

PRO MINORIBUS

PREVENT | INTERVENE | EDUCATE.

Prevention

The saying that prevention is better than cure is so true in this field! Learning to identify situations and people at risk, and setting up safe environments for the most vulnerable is imperative. This is fundamental work.

Intervene

When suspicions arise, concerns increase. When you witness the unbearable, you cannot sit back and do nothing, you have to intervene. But this cannot be done in any way, we must learn to do it in the best possible conditions.

Educate

Knowing how to prevent and dare to intervene is not innate, education is the third key to prevention. Education is the third key to prevention. Education is the concern of all those involved in protection, but also of the children and their families and their social environment.



Going beyond the clichés

This graffiti seen on one of the walls of Rome, shows us with force, the emotion and the concerns of many. Despite the many efforts of Pope Francis to invite more fraternity, more attention to the poorest, to all people and to our earth, the Catholic Church has become the symbol of child sexual abuse. One can legitimately be offended by this, consider it revolting, unjust, but it is not by rebelling that fears and suspicions will disappear. It is not by blowing against the storm that the force of the wind is subsided.

A painful and disturbing truth

For several years now, cases of sexual assault committed by consecrated men have not ceased to emerge. In the USA, Canada, Ireland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia, Germany and now also in France. And in our beloved Africa, how many victims? It is difficult to say today in the absence of data on the subject. To reject these revelations is to deny reality, to delude oneself. Even if it is painful, the truth challenges us and calls for change.



Bless the children

- Some people wonder, or even worry, about how to do ministry with the youngest. Some no longer dare to bless the little ones for fear of being accused. However, let us remember this important element:
- Blessing children is at the heart of the gospel. Sexual abuse will never have a place there.

Mark 10:13-16: "They brought him little children so that he could touch them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God is for those who are like them. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will not enter it. Then he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.' "

Benedixit filiis tuis in te.

Renewing our determination to eradicate this evil

In the Greek and Latin classics, there is the old adage: "no one likes the bearer of bad news because it is often fatal". In the case of sexual abuse, this is very true and those who break the silence are often blamed for being the source of scandal. But the scandal comes from the person who committed the despicable act of child abuse. It also comes through those people who, over the years, have protected these criminals hidden in the heart of the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us all become bearers of Good News. With regard to the sexual abuse of minors, the Good News, or rather the good news, is plentiful. The fact that the word is getting out is one, that new resources are being put online, such as tutelaminorum.org by the Pontifical Commission, is another. In the months to come, we will try, through this little bulletin, to help you discover them. Whether at the institutional level or at the level of the People of God as a whole, the truth is progressing and so is the will to change. Numbers and statistics are important but they cannot be the source of our resolve to eradicate this scourge, which must be rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ blessing children. Nor can our resolve ignore the disturbing words of Christ, for example this passage in the Gospel of St Matthew 18:6: "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. "Many would like to minimise this sentence of Christ in the name of a pseudo-mercy which is only a camouflage, a parody of divine mercy. As Benedict XVI reminded us, "There can be no mercy without justice. »

Today is the time for the truth, a painful truth, certainly, but a truth that sets us free.

Stéphane Joulain, M.Afr.



What news from the research labs

There is an extensive literature on the phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. A recent study in Germany on personnel records in 27 dioceses gives us important information. Many of the elements studied concern etiology and confirm the results of other research. But it provides a more recent analysis of the problem. Most of the studies carried out concern clergy from the northern hemisphere. This does not mean that it does not exist in the South, nor that everything applies cross-culturally. There is a great need for more studies from Africa, Latin America and Asia. In future issues I will alternate with studies on Africa. But the study presented here is this one:

H. Dressing, D. Dölling, D. Hermann, A. Kruse, E. Schmitt, B. Bannenberg, et al., *Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests, Deacons, and Male Members of Religious Orders in the Authority of the German Bishops' Conference 1946-2014*, *Sexual abuse 2021 Issue 33(3)* Pages 274-294 (Available from the CIM).

Their findings in the review of scientific literature

55.7% of accused priests have a single allegation: "most of them were not motivated by paedophilia" (page 276).

There are many cases of what is called 'situational abuse', as opposed to preferential abuse. A preferential child abuser preys exclusively on children, whereas situational abusers normally also have a non-deviant part of their sexuality.

Clergy offenders are older at the time of the first offence than offenders in the general population, and are more likely to have been sexually abused

themselves, which may be a risk factor for reoffending (page 277).

Clergy tend to be more sadistic according to psychometric tests (page 277).

Offending clergy tend to deny and justify more than the general population (page 277).

Clergy training fails to prevent ideological stances such as clericalism and paternalism and is not adapted to help candidates with pre-existing psychosocial and psychosexual difficulties (page 277)..

The findings of this research (the study covers a period of 68 years, from 1946 to 2014).

- 4.4% of clergy in Germany have received allegations of sexual offences (page 280). 5.1% of diocesan clergy; 2.1% of religious; 1% of permanent deacons.
- Average age at first offence 42.6 years; average years in ministry, 14.3.
- Other behavioural problems and personal difficulties were noted in the records.
- Of the 4.4% of offending clergy, 28.2% would 'qualify' as paedophiles under the DSM 5 definition

Some risk factors have been identified

1. Work overload
2. Feeling of isolation.
3. Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, medication. It does not include other addictions).
4. Difficult interpersonal behaviour (difficulties in relating to peers or other people).
5. Lack of maturity (behaviour or reactions that indicate an inappropriate age).
6. Some psychological problems (anger management problems, borderline, bipolar, etc.).

Concerning legal proceedings

Only one out of three cases was subject to a canonical procedure.

Only one in three clerics has been criminally charged.

Only a quarter of the canonical procedures resulted in a sanction. Only 2.6% were discharges from the clerical state, 5.3% excommunications. "The majority of the sanctions that were imposed appear to be minor (e.g. admonition or removal)." (page 284).

Regarding the institutional response

The researchers found many cover-ups that prevented punishment and allowed recidivism. (Page 287.)

An important element for preventive work concerns the main resistances to this work and they are: the "power structures of the clergy" and the "resistance of clerics to deal with the problem of abuse" (page 284).

In other words, it is the clerical culture and solidarity that prevents prevention.

Finally, the main systemic risk factors to be considered are:

- Too much interest in the "authority of the priest",
- High level of isolation,
- Lack of supervision,
- Absolute solidarity and the value of secrecy,
- Maintaining the status quo,
- Misuse of clerical power by senior officials and clergy,
- Clericalism,
- The lack of adequate training in celibacy and affective maturity in the seminary.

Their conclusion

« The sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clerics must not only be perceived as an individual problem that is related to isolated perpetrators who must be identified early and removed from risk constellations, but it must also be understood as a specific institutional problem concerning the basic structure of Catholic Church. Adequate selection mechanisms and training programs, as well as the implementation of widespread and lifelong psychological counseling for clerics is of utmost importance (Terry, 2008b). Much higher priority should be allotted to these aspects than was previously the case, not only in the selection of candidates but also during the basic and further training of priests. An exclusively pastoral-spiritual approach is not sufficient, but must be complemented by findings of modern psychology and sexology (Keenan, 2012) ».

Leads for future research for those who would like to undertake it.

1. The concept of clericalism: how to fight against this ideological drift?
2. The role of celibacy: a co-occurrence with risk factors?
3. How could training in psychosexual maturity and celibacy be improved?
4. How to study these painful issues in Africa?