

# CHALLENGES OF CLERICAL SEXUAL ABUSE: THE CRITICAL FAMILY ROLES

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## Abstract

*Though the heroic strides, accomplishments and sacrifices of many clerics who have led exemplary lives in the Catholic priesthood remain indelible, we are faced today with a preponderance of allegations and claims of clerical sexual abuse suggesting that both the Catholic Church and priesthood are experiencing crises of different kinds. Clerical sexual abuse is a contradiction of the life of chastity, one of the evangelical virtues which are corollaries of responding to the call to the Roman Catholic priesthood. How those evangelical virtues concern us and the needed critical family roles for addressing the challenges of clergy sexual abuse are often overlooked; but our lives are inter-connected. This article has been prompted by the need to see the other side of the problem, which is general huge family failures, and to awaken our consciences to assume our own responsibilities that would, by collective action, help to bring about positive and peaceful change.*

## Introduction

Very few issues have dominated international attention in recent times as much as the issue of clerical sexual abuse and scandal (CSAS), suggesting that both the Church and priesthood are experiencing crises of different kinds. Media are abashed with issues of crises and sexual abuses involving Catholic priests<sup>1</sup>; stress in the Roman Catholic priesthood<sup>2</sup>; child sexual abuse

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1. For example, see Joseph J. Guido, "A Unique Betrayal: Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Context of the Catholic Religious Tradition", *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, 3-4, (2008) 255-69; Roland Flamini, "Crisis in the Catholic Church: Can the church recover from the widening sex-abuse scandal?" (2011), <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqrglobal2011010000>; and Jill Darling Richardson, "Poll Analysis: Priests Say Catholic Church Facing Biggest Crisis of the Century", *LA Times*, (Oct 20, 2002), <http://www.latimes.com/la-timespollpriests-471pa1an-story.html>, accessed on March 3, 2018.

2. *The Economist*, "Why the celibate priesthood is in crisis" (Jan 22nd 2017). <https://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2017/01/fewer-and-lonelier>; and Doyle, 2005.

by Catholic Clergy<sup>3</sup>; the impact of the clergy sexual abuse on the victims and communities<sup>4</sup>; consequences of the crises and of such abuses in the Catholic Church<sup>5</sup>. Other burning issues are allegations of bishops accused of covering up sexual abuse and misconduct as well as actions taken against them<sup>6</sup>. This article is prompted by the need to see the other side of the problem, which is family failures; to reflect on the authentic response to the call to the catholic priesthood, and to awaken our consciences to assume our responsibilities that would, by ‘principled’ nonviolence, help to bring about positive and peaceful change.

Clergy sexual misconduct does not take place solely in the Catholic Church, as research suggests that clerical sexual abuse happens in other denominations and other faiths – Protestant denominations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Buddhism and non-traditional religious movements in the West, etc.<sup>7</sup> Talking of the disappointments experienced in handling sexual misconduct and other improprieties at the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, the President of the Missouri District, Raymond Mirly, frankly noted that “too often, ministers hide their behavior, become entrenched in it or addicted to it, and they are so filled with shame and guilt that they do not claim the courage of Christ to confess . . .”<sup>8</sup>. McClintock also confirms the present widespread cases of clergy sexual abuse: “We have an epidemic of sexual abuse in the church . . . People of faith and

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3. Una Doyle, “Stress in the Roman Catholic priesthood: “Harvest for a millennium”, PhD thesis, University of Nottingham (2005), <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11308/1/436726.pdf>; and Paul J. Isely et al, In Their Own Voices: A Qualitative Study of Men Abused as Children by Catholic Clergy, *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Volume 17 (3-4), (2008) 201-215.

4. Leslie H. Wind et al., “Survivors’ Perspectives on the Impact of Clergy Sexual Abuse on Families of Origin”, *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 17 nos.3-4, (2008) 238-254; and R. B. McLaughlin, , “Devastated spirituality: The impact of clergy sexual abuse on the survivor’s relationship with God and the Church”, *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 1 no.2 (2007) 145-158.

5. Frawley O’Dea and Mary Gail, “The History and Consequences of the Sexual-Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church”, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 5 no.1, (2004) 11–30; Paul M. Kline, Robert McMackin, & Edna Lezotte, “The Impact of the Clergy Abuse Scandal on Parish Communities”, *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 17 nos.3-4, (2008).290-300.

6. See [http://www.bishop-accountability.org/bishops/accused/global\\_list\\_of\\_accused\\_bishops.htm](http://www.bishop-accountability.org/bishops/accused/global_list_of_accused_bishops.htm)

7. K. E. Gerdes, M. N. Beck & H. Miller, “Betrayal of a sacred trust: Sanctuary trauma in sexual abuse survivors”, *Social Work Today*, 27 no.7 (2002), 6-11; and E. Adam (1998), J. Jacobs (1984) and N. Oxenhandler (2008) quoted in Diana R. Garland & Christen Argueta, “How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens: A Qualitative Study of First-Hand Accounts” prepared for publication in *Social Work & Christianity* (n.d.).

8. Raymond Mirly, “Holding Ourselves Accountable in Ministry”, *Caring Connections*, 10 no. 2, (2013) 13, [http://www.preventconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CaringConnections\\_Spring2013.pdf](http://www.preventconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CaringConnections_Spring2013.pdf), accessed on May 10, 2018.

goodwill have been aware of sexual abuse in congregations for years”<sup>9</sup>.

If clerical sexual misconduct is widespread, why does that of the Catholic Church, which may be less in comparison to other denominations and even other faiths, draw much attention? Apart from the roles the Catholic Church has played globally in history, chastity and clerical celibacy are enshrined and associated with Catholic priestly life; hence, associating sexual abuse with it could not but be very shocking. However, evil remains evil no matter who commits it and where it is committed. So, clergy sexual misconduct is really a sin that shames all of us and calls for collective action to address it. The evangelical virtues (chastity, poverty and obedience) are corollaries of the Roman Catholic priesthood which one has to observe as a voluntarily chosen way of life. But how these virtues relate to the lives of all of us is often not noted. Hence, many of us are pointing in one direction of the problem; we ignore huge family failures that are the core of the problem.

### **An Authentic Response to the call to Catholic Priesthood**

At the height of the priestly ordination ceremony, a Catholic priestly candidate is proclaimed by the officiating bishop (in words of great significance) “Called”, “Consecrated” and “Set Apart”. By priestly ordination, one is set apart from the people for an important function. And, no one takes this honor on himself, but must have been called by God, as Aaron was<sup>10</sup>. That means that no one chooses to be a priest by himself nor is one qualified by his own merit. As Ugwu puts it: “If there are any real qualifications for your being a priest, it is the fact that you have been chosen”<sup>11</sup>. Ugwu stressed further the human aspect of any vocation – the free response that is required for it to be authentic. To be a happy priest, therefore, one’s conviction of his call, free response and readiness to embrace all challenges of priestly life are necessary. Response to this call is propelled by the quest for happiness which consummates all the good things attainable by human activity, since the response comes from the man’s free will and the power of

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9. Karen A. McClintock, *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Congregations: A resource for Leaders*, Virginia: Alban Institute (2004) 2.

10. See Hebrews 5:4; and Galatians 1:15 (New Jerusalem Bible)

11. Bona Ikenna Ugwu, *Beware of Saturday: An Open Letter To My Fellow Priests* (Enugu, Nigeria: Kingsley’s, 2018) 11.

his choice bequeathed to him by the benevolent God<sup>12</sup>. But the way we choose depends on our sense of direction, which is not consciously acquired when we are unduly influenced by people or feel pressured into doing things<sup>13</sup>. A sense of value helps our sense of direction. Our aim is happiness and fulfillment as long as our goal is not contravening the laws of God and those of the society. By and large, an authentic response to the call to priesthood, like any other type of vocation, is a way of achieving happiness.

Discussing Aristotle, Ancius Boethius<sup>14</sup> sees happiness as completeness in itself, “a state made perfect by the aggregation of all good things. The word ‘happiness’ is derived from the Greek word *eudaimonia* (from “*eu*”, meaning “good” or “wellbeing”) and “*daimōn*”, meaning “spirit”), a name applied to that kind of self-realisation theory that makes happiness the chief good for man. It refers to happiness not as mere pleasure or emotion, but well-being or a pleasant state of mind<sup>15</sup>. Happiness is the end of all ends. Hence, Aristotle concludes that happiness is found to be something perfect and self-sufficient, being the end to which our actions are directed<sup>16</sup>. For Plato what is actually real is the universal and the supreme principle of good (happiness) is separated from the world of experience it is to be arrived at by the mind’s ascent from the visible world to the intelligible world<sup>17</sup>. Hence, our happiness on earth is only a shadow of the ideal and, as Thomas Aquinas argued, possession of God is man’s ultimate happiness. Aquinas categorizes happiness into two kinds; perfect and imperfect. The imperfect is attainable in this life through the operation of the senses, while the perfect is only possible in the life to come and attainable through the operation of the superlative intellect<sup>18</sup>.

These views show that to realize our life’s purpose, to actualize ourselves, and to attain perfect happiness, we must aim higher and go beyond the natural plane

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12. Jonathan Madu, “A priest: Called, Consecrated and Set Apart – Authentic response for peace and happiness”, in Damian Asawalam et al (ed), *Contemporary Issues for Authentic Existence* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press Nigeria Ltd, 2018), 240-249.

13. Jonathan C. Madu, *Resolving Domestic Conflicts for Happy and Successful Marriage*, (Enugu, Nigeria: Madonna University Press, 2015) 7

14. Ibid, 78

15. J.A.K. Thomas, *Aristotle’s Ethics*. Revised by Hugh Tredennick, London: Penguin Classics (1973)

16. See David Ross, *Aristotle*, London: Routledge (1995).

17. (Jonathan Madu, *Resolving Domestic Conflicts for Happy and Successful Marriage*, 19

18. T. Gilby, *Thomas Aquinas; Summa Theologie*, Vol. I, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. Publishers (1976).

to the supernatural. Life has meaning and it goes beyond this earthly concerns. Saint Augustine believes that man does not seek happiness by accident, but as a consequence of his incompleteness, in other words, his finitude<sup>19</sup>. A response to the call to priesthood is, therefore, a quest for that happiness since it is a fundamental choice in one's life. But, "experience teaches us that there is a danger of having wrong motives in being a priest, and if not guided, purified, transformed and constantly renewed"<sup>20</sup>, even one's good intentions can change. Responding properly gives peace of mind, which is inner harmony and stability as a result of contentment and happiness which leads to fulfillment or self-actualization<sup>21</sup>. Inner peace is important because one cannot give what one does not have.

The evangelical virtues (chastity, poverty and obedience) are the corollaries of accepting an invitation to the Roman Catholic priestly vocation. Clerical celibacy, of course, is one dimension of Christian holiness; and hence, "one of the unique ways of giving full response to this invitation"<sup>22</sup>. Everyone, religious, clerical, or lay, is obliged to observe chastity since chastity is an aspect of holiness to which all are called.<sup>23</sup> But, how different is the nature of the chastity expected of a Catholic priest from the rest of us? The observance of chastity differs according to one's vocation or state of life. The religious, in order to dedicate himself/herself in a special way to God, takes the voluntary vow of chastity as part of a public profession in a religious order<sup>24</sup>. What is then expected of a religious is absolute perpetual continence, which is abstinence from all voluntary sex activity. The religious professing vow of chastity renounces marriage and avoids every external and internal act forbidden by both the sixth and the ninth commandments of God<sup>25</sup>. Clerics (clergy), being all men of Holy Orders of the Roman (Western) Catholic Rite, are called to celibate life (priests and deacons of the Eastern Rite may marry). Simply put, they are to remain unmarried. They observe this in order to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the works of the apostolate without distraction. Unlike in the case of religious life, the clerical celibacy does not require profession or vow and the clerics are

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19. Fagothey cited in Madu, *Resolving Domestic Conflicts for Happy and Successful Marriage*, 20

20. Michael I. Mozia, *A call to priestly holiness* (Ibadan: Shaneseon C.I. Ltd 1987), 19

21. See Jonathan Madu, *Understanding Peace and Conflict Studies* (Enugu, Nigeria: Madonna University Press, 2015), 208.

22. Mozia, *A call to priestly holiness*, 5.

23. All are called to holiness (Vatican Council II. 1964, *Lumen Gentium*, Chp. V).

24. Madu, *Resolving Domestic Conflicts for Happy and Successful Marriage*, 114/115

25. See Exodus 20: 14, 17; Deuteronomy 5: 18; 1Corinthians 3: 16-17.

only obliged by the legislature (the Church's Law) to remain unmarried.

For the married, they are to remain chaste. Chastity for the married means the right use of sex activity within the bond of legitimate marriage<sup>26</sup>. The couple must be faithful to each other. Extra-marital relationship is considered a grave sin. So, it is also scandalous when our children (of the married couples) and those who look up to us for exemplary lives see us involved in this sin. In all other respects, clerical celibacy is similar to what is required of a person who is single, except that a person who is single can marry at any time, while a cleric who is obedient to his vocation does not. It is sacrilegious for a religious to violate the vow of chastity and that may cause a serious scandal. In fact, clergy sexual misconduct is scandalous no matter the faith or denomination.

Essentially connected to chastity are poverty and obedience. The poverty that is needed of a priest and, of course, of all Christians really means wisdom in the use of the things of this world to attain the things of heaven. Poverty as a virtue is life completely stripped of avarice and does not mean destitution. It is being "poor in spirit and in reality, industrious and sober in style"<sup>27</sup>, and contented with one's possession. This simplicity of life modeled after Christ's life makes one exciting and attractive. That is life that is really rich in meaning. Catholic priests not only take up poverty as a virtue but they also stand against things and actions that plunge people into destitution. Poverty as destitution is a very serious situation that people should be saved from or helped to eradicate. In fact, it is the fundamental right of people to be freed from destitution and any government should be committed to this.

Obedience and hierarchical authority are also among the hallmarks of the Catholic Church. Lessius sees obedience as a man's allowing himself to be governed throughout his life by another for the sake of God<sup>28</sup>. The term 'obedience' is derived from the Latin word, *ob-audire*, which means "to listen intently". Hence, the basic meaning of obedience is listening in order to comply with the good, which is different from the command and control of military force (which may be for what is not right). As the bishops and cardinals as well as all Catholic faithful are under the authority of the Pope (the Vicar of Christ), so are all the priests and religious under the authority of their bishops and superiors. The Catholic faithful at different ecclesiastical levels are also under their different levels of authorities in the Church.

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26. Jonathan Madu, *Understanding Peace and Conflict Studies*, 115

27. Mozia *A call to priestly holiness*, 25.

28. Leonard Lessius, *De Justitia*, II, xlvi, 37, quoted by in *New Advent* (2017), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11182a.htm>, accessed on April 13, 2019.

### Cases of Clerical Sexual Abuse and the Church's Punitive Measures

The Catholic Church might have had a deep-seated institutional culture that had not thrown open for the easy detection, handling and accountability of clerical sexual abuses<sup>29</sup>, but that does not mean that the Church has supported any such misconduct of its individual members. The clear words of Jesus for such misconduct are still firmly upheld by the Church<sup>30</sup>. Besides, following the investigations of some allegations the Church has given touching apologies<sup>31</sup> for such errors, and She has also taken forceful actions against many such abusers in recent times. Such steps include the establishment of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, the tribunal to investigate bishops accused of failing to protect children and vulnerable adults from sex abuse<sup>32</sup> and a declaration of zero tolerance for sexual abuse in Catholic Church<sup>33</sup>. The extreme criticisms<sup>34</sup> of Pope Francis regarding the misdeeds of individuals, which the Pope himself had abhorred<sup>35</sup> would, therefore, be very surprising. Priorly, known for advocating a tough stance against abusers before his pontificate, Pope Benedict on his own part surprised the world with what sounded like a collective “*mea culpa*” (deep apology) for the Vatican’s past handling of the scandal over priests’ sex abuse of

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29. Philip Pullella, “Pope candidly admits Church ‘arrived late’ in confronting abuse” (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-abuse/pope-candidly-admits-church-arrived-late-in-confronting-abuse-idUSKCN1BW22D>), accessed May 10, 2018.

30. “If any one of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Cf. Matthew 18:6).

31. When Popes Become Penitents: The History of Papal Apologies, <https://www.history.com/news/when-popes-become-penitents-the-history-of-papal-apologies>, accessed on 19May 2018.

32. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/10/vatican-department-to-judge-bishops-accused-of-covering-up-child-abuse>. Accessed on May 16, 2018.

33. Pope Francis declared ‘zero tolerance’ for sexual abuse in Catholic Church and denounced the ‘atrocities’ by clergy as ‘a sin that shames us’ (Letter of the Holy Father to Bishops on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, 28 December 2016).

34. Extreme criticism like that of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the retired Vatican ambassador to Washington who disappeared into self-exile and calling on Pope Francis to resign on his own belief that Pope tolerated a known sexual abuser, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

35. Theodore McCarrick was prohibited from public ministry and subjected to serious disciplinary measure of resigning from the cardinate in July 2018. Similarly, in September the same year, another popular cleric, Ferdinand Karidima of Chile suffered the same fate and was expelled from clerical state by Vatican.



children<sup>36</sup>. Sexual abuse among priests is surely bewildering, as this has occurred across the globe, from Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, South America to Oceania. Selected cases can help us make sense of the widespread nature of this shocking abuse and scandal.

### United States

After several allegations of sexual abuse, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, a former Archbishop of Washington, was prohibited from public ministry starting from June 2018, when a church investigation found credible charges of sex abuse against him dating back nearly half a century<sup>37</sup>. He was 88 years at the time of this extraordinary disciplinary measure. Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Cardinal McCarrick on Saturday 28 July 2018. Resignation from the cardinalate is extremely rare; hence that of Cardinal McCarrick is deemed a very serious disciplinary measure. However, still concerned by the confusion that the accusations brought against McCarrick were causing in the minds of the faithful, the Holy See decided to make known the conclusions of the matter in due course, after further thorough study of the entire documentation regarding the former Cardinal McCarrick<sup>38</sup>.

There have also been huge financial implications of clerical sexual abuse cases in the United States, such as the cases of Archdioceses of Los Angeles and Minnesota. Sexual abuse cases against the Catholic Archdiocese of Minnesota cost \$210,290,724, (that is €179 million) for settlement, involved about 450 victims of clergy abuse dating back to 1950, and implicated thousands of clerics<sup>39</sup>. In 2007, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles paid \$660 million to 508 victims<sup>40</sup>.

In the Diocese of Oakland, there was the strange case of the former Rev. Stephen Kiesle, who tied up and molested two boys in a California church rectory. He was convicted in 1981. Bishop John Stephen Cummins, who oversaw the Kiesle case, recommended laicization to the Vatican, but Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

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36. R Flamini, "Crisis in the Catholic Church: Can the church recover from the widening sex-abuse scandal?" [http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqrglobal20110100002011\)1](http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqrglobal20110100002011)1), accessed on May 16, 2018.

37. Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman, "American Cardinal Accused of Sexually Abusing Minor Is Removed From Ministry". Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/us/theodore-mccarrick-sex-abuse.html>, accessed on March 23, 2019.

38. Holy See Press Office Communiqué, October 6, 2018

39. See <https://www.thejournal.ie/us-catholic-church-settlement-abuse-victims-4048108-Jun2018/>

40. Joe Mozingo and John Spano, "\$660-million settlement in priest abuses", *Los Angeles Times* July 15, 2007, (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-jul-15-me-priests15-story.html>), accessed on August 2018.



(who later became Pope Benedict XVI) responded that the case needed more time, as it was “necessary to consider the good of the Universal Church” and “the detriment that granting the dispensation” could provoke among the faithful. In 1987, the Vatican laicized Kiesle. Whether the Church was shielding an abuser or punishing him depends on one’s interpretation of Ratzinger’s letter. Some regarded it as “blocking the removal of pedophile priests”, but for the Vatican officials “by refusing to grant such a dispensation from the obligation of chastity right away in the Kiesle case, Ratzinger was actually being tough with an abuser, not lax”<sup>41</sup>. The point was made that it was not a case in which a bishop wanted to discipline his priest and the Vatican official demurred. The Vatican was not being asked to deal with Fr Kiesle’s sexual offences (which had already been done by California courts and Kiesle’s bishop), but to deal with a request for dispensation from priestly celibacy.

### Tanzania

A prominent British member of the Rosminian order, Christopher Basil “Kit” Cunningham, together with three other priests, were exposed after Cunningham’s death as pedophiles. While at Soni in Tanzania, Cunningham perpetrated sexual abuse that made the St Michael’s Catholic Boarding School a place of sad experience for the pupils<sup>42</sup>. One of the survivors, John Poppleton, was sexually abused repeatedly as a young boy by Fr Kit, an experience that he said “broke me down and broke my spirit”<sup>43</sup>. Other pupils recall being photographed naked, hauled out of bed at night to have their genitals fondled, and other sexual abuses<sup>44</sup>. Although known by the Rosminians before Cunningham’s death in 2010, the abuse was not reported by the media until 2011. Formal action was launched by a group of former pupils who filed a civil suit in Leicester, UK on 20 March 2013. The Charity’s finances suffered significant impact on account of payment of legal and settlement costs in 2015. It was also alleged that Cunningham did not abide strictly with the rules of Catholic Church for marriages (he was willing to bless the second marriages of divorcees, against the Church’s teaching) and

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41. Carolyn, Moynihan “Vatican Speaks on Kiesle Case”, *MercatorNet*, 13 April 2010, <https://www.mercatornet.com/justb16/view/6986/>

42. The Catholic Herald, “The Rosminian order must face up to its past: what happened in Tanzania was a moral catastrophe”, 22 June 2011

43. Peter Stanford, “He was my priest and my friend. Then I found out he was a paedophile”, *The Guardian*, 19 June 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/jun/19/kit-cunningham-child-abuse?INTCMP=SRCH>, accessed on April 01, 2019.

44. BBC, “Abused: Breaking the Silence”, 20 June 2011

that he kept a female companion for the later part of his life<sup>45</sup>.

## Nigeria

Richard Burke, a member of the St Patrick's Missionary Society based in Cowicklow, who served as a priest in Warri and later became the Archbishop of Benin City, resigned his position in 2009 after an allegation of sexual abuse from a woman (Dolores Atwood) which began in 1983 (when Atwood claimed that she was 14 but Burke, then a Catholic priest at Warri, said she was an adult). The former bishop's reason for voluntary resignation was his failure to observe his vow of celibacy. Admitting that he was deeply ashamed of his behavior, Dr Burke expressed sorrow: "I have caused great pain, hurt and bewilderment to those around me"<sup>46</sup>. In an October 2009 interview, Ms Atwood, who was then living in Nova Scotia, Canada, said she believed she was "manipulated and controlled" as a teenager, and she eventually confessed the relationship to her husband because she was wracked with guilt. She wrote to the Vatican and the St Patrick's Missionary Society reporting the allegations.

Why is there a low number of reported cases of clerical sexual abuse in Nigeria? Could the reasons be due to the culture of patriarchy and subservience, lack of exposure, or are the priests of African origin more committed to their vows of celibacy? Though the pathetic nature of the harm of clerical sexual abuse on innocent children and the vulnerable in society are noted with sadness, the way some adults make their reports also raises questions about their intentions. The later part of the relationship Ms Atwood voluntarily enjoyed with Burke was frequent amorous telephone conversations while she was far away in Canada with her husband of many years<sup>47</sup>, suggesting Ms Atwood's own role and cooperation, as it continued at a time no one would doubt her maturity or support her claims of manipulation. Yet, she presented her claim with a sense of self-exoneration: "I am a 41-year-old woman who has been living in Canada since 1995 with my husband and 3 children. ... In 1983 when I was 14 years old, I became the victim of (what I now know to be) a sexual assault"<sup>48</sup>.

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45. *The London Telegraph*, "Obituary", 13 December 2010, and *The Irish Independent*, "Devastation and disbelief when abuse case hits close to home", 20 June 2011.

46. Eoin Burke Kennedy, "Irish-Born Archbishop Resigns", *Irish Times*, 31 May, 2010

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

## Italy

The Italian Government has a treaty with the Vatican that guarantees areas of immunity to Vatican officials, including bishops and priests. This has made it difficult to get accurate figures as to how many priests and other religious officials are alleged to have committed sexual abuse. However, there have been some reports. Three former students have claimed abuse and 65 former students signed statements saying that they or other students were abused by Catholic priests when attending the Antonio Provolo Institute for the Deaf, a Catholic school for deaf children in Verona, Italy. The abuse is alleged to have occurred from the 1950s to 1980s, and was reportedly conducted by 24 priests, including the late bishop of Verona.

## England (Archdiocese of Birmingham)

Father Alexander Bede Walsh, who committed several acts of sex abuse and computer indecency, was sentenced to 22 years in prison in March 2012 for serious pedophilic offenses against boys<sup>49</sup>. One young victim was driven to a suicide attempt. When an accusation of sexual abuse of young boys from the 1950s to the 1980s was brought against Father James Robinson, who worked in parishes in the English Midlands, he fled to the United States. Robinson remained in the United States for about 20 years when he was extradited back to the UK to face charges, and he received a 21-year prison sentence for multiple paedophilic offenses<sup>50</sup>. A former colliery blacksmith and a former professional boxer in his early 20s, John James Robinson, it was reported, later went to train for the priesthood. It was alleged that as a priest he moved from parish to parish sexually abusing children, including two altar boys. Jurors were told that Robinson used his status as a priest to gain “unfettered and unlimited” access to boys, giving them gifts and taking them on trips in his sports car. These allegations involving priests and nuns left a great wound of the heart of the Church, which was accused of providing protection to the abusers.

## Chile

While some accused abusers accept, confess and apologize for their crimes, others choose to deny until after prolonged investigations, making some believe that the Church is covering them. The case of Fr. Fernando Karadima of Chile

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49. “Priest jailed for boys’ sex abuse”, 9 March 2012 ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)).

50. *The Telegraph*, 22 Oct 2010 (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8080643/Priest-jailed-for-21-years-on-child-abuse-charges.html>)

involved long denials and claims of innocence until he was found guilty of sexually abusing minors and convicted by the Vatican on 18 February 2011 in a canonical process handled by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is to be noted that “Karadima himself has never stood trial for his alleged crimes because of the statute of limitations.” The hierarchy of the Church in Chile was thus accused of systematically covering up his abuse, and of doing the same for other accused priests<sup>51</sup>. It was difficult in Chile to believe that a person as revered as Father Karadima would be involved in sexual crime. According to Barrionuevo and Bonnefoy, he had trained five bishops and dozens of priests, acting as a spiritual leader and father figure for young men who later accused him of molesting them.

Because of his advanced age and poor health, Karadima was sentenced to a life of prayer and penitence, banned from any contact with his ex-parishioners, and forbidden to perform any priestly ministry in public. Karadima did not acknowledge any wrongdoing. On 27 September 2018, Pope Francis laicized Karadima, expelling him from the clerical state, an “exceptional measure” taken in response to the “exceptional damage” done by Karadima’s crimes, according to Vatican. The Pope expressed his anger at evidence of systematic attempts to suppress and ignore allegations of clerical sexual abuse in Chile.

### **New Zealand**

Clerical sexual abuse in New Zealand is common in schools and dates back to the 19th century. In 2000 the Church acknowledged and apologized for the abuse of children by clergy, putting in place protocols and setting up a national office to handle abuse complaints.<sup>52</sup> The Marylands School, which was operated by the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God (a Catholic religious order in Christchurch), was the center of a number of sex abuse cases. By 2006, the Australian branch of the St John of God order had paid out \$5.1 million to survivors who had been sexually abused at the school<sup>53</sup>.

### **Causes and Consequences of Clerical Sexual Abuse**

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) has become a global phenomenon perpetrated by many and it is an endemic problem even in UN peacekeeping

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51. See Alexei Barrionuevo and Bonnefoy, *The New York Times* FEB. 18, 2011 2011

52. Ben Heather, “Reports draw more church abuse complaints”, *The Dominion Post*, 29 June 2013, p. A10; Catholic Church in NZ: Confronting Abuse”. New Zealand Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

53. John Henzell, “Trial attempt to regain faith”, *The Press* 17 June 2006 p. 1

missions<sup>54</sup>. However, in our discussion we are concerned with Catholic clergy. While there seems to be overwhelming evidence of sexual abuse involving some Catholic priests, can one forget the heroic strides, unimaginable accomplishments, and sacrifice of Catholic clergy? Be that as it may, the consequences of the failures of those involved in sexual abuse have been disturbing and considered atrocious by everyone, including the Church itself.

Though clerical sexual misconduct has more to do with power relations between priests and their flocks, the behavior of some parishioners could expose them or lead to bad situations. Judging from African experience, the awe and respect paid to priests by people who once approached them in different communities are fading away and many things are being taken for granted by some priests and the laity. There is no doubt, too, that some who associate with priests do not always have genuine intentions. But, as Stiger points out (referring to priests of every denomination), “it should be understood that in every pastoral relationship, whether parish ministry or specialized ministries (chaplaincy, clinical pastoral education, counseling, etc.), the clergy person holds the greater power because of his/her office”<sup>55</sup>. This means that the responsibility for misconduct in such relationships falls to the pastor first.

While Shupe has described religious groups and institutions as “hierarchies of unequal power where leaders have powers of moral persuasion, and in some, the theological authority to deny others access to membership and heaven”<sup>56</sup>, Capps sees religious leaders as having “the power that comes with not being under surveillance or supervision of others; but on the other hand, the power of access and accessibility; and the power of knowledge about members of their congregation, often intimate knowledge”<sup>57</sup>. Hence, the imbalance of power in the pastor-parishioner relationship is the ground for beginning to address the loss of faith and sense of abandonment in a child who trusted someone as the mediator in his/her relationship with God. To have that person act in a harmful way toward a child and the vulnerable adult can cause damage to faith that is virtually irredeemable<sup>58</sup>.

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54. Karim 2016; UN News, 22 June 2015 and 17 December 2015

55. Stiger, D. ed, 2013, “Violating Boundaries: Improprieties in Ministry”, *Caring Connections*, 10 No. 2, 4 & 5 (2013), 7

56. Shupe, A. 2007. *Spoils of the kingdom: Clergy misconduct and religious community*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

57. Capps, D. (1993). Sex in the parish: Social -scientific explanations for why it occurs. *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 47(4), 350-361)

58. Stiger, “Violating Boundaries: Improprieties in Ministry”

Temptation, which could be identified as another cause, comes to every normal human being, but the Church preaches resisting it with firmness. The sin of concupiscence is very dangerous, and so we are taught to work against it through a principled lifestyle and self-discipline, avoiding violating others or taking advantage of them<sup>59</sup>. The present world of obviously embraces the concupiscence of the flesh. Mortification is life's long fight against concupiscence. The Christian Scripture sees it as the effort to "chastise the body and subdue it", lest after preaching to others one may be disqualified<sup>60</sup>. Most Catholic priests and, of course, all Christians, are expected to train themselves to forfeit freely the pleasures that are quite legitimate to have the strength to turn away from pleasures that would leave their souls soiled. Yes, "pollution of the natural world exists with pollution of ideas and morals which can lead to the destruction of man. The pollution is sin, from which lies are born"<sup>61</sup>. Errors committed by a few priests may seem to obscure the great sacrifices of other priests, especially in a frenzied world where many forget their own responsibilities. Again, ordinary human error should be differentiated from self-indulgence and sexual exploitation of the vulnerable, which is nothing but the wickedness of those who perpetuate it. In the Church, it is carried out by enemies fighting the Church from inside, and what a pain we all feel for the trauma of the victims and the wound such atrocities leave at the heart of the Church.

Due to the rampant nature of the abuse and scandal, it is not easy to quantify the consequences to the Church, as well as to individuals and communities, but as events unfold in different countries across the world, the weight of the evil has continued to confront us. Several dioceses in the United States of America were reported bankrupted by settlement of civil lawsuits from victims<sup>62</sup>. Apart from huge financial costs, clerical sexual misconduct is a flagrant misuse of the ministerial office and a betrayal of trust that has other disastrous consequences. Pope Francis understood this and made deep and sincere apologies, recognizing specific atrocities of such abuse in his August 2018 visit to Dublin - asking for forgiveness from the families of child sex abuse victims who had killed themselves as a result of their trauma.

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59. 1Thessalonians 4:3-7, New Jerusalem Bible, NIV

60. 1Thessalonians 4:3-7, New Jerusalem Bible, NIV

61. John Paul II quoted by Josè Gomez, "Do Not Be Afraid to Be Saints", *The Vatican News*, Sunday 02 December 2018, page 9.

62. F. Bruni and E. Burkett, *A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church*, (USA: Harper, 2002) 336.

The consequences of family failures as linked to the clerical sex abuse are of no small measure but they are often not considered. The family remains the basic structure of the church and of the society. Are we not accountable for our own actions too? Can a broken home or failed marriages bring up better children to become good priests, when such children are more exposed to drug addiction, rapes, pornography, and all sorts of crimes? What examples do children copy from families of indecent lives? Our lives are inter-connected, and no such social problems can ever be completely solved without using the family approach.

### **The Way Forward**

#### *The issue of Justice*

For retributive justice, the law of the state should usually take its course. This means that the criminal justice system often works on a retributive foundation. An offender who is alleged to have committed a crime against a victim is prosecuted by the state and, if found guilty, is subject to punishment. That punishment may or may not have compensations to the victim but he or she may only get assuaged with the feeling that the offender has consequentially suffered punishment. The important question here is: Can the Church deal with criminal acts themselves or must they report them to the criminal justice system? What of setting up an infrastructure which investigates such cases and charts a way forward? In recent times, the Church has been doing this, but the widespread nature and the unfolding cases may make it difficult to appreciate the extent of the Church's efforts. Some of the several steps taken by the Church have already been mentioned<sup>63</sup>.

Often restoring dignity and healing to the victim is less considered in the criminal justice system. However, for restorative justice, healing the damaged relationship is the focus, often using victim-offender mediation but involving, as in traditional African conflict resolution, all affected parties. Hence, restorative justice concerns "building a sense of self-worth and personal responsibility among offenders, and often involves efforts to build or rebuild the relationship between offenders and their victims"<sup>64</sup>. Attention to healing the victim of trauma

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63. Exemplary cases are the disciplinary actions taken in cases of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of USA and Fr. Ferdinand Karidima of Chile, Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, etc.

64. Moyo, 2017: 207 N Moyo 2017. "Using restorative justice approaches with ex-prisoners and their families: an action research project in Zimbabwe", in Sylvia Kay and Geoff Harris (eds), *Building Peace via Action Research African case studies*, pp 2007-222.



and his/her dignity is considered. It has often been argued that many of the methods used by African communities to deal with anti-social behaviours involve strong elements of restorative justice. Individuals are asked to take responsibility for their behavior, apologize for them and possibly make reparations, and the community is asked to forgive and accept the offender. A good example is the Gacaca justice system in Rwanda. For some of these proponents<sup>65</sup>, the criminal justice system approach is counter-productive and in fact promotes the bad behaviour it aims to deter. Restorative justice has a higher view of human nature and sees the responsibility of the criminal justice system as being to safeguard those in its care and aiding their integration back into society. The restorative justice approach emphasizes that an important reason for high rates of crime is the loss of the link between punishment and public shaming, a link which is often still strong in rural African communities. Punishment as provided by the criminal justice and prison systems reinforces a sense of badness and provides very little reason for behavioural change.

A public examination of the offender and his/her actions, on the other hand, makes it clear that certain behaviour is unacceptable to the community and that remorse, apology, reparations, and a commitment to change his/her behaviour are required. Once these occur, the matter has been dealt with and there is no reason to revisit it. What is needed, as Moyo opines, is to find ways of shaming offenders, not in order to send them on a long-term guilt trip or to permanently stigmatize them, but to aid their reintegration into the community. In an action research project with 12 ex-prisoners associated with the Second Chance Rehabilitation Trust (SCRC) in Bulawayo, Moyo discovered that the horrors of prison experience “acted as a major deterrent for them to engage in crime now that they are released but this was counterbalanced by the desperate economic situation which the ex-prisoners found themselves in and the consequent temptation to re-engage in crime to meet their needs”<sup>66</sup>.

### **The Church and Critical Roles of the Family - Preventive and Treatment Interventions**

With the confessions and voluntary resignations of some perpetrators of sex abuse in the Church’s hierarchy, it is no longer a mere allegation that some Catholic clergy have been involved in sexual abuse cases. Whether or not the figure of those involved is comparable to that of male clergy of other denominations or that of the general adult male population is not the issue here,

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65. For example ., Moyo, 2016: 207-222

66. Ibid, 2009

but rather to emphasize the need to join in the collective plea for forgiveness and chart the way forward. We need healing the wounds, dealing with the shame of failures, therapy and support services for the victims, upholding the decency of Christian faith and obligation as well as discipline. To acknowledge one's wrong, repent for the wrong action, and to apologize to the victims are the appropriate steps to begin the healing of such atrocities as sexual abuse and scandal. The needed critical family roles for prevention, education, and treatment interventions for the victims of clerical sexual abuse are therefore paramount. Preventive measures start with our roles in the family and society, how we educate children, and how we conduct ourselves.

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church has an excellent pre-priesthood training system, but it is in the family that this training begins before the seminaries take over. During preparatory studies for seminarians and other training programs for priests, the church should equip and encourage them to protect children and vulnerable adults from sexual harassment either by clergy or of clergy. McClintock opines that raising awareness of the occupational and emotional risks inherent in pastoral ministry can enable congregations to protect children and vulnerable adults.<sup>67</sup> There should be learning of both sound family values and congregational teaching and practices - humility, sobriety and continence. The strong moral teachings of the Catholic Church that shape the consciences of its members with firm conviction of their accountability to God, who owns human bodies and all things, remain important in strengthening of character. Candidates for priesthood should avail themselves of the openness and self-study that would help in making the conscious choice of what they want to be in life and the needed sacrifice to attain the goal. There is nothing short of the advice of Sun Tzu – “Know yourself and you will win all battles”<sup>68</sup>. Nothing good can ever be achieved without sacrifice.

Apart from protecting our children from abuse, other critical roles of the family are treatment interventions of a child-survivor of abuse. Providing proper support and counseling to a child who is a victim of sexual abuse and saving him/her from stigmatization are very important. There have been reported cases of suicide attempts and post-traumatic disorders where the situation of a child is not well managed. Some have made mistakes of over-criticizing a victim of abuse in an atmosphere of poor judgment, such that many victims harbor a guilt that is destructive. The imbalance of power in the priest-child relationship must be well understood; hence it leads to the loss of faith and sense of abandonment in an

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67. Ibid

68. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02jxeV7JqYU>

abused child, and it becomes worse when the home throws all the blame on the unfortunate child. Parents have a duty to bring their children close to themselves for prevention and treatment of abuses. One of the disadvantages of divorce is the lack of adequate care and attention for children. We all have to assume our responsibilities according to our callings, and in giving proper foundation to our children to become good priests or good citizens in our society.

We have a high responsibility to protect our children from sexual abuse in our environment, church and schools through education and good parental attention. Things which are real transgressions of the natural law and the law of God are proposed these days as values and conquests of the human mind. How would any child who has been involved in child pornography, or practiced indecent sexual acts in the home, become different when he is ordained a priest? The moral teachings of the Church should be enshrined in the homes of its members and upheld by parents and teachers.

The true life of a Christian is that of daily struggle for what is honorable and just.<sup>69</sup> It, therefore, needs constant revival so that we avoid being overwhelmed along the journey. It is by resisting the concupiscence of the flesh that we realize how our bodies are truly the temple of the Holy Spirit<sup>70</sup>, the assurances of the inner joy for resisting temptations<sup>71</sup>. If a “man’s entire existence on earth must be lived as a preparation for the realization of perfect happiness in eternity and not to fail in his destiny”,<sup>72</sup> then all of us are expected to lead decent and responsible lives and respect others’ rights to life of decency and happiness.

### **Collective Responsibility**

While we totally condemn clerical sexual abuse, we should also look inwards, to see how we are directly or indirectly contributing to such evil. Again, though the unfortunate issue of clerical sex abuse and scandal is shocking and embarrassing, we are to see priests as the products of our homes, families and, of course, the products of our society. Some seem to allege that the Catholic Church has not done enough to stop clerical sexual abuse. It is an issue that needs to be addressed collectively and at all levels, even among married Christian clergy of other congregations and persons of other religions. The renewed pressing invitation by the Pope should be embraced by all: “to unite forces to fight against

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69. It is dying with Christ and sharing His life - life that looks towards God (Romans 6:8)

70. I Corinthians 3:17; 6:15. New Jerusalem Bible, NIV

71. For we are all to be pruned as gold is pruned by fire (1Peter 1: 7)

72. Celestine Bittle quoted in Madu, *Resolving Domestic Conflicts for Happy and Successful Marriage*

the grave scourge of abuse within and beyond the Church, and to prevent such crimes from being committed in the future to the harm of the most innocent and most vulnerable in the society”<sup>73</sup>.

Instead of being discouraged by the unpleasant wave of clerical sex abuse, we should get awakened and challenged to address the problem, understanding that the problem is not the Church but the human agents in the Church who are not quite good as they should be. The exemplary lives of good priests and religious should inspire us as Bill Hayden (the celebrated former Australian atheist Governor General) was. Bill Hayden got converted and baptized in the Catholic Church at the time (2018) the rampant sex scandal was rocking the Church<sup>74</sup>. Hayden was inspired by the lives of other good religious in the Church; hence, seeing beyond the human element in the Church that is the cause of the current crisis and scandalous news. While we collectively join in the papal plea for forgiveness, we strongly welcome the declaration of ‘zero tolerance’ for sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and also observe such in our homes, offices and all aspects of our lives.

Sexual abuse is violence that needs to be addressed by all. The only approach to avoid this violence is principled nonviolence and sensitivity to our own responsibilities. To see the dawn of a new culture, we need a new value system and worldview, and these can only come from a nonviolent culture that is based on active, self-sacrificing love. “Looking ahead to the future”, Pope Francis requests, “no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated”<sup>75</sup>. It is a culture that values and respects the right and dignity of other persons. This is a great restraint against exploiting or abusing anyone, including their bodies. Principled nonviolence (concrete actions that build a nonviolent consciousness) calls for mature judgment and keen inward assessment rather than unconcerned criticisms. The greatest enemy fighting the Church is the one from within. Just as we cannot win the war for peace in the

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73. Holy See Press Office Communiqué, 06.10.2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/10/06/181006f.html>, accessed on June 12, 2019.

74. Reports D.C. McLean. “Former atheist and political leader Bill Hayden baptized at age 85 at St Mary’s Church, Ipswich”, *The Catholic Leader*, 2018. Available at <http://catholicleader.com.au/uncategorized/former-atheist-and-political-leader-bill-hayden-baptised-at-age-85-at-st-marys-church-ipswich>, accessed on 14 October 2018.

75. See Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis To The People Of God”, 20 08 2018 ([http://www.protectionofminors.va/content/tutelaeminori/en/what-we-do\\_section/healing-and-care\\_page/HC\\_for-children-and-families\\_page/LettertothePeopleofGod-20180820.html](http://www.protectionofminors.va/content/tutelaeminori/en/what-we-do_section/healing-and-care_page/HC_for-children-and-families_page/LettertothePeopleofGod-20180820.html)), accessed on March 12, 2019.

world by violence, so it is difficult to achieve religious peace, and overcoming this common evil and its entrenched harm, without the needed solidarity as one body of Christ.

## Conclusion

Clergy sexual misconduct cuts across denominations and people of other faiths. The dignified office of the Catholic priesthood has also been dented by the same shocking sexual abuse involving some priests in many countries. This article has been prompted by the need to see the other side of the disgusting problem - our own individual and family negligence that have contributed directly or indirectly to it, and to awaken consciousness of our responsibilities. While making a contribution to address the problem, the authors have given layman a view of what an authentic response to the call to Catholic priesthood should be. The life of celibacy, poverty and obedience is the embodiment of Catholic priestly life, a share in holiness to which we are all called, and which molds one into total self-abandonment for the service of others.

We do not live isolated from one another. Our life is lived in common and this is one of the most inescapable elements of our existence. Man cannot exist without his fellows. Realizing our responsibilities and living up to them would significantly reduce most of the ills we have in our societies, including the moral laxities in our children who become priests. As we support holding those found culpable in clerical sexual abuse accountable, we should also remember that we receive from the society what we give to it. Priests are the products of our homes, families and our societies. Family is central in providing the needed healing and reconciliation, as well as in building safer communities and laying good foundations for children who become future priests. Our lives are interconnected and we need collective actions to address this malaise; for there is no better appeal than that of Pope Francis: "The only way that we have to respond to this evil that has darkened so many lives is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God. This awareness of being part of a people and a shared history will enable us to acknowledge our past sins and mistakes with a penitential openness that can allow us to be renewed from within"<sup>76</sup>.

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76. Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis To The People Of God", 20 08 2018.