

Robert Kantor

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland

A Report of the International Conference on “How to understand and respond to sexual exploitation of minors in the Church” in Cracow, Child Protection Centre, Jesuit University Ignatianum, 20–21 June 2014

The conference began with a solemn Mass presided by Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, Archbishop of Cracow. In his homily, he said, *inter alia*: “Evil threatens all of us. It has access to the human heart and often ravages it, hurting other people, especially the weak, defenceless and innocent ones (...) To accept the toil and pain of purification and to do all we can – this is the evangelical response of the Catholic Church”.

During the session on 20 June, a representative of the Holy See, Fr. Robert Oliver, PhD, a Promoter of Justice of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, was the first speaker. He presented two views on the Vatican’s response to the discussed problem: that of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and the view of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. While discussing the proceedings against the accused priests, Fr. Oliver expressed the need for intensive training on how to recognise telling signs of abuse. According to him, examples of what still needed improvement were:

- failure to notice signs and signals of abuse;
- dealing with the manipulation by some violators;
- belief in the violators’ impunity.

He emphasised the principle of “No tolerance”, confirmed by Pope Francis. He also presented a number of issues in which an improvement was visible, including:

- comprehensive prevention programmes;
- using a “team” approach in each case.

Furthermore, Fr. Oliver analysed who the priests-violators were. The majority of them abused more than one victim. The average number of victims of one

violator was four. Only 14% declared that there had been one victim. As much as 47% hurt five or more victims. Research conducted by a certain institute has shown that 45% of priests-violators suffered from neuropsychological impairment. The speaker drew attention to the necessity of balance between “mercy and punishment”, so that there was no impression that the culprit had “got away” with his crime. Also, possibilities of court proceedings against violators were presented:

- voluntary petition for secularisation;
- prosecution;
- administrative criminal proceedings;
- expulsion from the clerical state *ex officio*.

Fr. Oliver concluded his speech on the positive note that many problems had already been solved.

The part of the conference dedicated to the participants of the drama started with a presentation by Prof. Jörg M. Fegert, PhD, on “Victims of sexual offences committed by priests, clerics and officials of ecclesiastical institutions – the background and impact”. Prof. Fegert began with presenting potential conflicts of interests, revealing the institutions from which he had received financial support for research in the past years. Then, he discussed international processes of re-evaluation of sexual abuse of children, paying particular attention to the achievements in this area in Ireland. He expressed his disappointment with the progress of such works in Germany. He also mentioned reports prepared in the USA, the Netherlands and Belgium. The attitude: “It does not concern us” seemed ‘hypocritical’ to him and he pointed out that it had appeared in many countries on different continents.

Monika Applewhite, PhD, presented the topic of “A sexual abuse offender in the Church”. Particular emphasis was put on the increasing knowledge on clerics who commit sexual offences – their motivation, types of crime, as well as the role of forgiveness, support, responsibility and conduct. Dr Applewhite had worked with more than 300 priests and monks who sexually abused children and adolescents. She presented both the latest research results as well as the expertise gained from experience.

She distinguished three types of sexual offenders among the clergy:

Type 1: Preferential

Type 2: Situational

Type 3: Non-demanding (sadistic).

Each type was characterised in detail, e.g. indicating that the first type of criminals were able to sexually exploit a huge number of minors. However, in the case of the third type of criminals, violence was more important than the sexual urge. The first two types were violators where there was a relationship between them and their victims, and if suffering appeared, no abuse would take place. There was a chance for intervention and stopping the process of abuse

In her analysis, Dr. Applewhite distinguished between internal and external control mechanisms of the offenders:

- Internal control mechanisms include belief systems, own moral principles, impulse control;
- External control mechanisms include law and regulations, being observed, lack of opportunity.

Dr Applewhite stated that although perpetrators among clergymen were often better educated and more intelligent, their denial and cognitive distortion were exactly the same as those of other sexual offenders. Denial is the claim that the accusation of sexual harassment is untrue or is not fully true. Cognitive distortion means having improper thoughts which strengthen behaviours related to sexual offences.

The next part of the conference was devoted primarily to the response of the Church to the problem of sexual abuse of minors. Prof. Jörg M. Fegert presented the reaction of the Church from the German perspective. He discussed the understanding of the problem and responding to cases of sexual abuse of minors in the Roman Catholic Church in Germany. “Nowadays, the reaction of the Church is model and exemplary” – said Prof. Fegert. He presented how the German Centre for Child Protection functioned and who it cooperated with.

The reaction of the Church in Anglo-Saxon countries was presented by Monica Applewhite, PhD, from the United States, who discussed both the human and structural dimensions. Her speech was an analysis of historical and recent research studies concerning cases of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Anglo-Saxon countries. She presented the history of this phenomenon from a secular perspective from the 1930s until the first decade of the 21st century. She also analysed historical reports in Ireland, the United States and other English-speaking countries. She pointed out, inter alia, that Irish reports were prepared in great detail, which often made it difficult to establish any action plan.

Ewa Kusz, a therapist and psychologist specialising in sexology, presented institutional conditions conducive to sexual abuse in the Church. The speaker mentioned the following factors contributing to this phenomenon: improper

procedures used in determining whether candidates for the priesthood and religious life fulfilled the necessary conditions; insufficient human, moral, intellectual and spiritual formation in theological seminaries and novitiates; a social tendency to treat clerics, and other persons vested with power, in a favourable manner; and the poorly understood concern for the Church's reputation and avoiding scandals, which had led to the failure to use canonical penalties and lack of protection of human dignity. Turning to detailed answers, Ms Kusz first drew attention to an element called "clerical culture". She explained that the essential feature of this clerical culture was the widely understood sense of superiority of the clergy over the rest of the people of God. It could be said that the more important a person was among the privileged, the more his privilege increased. In this way, the hierarchical structure of the Church received an unknown form of privilege and power. The speaker pointed out that often when a case of sexual abuse came to light, it turned out that for many people it had not been a secret. Silence or lack of response could have had many causes. It appeared that three of them were the most significant: a strong sense of belonging to a group; underestimation of facts due to the lack of knowledge and cognitive dissonance arising from the conflict between the priestly vocation and sexual abuse.

In the afternoon part of the conference, a victim who had experienced sexual abuse by a priest in Poland shared his experience. He pointed out that the trauma which a victim had to face had long-term effects and could not be forgotten over the years. "It is impossible to forget" – he said in his emotional speech. He added that it was impossible to cope with the trauma without the help of a psychologist.

"Beauty and depth cannot obscure the concrete thing – which is pain and suffering. Your task is to tell about this concrete thing in a clear and compelling way, just as Pope Francis does" – said Bishop Piotr Libera in his homily during a penitential liturgy presided by himself in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Cracow.

On the second day of the conference, the first speaker, Monika Sajkowska, PhD, presented the topic entitled "What do we know about the problem of sexual abuse of children in Poland?". Monika Sajkowska is a Doctor of Sociology and the President of the Board of Nobody's Children Foundation. She is also the author of many studies, as well as academic and popular scientific articles on the problem of child abuse. The main purposes of her speech were the presentation of empirical knowledge about the problem of sexual abuse of

children in Poland, as well as the identification of areas of ignorance, and the main reasons causing the problem that child sexual abuse was still not dealt with effectively, both with regard to accumulating knowledge as well as preventing and counteracting this phenomenon.

In turn, Fr. Adam Żak SJ, PhD, presented the topic “What do we know about sexual abuse of minors in the Church in Poland?”. He presented the state of current research and demonstrated several postulates: shortening the decision-making process (survey approval); creating a system of contact points for the victims; starting a dialogue with the victims; and appointing a member of the Polish Bishops’ Conference as a delegate for the problem of sexual exploitation.

In the afternoon, a panel discussion was held with the theme “Forecasts for Poland in the context of what is known about sexual abuse in other local churches”, including M. Applewhite, Fr. R. Oliver, Bishop P. Libera, and moderated by attorney Michał Kelm.

The last part concerned the response of the Catholic Church in Poland. The following annexes were presented:

- Guidelines with the annex for the canonical procedure – Fr. Piotr Majer, PhD, The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow;
- Annex for assistance to victims – Ewa Kusz, Child Protection Centre, Ignatianum;
- Annex for seminary and ongoing formations – Fr. Wojciech Rzeszowski, PhD;
- Child Protection Centre at Ignatianum and a document on prevention – Fr. Adam Żak SJ, PhD.

The conference was concluded by Prof. Bogdan de Barbaro and Bishop Roman Pindel. Bishop Pindel drew attention to the penitential liturgy which concluded the first day of the conference. He also said that he had benefited greatly from the work in groups, which had taken place in the afternoon of the first day of the conference. “It made me realise that several contact points for victims of abuse should be created in Poland”. Such places would make it possible to report crimes not only by curiae. He found the conference very useful and well-prepared, suggesting that more such projects should be organised. When Prof. de Barbaro thanked the conference, he stated that it had great value and gave hope that the Church would not be hiding from such an important issue, as paedophilia, in its ranks. He also admitted that the fact that, according to the statistics, there was a relatively small percentage of clergy people who commit such abuse, was not a consolation. It might result from the fact that

many cases had never been disclosed, the so-called “blind number”. At the end, he emphasised the necessity to minimise the number of sexual crimes.