

**The following editorial appeared in *America* magazine.**

### **Women and Parents Needed**

“We can hypothesize that a greater female presence, not at a subordinate level, would have been able to rip the veil of masculine secrecy that in the past often covered the denunciation of these misdeeds with silence,” wrote Lucetta Scaraffia, an Italian journalist and historian, in a hard-hitting article on sexual abuse by members of the clergy. “Women, in fact, both religious and lay, by nature would have been more likely to defend young people in cases of sexual abuse, allowing the church to avoid the grave damage brought by these sinful acts,” she wrote.

Many commentators (both men and women) have made similar observations since the abuse scandals broke in the United States in 2002. The surprise is that this article appeared in *L’Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican’s semi-official newspaper. Germany and Ireland have lately been convulsed by clergy abuse scandals, and the Vatican is taking note. Scaraffia pointedly used the Italian word *omertà*, usually applied to the Mafia’s rigid code of silence, to describe the secrecy around abuse cases.

The *L’Osservatore* article explicitly called for more women in leadership roles in the church. The inclusion of lay men and women in decision-making roles in local dioceses, archdioceses and in the Vatican would be a way to combat the clerical culture that led to the abuse. Parents, in particular, would have been far less likely to downplay abuses against children. Groupthink is a danger for any organization, including the Catholic Church.

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**The letter to the Irish people is released.**

### **Pope slams Irish church, no Vatican blame in abuse**

*Associated Press Writers Nicole Winfield and Victor L. Simpson*

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI rebuked Irish bishops Saturday for “grave errors of judgment” in handling clerical sex abuse cases and ordered an investigation into the Irish church. But he laid no blame for the problem on the Vatican’s policies of keeping such cases secret.

In a letter to the Irish faithful read across Europe amid a growing, multinational abuse scandal, the pope apologized to victims but doled out no specific punishments to bishops blamed by Irish government-ordered investigations for having covered up abuse of thousands of Irish children from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Ireland’s main group of clerical-abuse victims, One in Four, said it was deeply disappointed by the letter because it failed to place responsibility with the Vatican for

what it called a "deliberate policy of the Catholic Church at the highest levels to protect sex offenders, thereby endangering children."

"If the church cannot acknowledge this fundamental truth, it is still in denial," the group said.

The letter directly addressed only Ireland, but the Vatican said it could be read as applying to other countries. Hundreds of new allegations of abuse have recently come to light across Europe, including in the pope's native Germany, where he served as archbishop in a diocese where several victims have recently come forward. One priest suspected of molesting boys while the future pope was in charge was transferred to a job where he abused more children.

While a cardinal at the Vatican, Joseph Ratzinger penned a 2001 letter instructing bishops around the world to report all cases of abuse to his office and keep the church investigations secret under threat of excommunication. While the Vatican insists that secrecy rule only applied to the church's investigation and didn't preclude reporting abuse to police, Irish bishops have said the letter was widely understood to mean they shouldn't report the cases to civil authorities.

"You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry," Benedict said, addressing himself to Irish Catholics who suffered "sinful and criminal" abuse at the hands of priests, brothers and nuns and a botched response by their superiors.

"It is understandable that you find it hard to forgive or be reconciled with the church," he said. "In her name, I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel."

Benedict used his harshest words for the abusers themselves, saying they had betrayed the trust of the faithful, brought shame on the church and now must answer before God and civil authorities.

"Conceal nothing," he exhorted them. "Openly acknowledge your guilt, submit yourselves to the demands of justice, but do not despair of God's mercy."

Benedict faulted their superiors, the Irish bishops, for having failed "sometimes grievously" to apply the church's own law which calls for harsh punishments for child abusers, including defrocking priests.

But he didn't rebuke them for having failed to report cases of abuse to police, saying only that serious mistakes were made and that now they must prevent future abuse and "continue to cooperate with civil authorities."

"I recognize how difficult it was to grasp the extent and complexity of the problem, to obtain reliable information and to make the right decisions in the light of conflicting expert advice," Benedict wrote.

"Nevertheless, it must be admitted that grave errors of judgment were made and failures of leadership occurred. And this has seriously undermined your credibility and effectiveness."

While the letter doled out no punishment for the bishops, the pope did order a Vatican investigation into some dioceses, seminaries and religious orders. Such a move is undertaken only when Rome considers a local church unable to deal with a problem on its own. The Vatican ordered such an "apostolic visitation" into U.S. seminaries after the U.S. clerical sex abuse scandal exploded in 2002.

The results of the Irish investigation could lead to further action.

Victims have been demanding that bishops resign, and three Irish bishops have offered to step down. Benedict hasn't accepted the resignations.

Asked why there were no punitive provisions in the letter, Vatican spokesman the Rev. Federico Lombardi noted that the letter was pastoral, not administrative or disciplinary in nature, and that any further measures concerning resignations would be taken by the competent Vatican offices.

Cardinal Sean Brady, the top cardinal in Ireland who himself is under fire for not reporting a notorious abuser to police, welcomed the letter, as did archbishops from across Europe.

"Let us pray that the Holy Father's pastoral letter will be the beginning of a great season of rebirth and hope in the Irish Church," he said.

But One in Four, the victims' group, said a new church leadership is necessary in Ireland for the church to regain its credibility.

"In relation to the Irish bishops, the pope acknowledges their failings, but situates them in failures to adhere to canon law," the group said. "There is no appreciation that the law of the land supersedes canon law, and that the Catholic bishops, like any other citizens, are obliged to abide by Irish law."

Three Irish government-ordered investigations published from 2005 to 2009 have documented how thousands of Irish children suffered rape, molestation and other abuse by priests in their parishes and by nuns and brothers in boarding schools and orphanages. Irish bishops did not report a single case to police until 1996 after victims began to sue the church.

The reports have faulted the Vatican for sending confusing messages to the Irish church about norms to be followed and, in general, for what it called the absence of a coherent set of canon laws and rules to apply in cases of abuse.

In particular, the so-called Murphy report faulted the 2001 secrecy letter penned by then-Cardinal Ratzinger, who headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

for a quarter-century before becoming pope, making him the most informed Vatican official about the global scale of clerical abuse.

In that role, he denounced the "filth" in the priesthood and initiated what has amounted to a crackdown on predatory priests, demanding a policy of zero tolerance from his bishops. As pope, he has met with American, Australian and Canadian victims of abuse, offering them comfort and apologies.

Nevertheless, reports emerged last week that while he was archbishop of Munich in the 1980s, Ratzinger approved therapy for a priest suspected of molesting boys. The priest was then transferred to a job where he later abused more children. He was convicted in a criminal trial. The archdiocese has said Ratzinger's then vicar general took full responsibility for the transfer.

Lombardi defended Benedict in his handling of the global abuse scandal and said anyone who knows the pontiff's background and history would know he has been a "witness for coherence and correctness" in confronting abuse and a "guide to overcome a past of silence."

Lombardi was peppered with questions about why the German-born pope didn't directly address the German scandal or take the opportunity of the letter to make a more sweeping commentary on the now-global dimensions of the scandal.

Lombardi acknowledged the other cases but said the Irish scandal was unique in its scope. But he said that obviously issues in the letter could be read to apply to other countries and individuals.

"You can't talk about the entire world every time," he said. "It risks becoming banal."

The head of the German bishops' conference, Archbishop Robert Zollitsch, said the letter was a message also for Germany.

"The sexual abuse scandal in Ireland is not just an Irish problem, it is the scandal of the church in many places, it is the scandal of the church in Germany," he said.

A prominent German Catholic activist group, We Are Church, said it respected the pope's efforts with the letter.

But it faulted him for failing to address the fact that abuse is a global and structural problem for the church. "It would be good if there would be a mea culpa from him for all victims around the globe," said spokesman Christian Weisner.

**The full text of the letter is available at: <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/>**

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**The following excerpt is from Roger Karban's reflection on the readings for the Fifth Sunday of Lent.**

... Proclaiming Yahweh's word to a people in Exile who believe they've already "heard it all before," the prophet demonstrates that true faith isn't just a verbal, ritual recitation of past events. Real faith revolves around recognizing God doing something in our present life that God's never done before.

... Then God gets to the heart of the message. "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Yahweh's saving events aren't "events of the past." Though people of faith constantly experience them, they're not happening exactly the way they once took place. God always saves, but always does so in new ways. Our faith leads us beyond the past to an ever-evolving present.

I've experienced lots of "new things" in my faith life. Like most Catholics, I originally was taught Jesus founded the Roman Catholic Church as we know it, with its hierarchical structure, rituals, rules and regulations. He did this to guarantee all its members (after a required stay in purgatory) would eventually get into heaven. I was assured I'd achieve eternal glory by following the binding dictates of our church, no matter how minute. It took awhile before I realized the implications of something Raymond Brown said at our 1975 clergy conference: "Jesus of Nazareth had no intention of founding a church as we know it."

We know from our Scriptures that the first Christians gave themselves over to a person - the risen Jesus among them - not to an institution. Paul summarizes the impact of such an ever-new faith in one sentence: "I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord."

I've frequently mentioned **[that]** Semitic thinking persons truly know only what they experience. Theologians through the centuries have reminded us of organized religion's purpose: to help its members know God in their lives. Organized religion was never created to provide us just with an experience of organized religion.

**And I follow this with George Wynne's response to Frank Lawlor's reflection from last week. Thanks to Sal Umana for these brilliant updates.**

Yes, all of humanity has been "The People of God." Vatican II opened the doors to a new unfolding awareness/ development. Yes; all of humanity is mystically united to one another, and the Eucharist is our spiritual bond of oneness. Yes, we have been very parochial /possessive /controlling of Christ and His Eucharist. Jesus does not belong to us. We all mystically belong to Jesus. We must never try to possess/ control Jesus. Remember, Teilhard de Chardin: Jesus is "The Cosmic Covenant." He does not belong to an institution – or a planet. He excludes no one! The Sacramental Eucharist may be the very act of universal oneness. All persons, all creation belongs to "The Christic Cosmic Covenant" and all "The People of God" share in the Eucharist."

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**Zenit.org is in need of support to continue reporting the news from Rome. The following article addresses the role of the laity.**

### **Laity Are Not Priests' Collaborators, Says Pope All Are Co-responsible for the Church**

Benedict XVI today told parishioners of a Roman parish that there is a need to change mentalities, so as to see laypeople as co-responsible for the Church, not merely as collaborators of the clergy. The Pope made this reflection today when he celebrated Sunday Mass at one of the parishes in the north of the Diocese of Rome, San Giovanni della Croce in Colle Salario.

The Bishop of Rome made various concrete exhortations at the parish.

Regarding movements and new ecclesial communities, he lauded the fact that the parish has been open to them from the beginning, thus "developing a wider awareness of the Church and experiencing new forms of evangelization."

However, he added: "I call on you to continue in this direction with courage but also to dedicate yourselves to bring all of these realities together into a unified pastoral project."

The Pontiff expressed his satisfaction that the community "wishes to promote, in regard to the vocations and the role of consecrated persons and the laity, the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God."

To do this, he said, "demands a change in mentality, above all with regard to the laity, 'moving from considering them 'collaborators' of the clergy to recognizing them as truly 'co-responsible' for the being and action of the Church, promoting a mature and dedicated laity in this way.'"

Finally, the Holy Father exhorted the Christian families and youth of the parish to "let yourselves be more and more drawn by the desire to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ." "Do not wait until others bring you other messages that do not lead to life, but make yourselves missionaries of Christ for the brothers and sisters where you live, work, study or only pass your free time," he encouraged. "You should also establish here a strong and organic vocational program that educates families and young people in prayer and the living of life as a gift that comes from God."

**The only observation I would add is that those who are ordained are the servants of the laity in their mission of sanctifying the world.**

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