



The Sickening Pedophilia & The Catholic Teachings on Child Protection

Let the children come to me (Mt 19:14)

“ **Pedophilia is an abuse over the children. Does the Catholic Church take some measures to protect children who are created in the image, especially in the vulnerable image of God?** ”

Sexual abuse is a human problem everywhere in the world today and pedophilia is the worst of all. Pedophilia is an abuse of power over a weaker individual, a child, triggered by a sexual life disorder. Pedophilia is terribly sickening. Pedophilia indicates a deterioration of moral values in families and societies. The sexual abuse of children, minors and vulnerable persons by parents, teachers and religious leaders can cause enormous pain, anger and confusion, whereby a parent becomes an abuser, a healer turns to be a violator and a teacher becomes a perpetrator. It is breach of trust.



J. Charles Davis
Diocese of Jammu-Srinagar
Humboldt Research Fellow
University of Freiburg

It is devastating. John Paul II, in his address to the Cardinals of the United States and Conference Officers, on 23 April 2002 said that the sexual abuse of children is “by every standard wrong and rightly considered a crime by society; it is also an appalling sin in the eyes of God.” Sexual abuse of a child or minor is a crime in the universal law of the church as well as in the civil jurisdiction of India under the ‘Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012.’

Child Abuse is contrary to human dignity and inviolable right to life:

Every human is an image of God (Gen 1:26). A child is the most vulnerable image of God. The Catholic Church believes in the sanctity and the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. In the moral sense, a child is a human person and has dignity from the moment of conception. In the catholic theology, because every person is an image and likeness of God, the absolute inviolability of God demands the inviolability of human life, too. While the principle of inviolable right to life claims an absolute protection for all human lives, the principle of vulnerability calls for a special protec-

tion of children and minors, the handicapped and the sick because they are the most vulnerable and dependent humans. They should not be harmed physically, psychologically, mentally or sexually. A physical violence affects the whole person. That is why, we need to restore the physical, mental, psychological and social health of the victims.

Any type of abuse is contrary to human dignity. Human dignity is the source of inherent, universal and inviolable rights. Right to life, i.e., integrity of human body, is the most fundamental of all those rights. No one, no group, no authority and no state can change or harm these rights, because these rights find their source in God himself. The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the *inviolability of human life*. The Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World) issued by Pope John Paul II on December 30, 1988, says that the personal dignity of every human being demands *the respect, the defense and the promotion of the rights of the human person* (no. 38). When one part suffers, all parts suffer (1 Cor 12:26). This is especially true when it comes to victims of sexual abuse and the church. The issue of child abuse, particularly sexual abuse is most unholy and undignified act.

The human being has these rights *in every stage of development* from conception until natural death; and *in every condition* whether child or adult, healthy or sick or handicapped, rich or poor. The Second Vatican Council openly proclaimed:

All offenses against life itself, such as every kind of murder,

genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture [sexual abuses], undue psychological pressures; *all offenses against human dignity*, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where humans are treated as mere tools for [sexual pleasure] profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like are certainly criminal: *they poison human society*; and they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, *they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator (Gaudium et Spes, 27)*.

Addressing the violence against children, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, under #2356, states: “Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. *It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act.* Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.” As the Charter for Protection of Children and Youth by the US Bishops Conference states, “The damage caused by sexual abuse of minors is devastating and long-lasting.”

Protection of Children is an Obligation:

The church document *Familiaris Consortio* speaks directly on “The Rights of Children”: “Special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a pro-

found esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. This is true for every child, but it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more it is in need of everything, when it is sick, suffering or handicapped” (no. 26). To every affliction against human life, the church must defend and protect every human person from all who plot against life (no.30).

Bishops must make a clear policy on child protection in the wake of abuses. No authority should hide the issues under the carpet. We must acknowledge the mistakes, apologize, deal with them with stern action. Only a transparent and truth-based action can bring healing to the victims and restore the person and credibility of the moral authority of the church. We have the responsibility for “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18) and ask forgiveness for the sins from all those victimized, offended and wounded of this scandal in order to be reconciled to God and one another. We must stand by the victims. The offender must be punished. Sexual abuses of children and minors by clerics must be lawfully dealt with. For immediate reference, here are a few canonical norms to deal with sexual abuses by church personnel.

1. When there is an allegation of sexual abuse of a child/minor by a priest, an immediate investigation must be initiated promptly and conducted objectively (CIC: c. 1717; CCEO: c. 1468). The accused enjoys innocence until the investigation proves otherwise.

2. When there is sufficient evidence for the sexual abuse, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith shall be notified and the bishop shall withdraw the accused from active ministry and

prohibit public participation in the blessed Eucharist (CIC: c. 1722 or CCEO: c. 1473).

3. When even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest is established after an appropriate canonical process, the offending priest shall be removed permanently from active ministry and dismissed from the clerical state (CIC: c. 1395 §2 or CCEO: c. 1453 §1).

There are other legal provisions in the catholic church to deal with the cases of sexual abuses by church personnel: *Canonical Delicts Involving Sexual Misconduct and Dismissal from the Clerical State, 1995*; *Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 18, 2001*; Article 13, “Procedural Norms” for *Motu proprio Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela, Acta*

Church must be a safer place for children:

Children must grow in a loving and safe environment. The emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of a child will allow God gifts to enrich the Church and the world. “We must provide acceptance, love, esteem, emotional, and spiritual concern for every child that comes into this world” (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 26). Teaching on protection of children, through Sunday homilies and in schools, families and formation of priests, will provide safety for and give assurance to children, particularly, to those who have experienced the trauma of sexual abuse. Knowledge and awareness of moral values educates potential offenders.



We have the responsibility for “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18) and ask forgiveness for the sins from all those victimized, offended and wounded of this scandal in order to be reconciled to God and one another.



Apostolica Sedis 93, 2001, p. 787.

A canonical advisor can be asked to assist in the process. There is also a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors for reform on the child sexual abuse scandals. Pope Francis wants the offenders to be brought to moral and legal accountability and the victims to be loved and cared for pastorally. In addition to the canonical process, the church authorities must allow and facilitate the civil law to take its action.

The primary duty of the church is to protect the life and dignity of all human persons. Preventing child abuse and protecting children is an urgent obligation. Let the children come to the church. Don't prevent them from coming due to suspicion, fear and abuses. The church should not become a place of fear, but we must make and keep the church the safest place for children. Child protection training is must. The Church must be



a symbol of trust and compassion for children.

“An Ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” so goes a saying in English. Sexual abuse is part of the human condition, but we can definitely diminish its occurrence by effective policies. In his address to his fellow bishops at the Capuchin Bishops Meeting at San Giovanni Rotondo in September 2011, in which I participated along with my late Capuchin Bishop Peter Celestine, the Capuchin Cardinal Sean O’ Malley recommended the following policies against child abuses to be implemented in the dioceses:

1. Any allegation of sexual

abuse of minors (children under 18) should be reported to the civil authorities.

2. Any cleric who has sexually abused minors will permanently be removed from active ministry and not function again as cleric.

3. Use of proper screening and background checks for all church personnel and volunteers.

4. Child safety training programs for all church personnel, clergy, religious and laity.

5. Adoption of a rigorous program of human formation in seminaries and the implementation of codes of professional conduct and ministry.

6. Provision of pastoral

outreach to victims and family members that includes therapeutic health ministry services and opportunities for spiritual healing.

It is need of the hour for Indian bishops to remind the priests and families on moral issues periodically through their news letter. Having successfully dealt with the sexual abuse crisis in the USA and Ireland at the request of Pope Benedict, Cardinal Sean was earnest when he said that we must address the clerical sexual abuse not only by preventing it from happening but also by training the priests for moral life and ministry. The hope is that “prevention is possible.” **COMP**