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Reflections on the Sexual Abuse Scandals in Europe

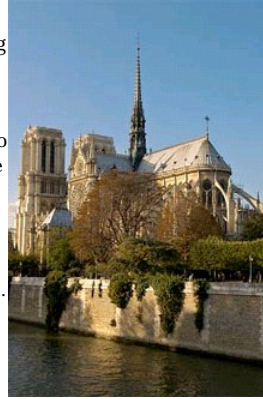
Written by Luiz Sérgio Solimeo
Tuesday, 30 March 2010 16:58

With the media uproar over sexual abuse scandals now raging in Europe, it is fitting to reflect on what is happening and how faithful Catholics should react.

A Heinous Crime

We should begin by stating outright that there is nothing so heinous than the sexual abuse of an innocent child. No one has been more severe against this than Our Lord Jesus Christ: "But he that **shall scandalize** one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

Thus no one should have more indignation and severity against this kind of abuse than Catholics. This indignation is compounded even more if the perpetrator is someone that, by his Holy Orders or religious vows, established a special relationship with the Savior and assumed a special commitment whereby he, in some manner, symbolizes the teachings and morals of the Divine Master.



The sins of the Church's human members do not sully the sanctity of the Church, Her sacraments, doctrine, or institutions.

For this reason, these scandals that have shaken the Church are considered by devout Catholics as not only a criminal offense but also a heinous sin.

We must not also forget that aside from the crime of abuse, there is also the fact that these acts were tolerated by some ecclesiastical authorities or even, covered up by them. Some of the criminal priests were transferred from one parish or school to another, sometimes committing the same odious acts again. In light of these facts, all parties concerned must be censured and punished, but not the institution itself, which is holy and hierarchical and instituted by its Founder.

Act II of the Same Play?

The similarity of the present uproar with the American crisis in 2002 leads us to ask if the present efforts, and especially those attempting to involve the Pope, do not also point to some *de facto* association among liberal journalists and dissident Catholics in an attempt to change the Church from an hierarchical to a democratic type of Church government. The similarities of the tactics used appear to be acts from the same play.

This possible association does not diminish in any way either the gravity of the sins committed or the holy indignation merited by the scandals. However, it does explain some aspects of a truly worldwide campaign that circulates the same suggestions and pressures to change the Church by pressuring Her to conform to the "morals" of the secularized world.

The principal media organ that is leading the latest uproar in Europe is the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. In its international online English edition (02/08/2010), we can see articles with titles like "Shame and Fear: Inside Germany's Catholic Sexual Abuse Scandal," which is signed by the "Der Spiegel Staff."

At the same time that some abuse cases are described with shocking graphic details, the anti-Catholic and anti-clerical approach of the article is also clear. It presents the Church as an outdated institution with repressive morals. It cites the Church's position on homosexuality, celibacy and its hierarchical structure as *the cause* of the pedophile scandals. They quote dissident theologians such as Hans Kung and Eugen Drewermann as experts and refer to fringe groups like We Are Church, to opine about the model of Church that needs to be established.

The article criticizes the "Catholic Church's claim to being a superior moral authority." For *Der Spiegel*, the sexual scandals are the fruit of the Church's "**repressed sexual morality**" that is dictated from above." Former Catholic theologian Hans Kung gives his opinion: "If you are forced, by virtue of your profession, to live a life without a wife and children, there is a great risk that healthy integration of sexuality will fail, which can lead to pedophile acts, for example." The opinion of ex-priest Eugen Drewermann finds fault with a "church structure that is repressive in emotional areas and on questions of love."

Another "expert" is Wunibald Müller, presented as a theologian and psychotherapist, and who defends homosexuality and a "mystical eroticism." He claims "the experience of pain and suffering can lead us to God, but so can eroticism and sexual passion." He sees no problem with sexual relationships, but only with "an 'immature homosexuality'

that makes some priests 'susceptible' in their interactions with young people."¹

Finally, the dissident movement, We Are Church, complains of "a structural problem, in which strict sexual morality and an authoritarian system combine to form a dangerous mix."²

Echoes All over Europe

The *Der Spiegel* article is echoed all over Europe. We find the same arguments attacking Church morals and governing structures as were circulated in the United States in 2002 and in some cases the same "experts."

Following *Der Spiegel's* example, we can cite Peter Popham, religious writer for the English newspaper *The Independent*, (March 15, 2010). He writes a long chronicle of the clerical sexual scandals tinged with progressivist jargon, defending a "modernized" Church and even going so far as to call the Pope a "former Nazi."

The Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* (March 16, 2010) noted that "the [Catholic] progressivist movement 'Initiative Kirche von Unten' (Church from Below Initiative) asked directly for Benedict XVI's resignation..." The paper also cited the dissident movement We Are Church.

Simon Sturdee of [Agence France-Press](#) (03/17/2010) claims that "senior Church figures in Germany ... called for priestly celibacy to be reviewed..."

A very well-read religious blogger from England that uses the pen-name of "Archbishop Crammer" (March 16, 2010) reviewed the extent of the world media uproar and asked: "Is Pope Benedict XVI about to Resign?" Introducing the links to his long list of articles, he adds: "Well, he is under a little pressure."

Scandalous Coverage

Such coverage does not address the central issues. Instead of citing how the heinous crimes that were committed and their cover up go against Church teaching and structures, these self-proclaimed theologian-journalists allege that Church teaching and structures are the causes of the crimes! Instead of showing how unrestrained sexuality is part of the problem, these commentators put forth ending the "sexual repression" as part of the solution.

Moreover, we might mention a curious comparison. From 1995 up to the present, there have been 210,000 sexual abuse cases with minors in Germany. Of these, only 94 cases involved the clergy – only 0.044% of the total cases. We are led to ask why *Der Spiegel* and so many other publications only talk about clerical sexual scandals as if the clergy was the only, or principal cause of the sexual abuse of minors.³

With such inconsistencies, we are compelled to ask if the international media uproar over the clerical sexual scandals is being done for the good of the Church and the faithful or if there is some other agenda being promoted, again, aiming at reforming the institution as it is today and has been for 2000 years.

The Spirit of God is Not in Sensationalism

In the book [I Have Weathered Other Storms – A Response to the Scandals and Democratic Reforms That Threaten the Catholic Church](#), the TFP Committee on American Issues had already denounced in 2002 the strange liaison of liberal media with dissident Catholics **who take advantage of the tragedy of sexual abuses to attempt to transform the structure of the Church into something which is contrary to Her traditions and the wishes of Her Founder, Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

We note that Pope Benedict XVI in his [Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland](#), without mentioning liberal media or dissident Catholics, deals with the issue in a serene and supernatural manner which is so contrary to the "scandal-mongering" tone of the media and dissidents. God is not found in sensationalism and agitation (cf. *1 Kings* 19:11-13).

To Chastise but to Give Hope

The Pope's letter chastises those priests and tolerant bishops responsible for the scandals. It uses powerful language to qualify their actions and supports both canonical and civil sanctions against them. At the same time, he does not abandon them and insists on the power of repentance and penitence united with the sufferings of Jesus Christ since there is no sin without pardon.

The letter emphasizes the need to return to the Faith, a true life of piety, devotion to the Blessed Mother and Blessed Sacrament and a greater love for the Church. It is not by breaking with the Church or dreaming up a Church different from the one founded by the Divine Savior that we can come out of the crisis.

He counsels all Catholics everywhere that, "[a]s you take up the challenges of this hour, I ask you to remember 'the rock from which you were hewn' (*Is* 51:1)." Catholics should remember the Faith of our fathers and all that the Church has done: converting the pagans and barbarians, creating the institutions like hospitals and universities, and reaching out to the poor.

The Church has "Weathered Other Storms"

Yes, the Church has "weathered other storms." In the midst of the present crisis, we must follow the counsel of St. Paul: "Put you on the armor of God that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil." (*Ephesians* 6:11).





Footnotes

1. Cf. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,676497-5,00.html> [back]
2. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,druck-676497,00.html>. [back]
3. Luigi Accattoli Perché solo la Chiesa ammette i propri peccati?
http://www.liberal.it/media/340307/09_03_liberal_10.pdf;
<http://www.laiglesiaenlaprensa.com/2010/03/operaci%C3%B3nlimpieza-de-benecito-xvi.html>. [back]