

## PUTTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

First we must express our deep sympathy for victims of sexual abuse and their families. To learn that any Catholic priest used his privileged position to sexually abuse children fills us all with shame and horror, and that this was ever condoned by any bishop is also totally unacceptable.

However, there is no question that the Catholic Church and our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI are undergoing a savage and ill-informed attack from the secular media of this country and abroad, We intend to list a few facts which we hope will put this attack in its proper context, partly out of regard for the truth but also to give ordinary lay Catholics the information they need to defend our beloved Church, to their family and friends, workmates, colleagues and fellow parishioners - while agreeing that child sexual abuse is a terrible evil which must be promptly rooted out - wherever it is discovered.

### I. THE CHURCH.

Recent coverage in the media gives the impression that the sexual abuse of children is a particularly Catholic problem. Even the three party leaders discussing the Pope's visit in their televised debate, spoke as if this should be taken into account, although they could have been expected to know better.

The figures show a different story.

An American study, published online by Sam Miller, who is not a Catholic but a prominent Jewish businessman from Cleveland, reveals that while a disgraceful 1.7% of Catholic Clergy have been found guilty of sexual abuse in the USA, 10% of Protestant Ministers have been found guilty. It also showed that child abuse is far more prevalent in schools, youth organisations and sports training centres while Catholic clergy are actually at the bottom of the list - below doctors, teachers and farmers. Mr Miller ends his article with these words *"Walk with your shoulders high and your head higher... Be proud to speak up for your Church. Be proud that you are a Catholic. "*

The official figures in England and Wales are even lower.

**Only 0.4 % of Catholic priests have been accused of child abuse in England and Wales since 1970 - less have been found guilty.**

That it happens at all is a terrible scandal but **the truth** is that only a very small number of Catholic priests ever abuse children sexually and it is dishonest of the media not to make this clear. When a Muslim terrorist plants a bomb which kills a large number of people we are always told, every time it is mentioned, that this movement concerns only a very small number of Muslims who are not representative of the vast majority. Where is a similar disclaimer for Catholic priests? Why are the British people being given only half the story?

**The truth** is that a young child is now safer in the Catholic Church than in any other institution including nursery or school. Since the Nolan Report, as soon as a priest is

reported to have abused a child, the police are informed and the priest is removed

from his parish that day and kept in a Convent or Monastery away from children while the accusation is thoroughly investigated. Even after the police have dropped the case, satisfied that there is no truth in the allegation, the Church continues to complete Her own investigation until satisfied.

It is encouraging that some non-Catholic journalists have pointed out these facts online and in personal articles out of an interest in seeing fair play. Sadly, Church Officials in this country have been very slow to join in and help redress the balance.

## **II. THE POPE.**

Our Holy Father has come in for special attention in this outpouring of hatred and abuse which is particularly distressing as, not only is he innocent of the charges made, he is the one who has done so much to prevent any future possibility of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy.

We need to remind our non-Catholic friends, who are used to much smaller National bodies, that the Catholic Church consists of 1.3 Billion people world-wide who are looked after by over 400,000 priests. Obviously with these numbers it would be absurd to expect the Pope to leap into action at every allegation - true or false - and investigate it himself. Fortunately he doesn't have to as the local Bishop has the power and indeed the duty to suspend the priest immediately, inform the police and set up an investigation while fully co-operating with the police enquiry. So let's stop blaming the Pope for generally failing to react to allegations of sexual abuse.

However there are two cases where he has been to some extent involved which require some examination.

### **1. Father Murphy of Milwaukee Archdiocese.**

*The New York Times* used this case to attack the Pope most unfairly without consulting Father Thomas Brundage JCL, the presiding judge in the case, about the true facts. It is clear that bad mistakes were made but they were not made by the Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger as he was then. The facts revealed by Father Brundage reveal that Father Murphy, who taught in a school for the deaf, abused a boy in 1964 and went on to abuse other boys.

The boys complained to Father David Walsh who quite correctly reported the matter to the Archbishop, Rembert Weakland, who unaccountably did nothing. So Father Walsh informed the Police who, surprisingly, took no action either. Eventually, Father Walsh wrote to the Pope's representative, the Papal Nuncio in Washington about it. A meeting was held in 1974 attended by two Papal representatives and Father Murphy was suspended and removed from the school but the delay, inexcusable as it is, cannot be laid at the door of the present Pope. No-one in Rome even heard about this crime until ten years after it happened and Father Murphy was already suspended. Archbishop Rembert Weakland has also been disciplined now and removed from his Diocese.

Because the boys said the Sacrament of Penance was used to approach them, this case now had to go to Rome so the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by

Cardinal Ratzinger, the present Pope, was informed. However, it is unlikely he even saw the letter as the answer came two months later from Cardinal Bertone, his Deputy. This is because Cardinal Ratzinger was best qualified to deal with matters of Doctrine while his Deputy handled administration.

By now Father Murphy had had two severe strokes and was not expected to live long and as, he was already suspended and could no longer harm children, it was decided that it would be better not to start the lengthy laicisation procedure which would involve the boys again as witnesses. Two months later Father Murphy died and went to answer to his Maker.

This shows that to claim as so many papers did that the Pope 'did nothing and blocked action in this case' is just not true.

## **2. Father Hullermann of Munich Diocese**

The second attack concerns a Father Hullermann of Munich Diocese where the Pope was Archbishop. In 1980 Father Hullermann was accused of sexual abuse and sent for therapy, which at that time was thought to be effective. He came to live in a rectory in Munich to receive this therapy and while there, helped out in a Munich parish on Sundays. This should not have happened but the present Pope, who would have been involved if Father Hullermann were appointed parish priest, would not necessarily have known this was happening. In 1982 the Pope was made Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith in Rome and seven months later, when he had completed his therapy. Father Hullermann was, against the advice of his therapist, assigned to a parish in Grafing. He was convicted of serious sex offences in 1986 and this is described by the media as a 'smoking gun' against Pope Benedict XVI although he had been four years in Rome by then.

On the strength of these two false accusations we have the Oxford Professor, Richard Dawkins describing the Pope as *"a leering old villain in a frock...in charge of a profiteering, woman-fearing .guilt-gorging, truth-hating .child-raping institution."* Fortunately, Damien Thompson puts this in perspective by writing, *"The article conjures up the image of a nasty old man who s losing his marbles. It's not very nice about the Pope either!"*

We also have Foreign Office officials compiling a very offensive plan for the Pope's visit which includes items such as 'visit an abortion centre, bless a homosexual civil union, etc.' The French paper, *Le Monde* joins in with a disgusting cartoon of the Pope with a child and there is a petition on the internet protesting about his visit. On 26th April Radio 4 broadcast a Report on "The Pope's Track record in dealing with paedophile priests"! They discussed the two cases covered above at some length, even describing Archbishop Weakland as a 'whistleblower', but finally, disappointed at the lack of any real evidence against the Pope, they assured listeners that 'Lawyers were still combing through documents looking for any evidence against the Vatican and the Pope'.

Now why would they want to do that?

### **A few more questions**

How can we explain this media hysteria about something they themselves have

concocted? If they are really concerned about children who are being abused why don't people attack places and institutions where it is much more prevalent? What about beginning with abortion clinics where not only are hundreds of unborn children killed, but pregnant 13 and 14 year olds are regularly counselled without ever being referred to the police, although they are obviously victims of child abuse, sometimes by older men? Or could it possibly be that people who hate the Church see this as a good piece of propaganda to bring it into disrepute?

### **The situation today.**

In 2001 Pope John Paul II asked Cardinal Ratzinger to look into the question of sex abuse. The Cardinal decided that Bishops needed more guidance and he devised a form which must be completed every time an allegation of sex abuse is made. This form must be sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when it is completed so Rome knows how many allegations are made and what action has been taken. This simple procedure would probably have prevented the delay with Father Murphy's case and it should help in any future cases. So, far from being the problem, Pope Benedict XVI should be recognised as part of the solution. The rest of the solution is Prayer and watchfulness. Prayer for Seminary students and Priests, for Bishops and Cardinals for Richard Dawkins and his fellows, whatever their motives are, and for our Holy Father.

### **A Surprising Development.**

An unexpected consequence of this spotlight on child sex abuse is the emergence of a great number of victims who were abused as children who have no connection with the Church at all. Because the subject has been opened up so widely, people from various parts of Europe and America who were abused as children are now coming forward.

For example, the Mayor of New York City, where the attack on the Church originated, now says he is concerned about how he will find the large sum of money needed to compensate victims of the enormous number of cases of sexual abuse coming to light in his City. These involve teachers in State schools, youth workers, welfare officials, etc. The problem in the secular world is obviously much bigger than even the wildest allegations made it appear in the Catholic Church.

If this unpleasant and largely undeserved attack on the Church means that in future children in the secular world will also have better protection, it will have done some good.

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