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Sexual Abuse of Minors in the Catholic Church: USA and Europe**

A comparative analysis of abuse reports

ABSTRACT: The year 2002 marked a pivotal moment in the American Catholic Church when a scandal erupted in Boston, unveiling a systemic crisis of clerical sexual abuse. This event unleashed a tidal wave of revelations that rippled through the Church, shattering the prevailing facade of "business as usual" and exposing a hidden stream of abuse that had flowed beneath the surface for decades. This paper examines the profound impact of the Boston scandal on the Catholic Church, both in the United States and in Europe.

This study delves into four reports from Europe and the United States, shedding light on the extent of the issue in each region. It aims to bridge a gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of these reports, emphasizing that the problem is not exclusive to the Church but is a societal issue. The examined reports reveal varying rates of abuse and abusers across countries, highlighting the need for a broader societal approach to combat child abuse.

This research underscores the importance of confronting the issue transparently and acknowledges the critical role played by independent investigations, such as the John Jay Report. The data from these reports are essential in dispelling misconceptions and fostering a fact-based understanding of clerical abuse.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis examines key findings from reports in the United States, France, Germany, and Ireland, highlighting both similarities and differences.

KEYWORDS: Catholic Church, abuse, minors, clergy, religious personnel, reports.

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1. Introduction

In 2002, a huge scandal broke out in the American Catholic Church, in Boston.¹ The years that followed showed the extraordinary importance of the case; it is not an exaggeration to say that this was the moment from which the tide of sexual abuse, which had been present as a hidden stream for decades, broke to the surface with elemental force, and swept away like a tsunami the previously prevailing “business as usual” automatism related to abuses, first in the American Church and then around the world.

As it turned out, it was not just that one Catholic priest had abused minors in an isolated case; the problem was systemic:² The Cardinal of Boston Bernard Francis Law kept the priest offender in office even after cases were revealed, and even tried to cover up the cases by transferring the abusive cleric—as we now know, with little success, since the priest went on to abuse additional victims in his new post.

Following the incident, Cardinal Law resigned from his post³, and was replaced by a puritan Capuchin monk, Sean O’Malley: he sold the bishop’s palace⁴ and tried to help the victims by all means possible, both financially and morally. He declared zero tolerance for similar cases, and enacted draconian rules for the protection of minors.

In 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (hereinafter, USCCB) decided to take an unprecedented step; it invited an independent institution⁵ to investigate cases that had occurred in the past decades. At the same time, to clean up the Church, prevent further cases,

¹ *Church allowed abuse by priest for years*. Boston Globe. Available at: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/06/church-allowed-abuse-priest-for-years/cSHfGkTTrAT25qKGvBuDNM/story.html> (Accessed: 02 June 2022).

² Engel, 2002.

³ Getlin and Baum, 2002.

⁴ Mehren, 2004.

⁵ ‘In June 2002, the entire body of Catholic bishops of the United States approved the Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth at their General Assembly in Dallas. The Charter established the National Review Board, which was tasked with preparing a descriptive study of the nature and extent of sexual abuse of minors by priests, with the full cooperation of dioceses. The National Review Board commissioned the City University of New York’s John Jay College of Criminal Justice to conduct research, summarize the data collected, and issue a summary report to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the findings. This report from John Jay College is published by the undersigned. (Msgr. William P. Fay, General Secretary’ Available at: https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2004_02_27_JohnJay_original/ (Accessed: 02 June 2022)).

and protect minors, the conference and the individual dioceses, archdioceses, and religious orders took other concrete steps, such as creating regulations and developing strict procedures that they implemented across the US.

Following the American case, similar scandals erupted in almost every part of the world, and the Catholic Church continued to make serious efforts to deal with them – on the one hand, centrally, through measures taken by the Holy See, and⁶ on the other hand, through the actions of local church communities, episcopal conferences, and religious orders.

As a result, the picture began to become clear: The Church and the wider public gained insight into the depth and quality of the problem over the past 70 years, and the reasons and factors that facilitated these types of crimes in the Church became visible.

On the other hand, at the same time, regulations were created, training aimed at raising the awareness of victims and deepening the topic in general appeared, the Pontifical Gregorian University⁷ developed an internationally accredited training portfolio related to child abuse.⁸ Pope Francis proclaimed zero tolerance, prescribed cooperation with secular authorities, and obliged bishops and religious orders to develop and implement appropriate regulations and procedures, as provided for in “You are the light of the world.”

The Holy See also modified the Canon Law, Book VI of the Code. This book underwent significant changes;⁹ among other things, the scope of relevant Church law was extended to include lay people employed by the Church.

⁶ In 2019, Pope Francis issued his apostolic letter entitled “You are the light of the world,” which aims to “prevent sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons within the Church. Pope Francis took this action *motu proprio*, but it was born as a result of the meeting held in the Vatican in February, which was attended by the presidents of the episcopal conferences and the main religious superiors. ‘The papal decree contains innovative elements that serve better cooperation between the Holy See and dioceses,’

„*Ti vagytok a világ világossága*” – *Ferenc pápa motu proprioja az Egyházon belüli visszaélések ellen*. Magyar Kurír. Available at: <https://www.magyarkurir.hu/ferenc-papa/-ti-vagytok-vilag-vilagossaga-ferenc-papa-motu-proprioja-az-egyhazi-beluli-viszgezesek-ellen> (Accessed: 02 June 2022).

⁷ Pontifical Gregorian University. Available at: <https://www.unigre.it/en/>. (Accessed: 02 June 2022).

⁸ https://iadc.unigre.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Elearning_Flyer_15.pdf. (Accessed: 02 June 2022).

⁹ Fóris, 2021.

Globally, the Catholic Church has taken serious and effective steps to make it safer for minors. It can perhaps be stated that today, there is no other organization that takes the protection of children and vulnerable adults as seriously as the Roman Catholic Church. No other organization has taken action against the abuse of minors in such a wide manner.

As mentioned earlier, this issue emerged with the breaking of silence within the American Catholic Church. The American bishops crushed all their fears and horrors and said that they were willing to face the demon hiding in the bosom of the Church, they were willing to call the trouble by its name, and accepted that this meant that they would have to take responsibility, pay a lot of money to many victims, and change the paradigm regarding the treatment of abuse cases and the attitude towards victims.

The first step on this path was an independent research, called the John Jay Report.

This was followed by even more research worldwide, as a result of which a serious and profound transformation and purification began in the Catholic Church. These reports played an important role for local churches and the Holy See, leading to the measures I have already mentioned above. After all, to defeat evil, we must first call it by its name, and these reports have done just that.

The purpose of this study is to present the results of three European and one US report. On the one hand, this study fills a gap in that we often mention these “country reports” in professional and Church circles, but as far as I know, no summary analysis of them has been published in such depth.

At the same time, I also consider it important that the knowledge of these reports can help the reader gain a correct, factual knowledge of Church abuses. It is clear from the reports that it is not true that this is a problem “invented by liberals,” just as it is not true that “all priests are pedophiles.” Let me note in parentheses that sexual abuse is a problem across modern and postmodern societies, and although the involvement of the Church is indisputable, reforming the Church is not enough to eliminate the phenomenon. The majority of abuses take place in the secular world (according to the European Commission, in 2020, 1 in 5 children is sexually abused in the EU¹⁰, and the number of abuses has increased by 70% since 2010), so it would be very necessary for the leadership of each country and the international organizations with the appropriate powers (UN, EU, etc.)

¹⁰ European Commission, 2020. p. 1.

to take a similar approach to confrontation to that done in the Catholic Church.

In the following, I examine four documents: American, Irish, German, and French reports. I am aware that many other reports have been published, including in Australia, Chile or Poland. The examination of these may be the subject of a subsequent analysis, in which I focus exclusively on the reports indicated above.

The primary sources I used from the reports was the executive summaries. However, I also highlighted some important findings from the detailed chapters. I did not search thoroughly for other analytical sources, although I used a few. My main intention is to present factual material in the reports in a form that can be compared to each other as much as possible. Therefore, the following chapters are based on the main four sources, that is, the reports themselves, with some exceptions.

2. USA—the John Jay report

This report was conducted by the John Jay Institute of Criminal Justice, part of the City University of New York. This highly prestigious institute published the results of a 291-page study that analyzed the sexual abuse of minors by clergy (priests and deacons) in the USA. This study was based on answering questions posed by the USCCB. The research was commissioned by the Bishops' Conference in June 2002. Data collection began in March 2003, and the report was handed over to the client in June 2004.¹¹

2.1. The questions—areas of research

The USCCB asked the research organization to investigate a one-and-a-half-page set of questions, divided into four categories. (1) Examining the number and nature of sexual abuse accusations faced by the Catholic Church in the USA between 1950 and 2002. (2) Collecting information about the alleged perpetrators: church status, age, number of victims, and the response of the Church and secular authorities to the accusations made in relation to them, among other things. (3) Collecting information about alleged victims: the nature of their relationship with the perpetrator, the nature of the abuse, and the distribution of allegations over time and (4) Collecting information on the financial consequences of the abuses for the Church.

¹¹ John Jay College, 2004, p. 3.

2.2. Research team and methodology

The researchers had three fields of expertise: forensic psychology, criminology, and behavioral science.¹²

The methodology was based on questionnaires, which were formulated separately for the heads of dioceses, religious orders, and other Catholic organizations. Although there was resistance at the beginning, in the end, a very high number of those who were contacted answered the questionnaires: 97% of the dioceses (this is an exceptionally good rate for a questionnaire survey; moreover, the quality of the answers was also very high according to the evaluators), and 60% of the orders, which represented 80% of the religious persons.¹³ The questionnaires were diverse and included questions about the clergy, the victims, the committed acts, and the diocese/religious order.

Owing to the sensitivity of the topic, the questionnaires were first sent to the consulting firm Ernst & Young, who stripped them of any personally identifiable information so that the researchers only received clean data.¹⁴

The questionnaire covered three areas based on these questions. Each diocese or religious order was required to complete three questionnaires. The first concerned the institution itself, the second concerned the priests accused of sexual abuse, and the third concerned the incidents themselves. A joint examination of the three types of questionnaire provided a comprehensive picture of the individual institutions and revealed the depth of the problem.¹⁵

The first questionnaire was the “Diocese Profile,” consisting of 10 questions. Of these, five dealt with the demographics of the given institution and the other five with problematic cases. Respondents were also asked, among other questions, how many accusations were made, how many were found to be unfounded, and how many were withdrawn.

The “Clerical Questionnaire” consisted of 17 questions and 18 follow-up questions and focused on individual priests who had been implicated in established or alleged cases of sexual harassment of minors at any time during the examined period. The questions revolved around the priest’s life

¹² John Jay College, 2004.

¹³ John Jay College, 2004.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ John Jay College, 2004, p. 13.

history, where he attended seminary, whether he was transferred during his training, whether he had substance abuse problems, whether he had been sexually abused himself, and so on. Some questions also investigated what happened after the report of abuse: was the priest disciplined or transferred, reported to the authorities, banned from working with youth, sent to therapy, etc.

Finally, the “Victim Questionnaire” was about survivors of sexual abuse. This meant that if five reports were made against a certain priest, five questionnaires had to be completed, one for each victim. This questionnaire had two parts. The first part included questions about the victim themselves: gender, age at the time of the incident, and age at the time of the report. They were also asked about the nature of the incident and the behavior of the Church, and the secular authorities after the report. In the second part, an attempt was made to reveal the financial circumstances of the incident: how much did the therapeutic treatment cost (for both the victim and the perpetrator), how much compensation had to be paid, what were the legal costs, and so on.¹⁶

The questionnaires were cleaned of all personal data and evaluated by the research team. The previously mentioned very high percentage of responses (97% in dioceses and 80% in religious orders) was mainly due to the fact that the President of the Bishops’ Conference sent a letter to all institutions asking for smooth and transparent cooperation with the independent research organization, and the overwhelming majority of the institutions complied with this.

2.3. Prevalence of sexual abuse of minors among priests and deacons

2.3.1. Overall prevalence of sexual abuse of minors in the United States

First, the John Jay Report attempts to provide statistical data on incidents in wider society to convey the depth of the Church’s problems. Several studies have been conducted and the results have been noted to vary slightly; however, the following data have been reported.

27% of women and 16% of men said they had experienced childhood sexual abuse during the study period (1992–2000). In the investigated cases, 42% of men and 33% of women had never spoken about the abuse they had suffered. 12.8% of women and 4.3% of men had reported sexual abuse as a

¹⁶ John Jay College, 2004, p. 15.

child to police. 15.3% of women and 5.9% of men had experienced some form of sexual violence. Only 5.7% of the cases had been reported to the police, and no one had been informed about 26% of the incidents before the investigation began.

In summary, girls are abused much more than boys, and girls are more likely to report what happened to them than boys. However, the number of cases reported to the police is very low for both sexes, as stated above.¹⁷

2.3.2. Sexual abuse by priests, deacons, and religious personnel

A) Statistics of occurrences

According to the data, 4,392 priests were accused of sexual abuse during the investigation period. It was difficult to calculate the percentage of active priests accused, because there were no exact figures available for the number of active priests who served between 1950 and 2002. Several sources were used to estimate the total number of priests.

Dioceses and religious orders were asked to provide data on the number of priests they had employed during the period under review. According to the results, 109,694 people were employed, which means that 4.0% of the total employees were abusers.

The other data were obtained from a Church database, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) database, in which 94,607 priests were counted between 1960 and 2002; during this period, the number of offenders was 4,127, for a rate of 4.3%.

When the diocesan and religious order data were examined separately, the results showed that 4.3% of diocesan priests were accused of sexual abuse while 2.5% of religious order personnel were accused of sexual abuse. Based on the CARA database, these rates are 5% and 2.7%, respectively.

Regarding the reports, the research could not find out what percentage of incidents were reported. It is interesting, however, that while less than 13% of survivors reported the incidents within a year of their occurrence, more than 25% of those who did so more than 30 years after the abuse (see more later).

The number of victims who reported sexual abuse committed by a priest or religious member of the Church during the examination period was

¹⁷ John Jay College, 2004, p. 25.

10,667; that is, each abusive priest abused two to three children on average.¹⁸

As for the geographical distribution of cases, there was no significant difference in terms of offender rates; the lowest rate by region was 3%, the highest was 6%.

B) Time distribution of cases

According to previous research examining repeated cases of abuse in the 1970s, it perpetrators were reported in 1970; however, most incidents were recorded in 1980.¹⁹

Cases of abuse often last for several years. More than 38% of the cases went on for less than a year, 21.8% lasted more than a year but less than two years, 28% lasted 2–4 years, and 10.9% lasted 5–9 years.

At the time of the reports, one-third of the cases were reported before 1993 and another third between 1993 and 2002, while within just one year the last one-third of the reports had been made, in 2002–2003.²⁰

C) The costs

By 2004, the Church had spent more than \$500 million on victim compensation, therapy for victims and perpetrators, and legal fees, according to the report.

D) Profile of offending priests

The majority of offending priests, 68%, were ordained between 1950 and 1979. The proportion of those who were ordained before 1950 was 21.3%, the remainder, 10.7%, were ordained as priests after 1979.

Of 37% of the perpetrators participated in therapy programs, most were enrolled in treatment specifically for perpetrators of sexual violence, and some were sent for individual therapy. Priests with several victims were more likely to enter such programs than those with few or only one victim. Interestingly, the severity of the act of violence did not correlate with whether they received treatment; those who forced children have vaginal, anal, or oral sex did not receive treatment in a higher proportion than those who were touched them through their clothing.²¹

¹⁸ John Jay College, 2004, p. 4.

¹⁹ John Jay College, 2004, p. 5.

²⁰ John Jay College, 2004, p. 5.

²¹ John Jay College, 2004, p. 6.

Offender behaviors were classified into more than 20 categories. The most common were indecent touching through clothing (53%), reaching under clothing (45%), oral sex performed by the priest (26%), undressing the victim (26%), and sex in which the priest penetrated the victim (22%). Most perpetrators abused their victims in several categories, and it can be said that the number of those who stopped at the mildest category was very small (on a similar note, the proportion of those who “only” verbally committed sexual abuse or showed pornographic content to their victim was 1.5%).

In most cases (41%), the scene of the crimes was the rectory; 16% of the cases took place in the church and 12% in the victim’s home. Approximately 10% of the cases took place in a school or in a car.

The majority of the offending priests had behavioral problems, according to the witnesses; the most common were personality disorders. Offenders’ age increased on average over time: while in the 1950s through 1970s, the offenders were typically in their thirties (the average age was 37–38 years in these decades), between 1980 and 1990, the average age of perpetrators was 42 years, and from the 1990s onward, 48 years.²²

56% of offenders were reported for a single victim, 27% for 2–3 victims, 14% for 4–9 victims, and 3.5% had abused more than 10 victims.²³

E) Notifications and other activities following the cases

During the report, the police made contact with a quarter of the perpetrators. The number of those who were finally prosecuted was 384, nearly 10% of all perpetrators. Those who were finally convicted were 252, of whom 100 went to prison, which is 2% of all the perpetrators.

Half of reports were made by the victims themselves, one-quarter by the victim’s lawyer, and the remainder by family members (mostly the parents). In half of the cases, the report was made to the diocese/religious order, and in a quarter to the authorities. In the latter reports, the archived files show that in just under half of the cases, at least one attempt was made to investigate – the visited institute made at least one response. Unfortunately, however, no response was made to slightly more than half of the victims (50.3%).²⁴

²² John Jay College, 2004, p. 44.

²³ John Jay College, 2004, p. 51.

²⁴ John Jay College, 2004, p. 93.

Police made contact with a quarter of the perpetrators; the number of those who were finally prosecuted was 384, and those who were finally convicted numbered 252, of whom 100 went to prison, which is approximately 2% of all accused priests.²⁵

Many reports were made quite late compared to the abuse (this is quite common across abuse cases in general). According to the report, victims reported less than a quarter of the cases within 10 years of the incident; half of the reports were made after 10–30 years and another quarter more than 30 years after the incident.²⁶

F) Typology of victims

The study showed that 81% of the more than 10,000 victims were male, while only 19% were female; in terms of their age, they could mostly be categorized as prepubescent or pubescent: most victims were boys aged 11–17 years, the average age was 12.6 years, and showed an increasing trend over the decades (John Jay College, 2004, p. 70).

G) Causes of sexual abuse in perpetrators

In a detailed appendix, the document also provides an analysis of why individuals may develop a morbid attraction to children and why they may act on it criminally. Several theories are listed: biological, psychodynamic, behavioral, attachment, cognitive-behavioral, integrated, and special theories related to priest offenders. Of these, the last two are the most interesting.

Integrative theory admits some aspects of all other theories may be true of a given perpetrator, in ways that may vary among perpetrators.²⁷ According to this theory, four main characteristics lead to sex crime.

The first is so-called emotional congruence, which means that a person is emotionally damaged, suffers from an infantile or minority complex, and is therefore able to establish relationships with children more easily than with adults.

The second is the awakening of the offender's sexual desires for the child. Finkelhor sees the reason for this primarily in socialization, which can also be his own experience: the perpetrator himself was a victim of sexual abuse in his childhood, and the experience drove him towards children.

²⁵ John Jay College, 2004, p. 7.

²⁶ John Jay College, 2004, p. 94.

²⁷ Finkelhor, 1984, cited in John Jay College, 2004, p. 168.

The third aspect is explained by blockade theory: In essence, something blocks emotional and sexual contact with adults. This can be traced back to childhood and youth trauma, and the lack of development of socialization skills.

The fourth factor is a lack of restraint, enabling the offender to cross the line of child molestation. According to Finkelhor, three predisposing factors play roles in this process: cognitive disorders, drug use, and stress.

Regarding priest offenders, the opinion of researchers is that there is no clear and unambiguous answer as to why some priests molest children. However, there is agreement that childhood trauma is important in many cases, as well as childhood abuse of the priest perpetrator. It is conceivable that emotionally burdened clergy who are impaired in their psychosexual development, restricted by celibacy, and have a deep sense of shame, as well as possible minority complex arising from inability to meet the Church's moral expectations, may become abusers.²⁸

3. Ireland: The Ryan Report

Norbertine monk Brendan Smyth's child abuse case caused great uproar in 1995 and initiated a child abuse scandal in Ireland to such a degree that it resulted in a paradigm shift in societal and Church perception of child abuse. The case shook Ireland so deeply that the Attorney General and the Prime Minister were forced to resign. The problems that emerged as a result of the incident primarily affected schools, particularly boarding schools.²⁹ Smyth was sentenced to 12 years in prison for 74 counts of sexual abuse of 20 students over 36 years.

In 2000, the Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern founded the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (hereinafter, CICA), or the Ryan Commission (formerly the Laffoy Commission; it was run by Mary Laffoy and then Sean Ryan, "which then published its 2,600-page assessment report (Ryan Report) after nine years of work," in 2009.³⁰

The report investigates religious, state-funded institutions in Ireland that deal with minors, mainly industrial schools, orphanages, and correctional institutions; the range of abuse investigated (not only sexual but also physical and other abuses, including neglect) is significantly different

²⁸ John Jay College, 2004, p. 170.

²⁹ Németh, 2019, pp. 5–6.

³⁰ Ibid.

from that of other countries. The root cause of the Irish problem, the report finds, was the various abuses committed in poorly functioning residential institutions combined with the Church's failure to properly investigate and deal with the ever-expanding scandal in its bosom.³¹

3.1. Typology of abuses, chapters of the research

The Commission defined as abuse: (1) physical abuse and the lack of its prevention (listed first); (2) use of a child as a sexual object for one's own or a third party's pleasure; (3) neglect that leads to an abnormality in the child's physical or mental development or seriously damages the child's well-being or behavioral skills; and (4) any other act or omission that has or could have similar negative effects on children, such as emotional abuse.³²

The research is divided into five chapters and has a completely different system from any other independent country report, with the first and second chapters following a summary report style discussing the abuses that occurred in the examined institutions individually, in an institution-by-institution overview. Chapter 3 is most similar to the other reports; the authors summarize more than 1,000 testimonies, focusing on the place and form of abuse, typology of the victims, and so on. In chapter 4, the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the relevant features of institutional financing, which also falls under the Ministry's responsibility, are examined, as well as the relationship between schools and society and the characteristics of the operation of residential schools in relation to child welfare. Specific conclusions and proposals are formulated for these topics. Chapter 5 consists of expert reports along with description of the composition of the Commission and the legal background.

In the following, we will describe the most important details of the summary report, focusing on the first three chapters and the conclusions formulated in the 4th chapter; however, we will first describe the task, composition, and research methodology of the Committee.

3.2. The Commission's task, composition and research methodology

The task of the Commission was to investigate child abuse cases in institutions maintained by religious orders, mostly state-funded, in light of the following themes.³³ Whether abuse occurred in the given institution.

³¹ Keenan, 2017, pp. 257–270.

³² CICA, 2009, pp. 6–7.

³³ Keenan, 2017, p. 264.

What kind of abuse occurred and how many people (abusers and victims) were affected. The role and responsibility of the Church, the state, and various supporting organizations and suggestions in response to the above.³⁴

The Commission examined schools run by 18 religious orders. More than 100 people participated in the committee; the president was surrounded by a 7-member council of commissioners, numerous lawyers, legal advocates, and a large number of administrators. In addition, two subcommittees were established: one was called the Investigative Committee and the other the Trust Committee.

The duties of the Trust Committee were as follows. To provide an opportunity for those who were abused in institutions as children but who did not wish to report to the Investigative Committee but instead requested that their reports and experiences be treated confidentially. To collect evidence of abuse. To make general proposals regarding what detailed recommendations the Commission would make and to compile relevant reports.³⁵

The Commission of Inquiry's activities were as follows. It heard witnesses who wanted to have their allegations of abuse investigated. Consequently, the commission heard witnesses — private individuals, members of religious orders, and others — at both public and (mostly) private hearings. The Commission had the right to oblige parties to participate in hearings and present the documents required by the Commission. All parties were entitled to legal representation. The task of the committee was to investigate abuses that occurred in the institutions during the relevant period and to determine their nature, causes, circumstances, and extent, as well as how the management, administration, supervision, and regulatory functions of the institutions were carried out in relation to abuses by the relevant persons. It reported its findings to the Upper Committee in writing.³⁶

The hearings took place in person, alone, or with a companion brought by the victim, who was bound by confidentiality in the same way as the members of the Committee themselves. From the hearings, the Committee collected three types of evidence. (1) Audio recordings of testimonies. (2) Following the testimonies, answers to the questions asked by the members

³⁴ CICA, 2009, vol. 1, ch. 1.

³⁵ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, p. 4.

³⁶ CICA, 2009.

of the Board of Commissioners. (3) Documents, statements, letters and photographs.

The report is a summary compiled from the testimonies after they were collected and organized.

3.3. Statistics and nature of occurrences

3.3.1. Prevalence of sexual abuse of young people in Ireland

The data below are not from the Ryan Report. Because social data were included in both the American and French studies, I thought it would be good to display similar data from Ireland (and Germany; see below) from sources other than the reports:

“One in five women, or 20.4%, reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood, while a further 7.6% of all women stated they had experienced attempted or actual penetrative sex in childhood, that is, rape or attempted rape... one in six men, or 16.2%, reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood, of whom approximately one quarter reported experiencing attempted or actual penetrative sex in childhood. Overall, almost one third of women and one quarter of men reported some level of sexual abuse in childhood, that is, contact and non-contact sexual abuse.”³⁷

3.3.2. Sexual abuse by priests and religious personnel

The Trust Committee listened to the testimonies of 1,090 victims from 1914 to 2000. Most of the cases occurred between 1930 and 1990. The cases affected 216 institutions.³⁸

The Examination Committee notes I and II. related to the individual institutions. These cases occurred between 1936 and 2009. The Commission investigated only institutions with 20 or more complainants.

According to the Ryan Report, 170,000 children attended the institutions investigated during the period under review; Ryan later called

³⁷Departmental Investigations. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2012-10-25/11/?highlight%5B0%5D=animal&highlight%5B1%5D=animal&highlight%5B2%5D=welfare#s15> (Accessed: 24 June 2022).

³⁸ CICA, 2009, p. 12.

this figure incorrect, and it was corrected to 42,000.³⁹ The number of victims exceeded 2,000, which is almost 5% of students. A total of 800 priests and religious personnel committed crimes.⁴⁰

More than 90% of victims reported physical abuse, and more than half (mostly boys) reported sexual abuse.⁴¹ Emotional abuse and neglect were also present, the latter caused by insufficient government funding. According to the report's testimony, the schools applied oppressive strictness not only to the children but also to the adults working there. The Ministry of Education exercised its control rights either negligently or not at all.⁴²

3.4. Case management and Church and state responses to abuse

According to the report, the supervisors, although most of them knew about the cases, considered "avoiding scandal" more important than protecting the children, and refused to do anything about the perpetrators.⁴³ The Ministry of Education colluded with religious leaders⁴⁴ when they learned of the incidents.

Based on the above, the reporters formulated the conclusion that Church leaders, although they knew about the crimes committed, did nothing; at most, they placed the abusers in other institutions, where they found more victims. The cases were investigated in isolation and secretly, and no systemic conclusions were drawn; consequently, no attempt was made to reform the system. Cases where older boys sexually abused younger boys were ignored, and if there was a consequence, the victims were punished with the same severity as the perpetrators, with the direct consequence of remaining silent.⁴⁵

3.5. The financial consequences of the cases

After the publication of the Ryan Report, the government and religious orders began negotiations on responsibility, as there were many serious claims for compensation. In 2002, an agreement was reached for 128

³⁹ McGarry, 2019.

⁴⁰ Keenan, 2017, p. 11; CICA, 2009, Executive Summary, p. 12; Méténier, 2020.

⁴¹ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19, p. 2.

⁴² CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19, p. 21.

⁴³ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19, p. 21.

⁴⁴ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19, p. 23.

⁴⁵ Keenan, 2017, p. 266.

million euros paid by the orders, then in 2010, religious orders paid a voluntary donation of another 338.5 million euros. According to estimates, the final cost of reparations for sexual abuse committed in residential institutions was more than 1.3 billion euros, and the Irish government is demanding more contributions from religious orders, which bear some responsibility.⁴⁶

3.6. The social profile of the victims

75% of the 1,090 testimonies from the Trust Committee were from children living in two-parent households; the remaining 25% either lived with a single mother or did not know anything about their biological parents. Most families were extended families, with grandparents and an average of six children. In the vast majority of cases, testimonies reported simple, uneducated parents. In all, 77% of the victims were over 50 years old and less than 3% were under 30 years old at time of reporting. The majority of the victims had stayed in a residential institution between the ages of 5 and 15, for an average length of stay of 9 years.⁴⁷

3.7. Typology of abuses

One of the peculiarities of the Ryan Report is that it considered not only sexual abuse but also other forms of abuse: physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as neglect.

3.7.1. Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurred in all institutions in all decades examined and in almost all victims. The witnesses described this as a reality that was constantly present in their boarding school life and that completely permeated their everyday lives. They reported regular beatings, and unfortunately, not a small number of cases where they were injured or even lived in fear of death due to the frequency and severity of abuse. They also suffered especially brutal punishments, such as beatings with whips until they started to bleed, kicking, burning, or having their heads pressed underwater. These brutal acts often took place in public and front of other

⁴⁶ Keenan, 2017, p. 270.

⁴⁷ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19, p. 23.

students, staff, and teachers. Victorians also reported serious injuries, bleeding wounds, or broken bones.⁴⁸

3.7.2. Sexual abuse

On average, 50% of the men and women who testified were affected by sexual abuse (boys in a much larger number), including rape, various forms of molestation, and voyeurism. As in cases of physical abuse, there were one-off cases as well as long-lasting, often repeated abuse. Unfortunately, the secrecy surrounding these crimes helped keep a large number of cases hidden. If the victim spoke up, in most cases, they were punished by the people whose job was to protect, develop, and educate them—not only priests and religious personnel, but also foster parents, secular employees, visitors, and other people who would be left alone with the children without supervision. In the case of female victims, both the perpetrator and those for whom complaints were made often blamed the female victims themselves for what happened.⁴⁹

3.7.3. Neglect

This was perhaps the most common type of abuse suffered. Little food, lack of heating, bad clothes, and lack of personal care from those whose job was to love, develop, raise, and help the children were ubiquitous. Victims reported that they did not care about their safety, education, or development, and that their experiences had serious consequences in their later lives, as their physical and mental health often suffered damage, they were unable to find jobs, and they had low social and economic status. Neglect was also present at the levels of individual educators and institutions. In many cases, injuries and illnesses were not treated, which, in some cases, had lifelong consequences.⁵⁰

3.7.4. Emotional abuse

⁴⁸ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19, p. 13.

⁴⁹ CICA, 2009, vol. 3, ch. 19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

In this round, victims mentioned a lack of attachment and poor emotional connections. Humiliation, constant criticism, prohibition of family contact, trampling on honor, threats, and intimidation were the most common methods. Most patients had to be separated from their parents and siblings. In some cases, they were told that their parents were dead or told other lies about their family. More than once, they had to watch their peers being abused, which caused serious emotional trauma. Almost without exception, the victims reported that, as a result of emotional abuse, they had to deal with serious health, psychological, and integration problems in their adult lives.⁵¹

3.8. Recommendations

In the last chapter of the report (Part 4), the Commission formulated 20 proposals.

First, a monument was to be erected in recognition of victims' suffering and as a sign of apology. To date, this has not been done; although the plans were accepted in 2013, authorization was ultimately not granted.⁵²

The first group of proposals included initiatives aimed at alleviating victims' suffering and the negative effects of abuse. In the second group, experts gave preventive suggestions and initiatives related to the protection of children.

4. Germany - the MHG study

The so-called Mannheim, Heidelberg, and Gießen (MHG) study was completed by a research consortium from these three scientific institutes the Central Institute of Mental Health (Mannheim), the Institute of Criminology and the Institute of Gerontology of the University of Heidelberg; and the professor responsible for Criminology, Juvenile Law and Prison Research at the University of Gießen.⁵³

The report was entitled "Sexual harassment of minors by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the area of the German Bishops' Conference"⁵⁴, and examined cases of harassment committed by priests, deacons, and members of religious orders operating in the area of the

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Casey, 2021.

⁵³ MHG, 2018a.

⁵⁴ MHG, 2018a.

German Bishops' Conference (exercising authority over all of Germany). It was presented on September 5, 2018, at the autumn plenary assembly of the German Bishops' Conference in nearby Fulda.⁵⁵

4.1. The questions—areas of research

The project provided detailed information on the following topics. Frequency of sexual abuse committed by priests and deacons under the jurisdiction of the German Bishops' Conference and religious personnel under the responsibility of the Conference in a contractual relationship with the Conference (i.e., “with a stipendium” by the Conference). Forms of sexual abuse committed and structural and operational characteristics of the Church that facilitated the occurrence of abuses.⁵⁶

4.2. Research team and methodology

The research team consisted of two main groups. First was the so-called research consortium to which all participating institutes delegated researchers. Second was a group of their scientific colleagues.

To initiate the investigation, a contract was signed with all 27 dioceses in Germany. Thus, bishops fully participated in the research.

The research was divided into seven subprojects, each of which examined the issue of sexual abuse from a different aspect. Their methodology was also designed according to the specifics of the topics (see next page), so each subproject used a different methodology.

The investigation covered the period from 1946 to 2014, although there were also perpetrators (a small number) who had committed abuse earlier. These abuses were included in the report if the perpetrator was still alive in 1946 but had committed the act before 1946.

The researchers did not have direct access to the diocese archives. They were always handled by relevant diocesan employees or a commissioned legal firm, and the data and cases were forwarded to the research consortium in anonymized form, using a pre-specified form prepared by the consortium.

The seven sub-projects produced extensive and detailed research results. The diversity and thoroughness of the independent use of existing information sources and the use of research methodologies combining criminological, psychological, sociological, and forensic psychiatry

⁵⁵ MHG, 2018b.

⁵⁶ MHG, 2018a, p. 1.

knowledge is of such depth that, according to the researchers, it has never been seen in national or international research.⁵⁷

Although the methodological differences made it difficult to standardize the data, and the time needed to evaluate the data was rather extended, the experts who performed the analysis were of the opinion that an institution as complex as the Catholic Church could achieve the goals of its research as efficiently as possible with this type of methodology. in this topic.⁵⁸

The sub-projects were. (1) Analysis of diocesan data. (2) Interviews with victims, accused and unaccused clerics. (3) Analysis of criminal archives. (4) Concepts regarding prevention and their various aspects. (5) Research and analysis of relevant literature. (6) Analysis of the personnel files of the dioceses. (7) Completion of an online, anonymous questionnaire by the persons concerned.⁵⁹

4.3. Prevalence of sexual abuse of minors

4.3.1. General prevalence of sexual abuse of minors in Germany

According to data from the German Federal Criminal Police, the number of reported sexual crimes committed against children under the age of 14 increased significantly by in year 2021 compared to the previous year 2020. While 16,900 children were sexually abused in 2020, 17,704 were abused in 2021, including 2,281 children under the age of six. The report also pointed out that the number of reported cases in which there are images or video content containing child abuse that can be found online has doubled over the course of a year; in 2020, there were 18,700 such cases, which will increased 39,171 in 2021.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ MHG 2018b, p. 3.

⁵⁸ MHG 2018b, p. 3.

⁵⁹ MHG 2018b, p. 4.

⁶⁰ *Germany records rise in child sexual abuse in 2021*. DW. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-records-rise-in-child-sexual-abuse-in-2021/a-61974823> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

In the case of adult men and women, 9% of men and 19% of women have been sexually abused as children in Germany—every seventh adult, according to data from the World Health Organization.⁶¹

According to investigations launched in 2020, the number of sex offenders is in the tens of thousands: in 2019, in the city of Bergisch, near Cologne, a huge manhunt was launched due to materials containing child pornography found in the home of a sex offender discovered as a result of a routine investigation (followed by a massive police action with the involvement of more than 300 police officers); thus ultimately revealed a network of 30,000 potential child abusers.

4.3.2. Sexual abuse by priests, deacons, and religious personnel

A) Statistics of occurrences

As part of subproject no. 6, more than 38,000 personal documents and other reference data were examined between 1946 and 2017.

B) Number of offenders

The number of clerics accused of sexually abusing minors in this period was 1,670, or 4.4% of clerics who served during the examined period.⁶² In all, 5.1% of the diocesan clergy (1429 accused persons) and 2.1% of religious personnel (159 accused persons) were offenders.

C) Number of victims

The report noted that the methodology processed the data using a conservative approach; therefore, the absolute numbers and proportions could conceivably be higher.⁶³

The 1,670 perpetrators sexually abused 3,677 minors. This implies an average of 2.5 cases per offender. As for cases in which criminal proceedings were initiated against the perpetrator, this ratio was much higher, with almost four children (3.9) per perpetrator. In 54% of the cases, the abuser had one victim, 42.3% abused more than one victim, while for

⁶¹ *Figures on Child Sexual Abuse in Germany*. Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues. Available at: <https://beauftragte-missbrauch.de/en/themen/definition/figures-on-child-sexual-abuse-in-germany> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

⁶² MHG, 2018b, p. 4.

⁶³ *Figures on Child Sexual Abuse in Germany*. Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues. Available at: <https://beauftragte-missbrauch.de/en/themen/definition/figures-on-child-sexual-abuse-in-germany> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

the remaining 3.7%, there were no data. Those who abused multiple people abused an average of 4.7 victims. The most depraved sexual predator found during the investigation was responsible for the abuse of 44 children.

D) Locations of the crimes

Nearly 50% of the cases took place during private meetings between the perpetrator and the victim, mostly in the parish (where the priest lived). Most of the other cases took place at school or during an organized holiday camp.

E) Time distribution of cases

The distribution of cases from the 1950s to the 2000s (counting multiple cases of abuse of the same victim by the same perpetrator over time from when the first case occurred) was relatively even: the plurality of cases, 17.4%, occurred in the 1990s, and the smallest group, 12.1%, in the 1980s; in the other mentioned decades, the rate of occurrence ranged from 13.3% to 15%. Rates were much lower in the 1940s (8.1%) and in the 2010s (1.9%).⁶⁴

F) The costs

The dioceses created a procedure called “Compensation provided following recognition of the harm suffered by victims of sexual harassment” for the injured parties, within the framework of which compensation could be requested following a defined system. In some dioceses, applications were approved almost automatically, whereas there were also dioceses which as few as 7% of applications were given a positive response. As of 2014, nearly 5 million euros have been paid within the framework of this procedure.⁶⁵

Twenty dioceses reported payments in addition to those made in the framework of the above procedure. In most cases, this was related to legal or expert opinions, as well as the costs of psychotherapy; the total amount was nearly 1 million euros. The criteria for the approval or evaluation of these procedures remain unclear.⁶⁶

G) Profile of offenders

⁶⁴ MHG, 2018a, p. 129.

⁶⁵ MHG, 2018b, p. 8.

⁶⁶ MHG, 2018a, p. 43.

Three subprojects also include analyses of the common features of perpetrators, based on which a triple typology⁶⁷ is established.

The first type of offender is one who has committed sexual abuse against several victims under the age of 13; in some cases, the abuse lasted for a period longer than six months, and he often abused his first victim shortly after ordination. This offender is called the “fixed type” in the report.⁶⁸ This term implies that this type of offender has a pedophilic tendency. Often, this type of person chooses the profession of a priest (or even coach) precisely because it creates an environment in which he has easy access to potential victims.

The second type comprises narcissistic–sociopathic offenders. This type tends to abuse their power not only to gain access to sexual pleasure but also to force any other situation to their advantage.

The researchers labeled the third type “regressive-immature.” They mainly discuss the stagnation of sexual development in this group and note that while there are heterosexual and homosexual people among them, this type of offender is much more homosexual in orientation in the Catholic Church than in other areas of society. For these people, their first abuse occurred long after ordination. These offenders usually suffer from isolation and feel that they have not received sufficient support from the Church.⁶⁹

The age of the offenders was between 30 and 50 years at the time of the first offense, while the date of the first abuse was on average 14.3 years after ordination⁷⁰, which shows that most offenders belonged to the third (or to a lesser extent, the second) type.

E) Reaction of the Church following the announcements

E1) Sanctions against accused clerics

Canon law proceedings were documented for 33.9% of the defendants, while for 53% this did not happen. Only a quarter of canon law proceedings ended with sanctions, most of which were mild. As for criminal proceedings, criminal charges were filed in 37.7% of the cases, while in the remaining more than 60%, no charges were filed during the period under review.

⁶⁷ MHG, 2018b, p. 10.

⁶⁸ MHG, 2018b, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ MHG, 2018b, p. 5.

Reports to the Church were mainly submitted by family members of the victims (27.5%), whereas criminal reports were mostly filed by the Church (20%). It is interesting to find that 10.7% of accused priests self-reported, while in the control group (lay people) there was not a single offender who self-reported.⁷¹

E2) The relocations

Both absolute numbers and ratios show that clerics who committed sexual abuse were transferred significantly more often than those who did not. Overall, 86.8% of diocesan priests were transferred at least once during their careers, compared to 91.8% of offenders. The latter moved to another parish an average of 4.4 times during their priestly service, whereas priests who did not commit sexual abuse had to move only 3.6 times. There were similar rates for movement between dioceses and transfers abroad, and all of this shows that transfer was regularly used to “remedy” abuses.⁷²

F) Typology of victims

F1) Distribution of victims by gender

As in other reports, male victims were the majority (in contrast to other segments of society, in which girls fall victim to significantly more abuse than boys do). Here, the boy–girl ratio is 2:1.⁷³

F2) Type and severity of offences

More than 80% of the victims reported abuse involving physical contact, which ranged from biting to penetrative rape. The rate of the latter (oral, anal, vaginal violence) was 15.8%–18% of all cases.⁷⁴

F3) Age of victims

The abused children were on average 10.6 (as measured by subproject 2, which included the confessions of the perpetrators) and 12 years old (as measured by subprojects 6 and 3, which included diocesan and police documentation). The proportion of those who were abused for the first time

⁷¹ MHG, 2018b, p. 7.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ MHG, 2018b, p. 4.

⁷⁴ MHG, 2018b, p. 6.

before the age of 13 was 51.6%. Overall, 25.8% of the victims were 14 years of age or older, and 22.6% were of unknown age.⁷⁵

G) Sexual orientation of the perpetrators; psycho-social predisposing factors

G1) Pedophilia

According to the research (three sub-projects also dealt with this issue), approximately 28% of the perpetrators were attracted to boys under the age of 13, so it can be assumed that they have pedophile tendencies.

G2) Homosexuality

Different sub-projects reported significantly different rates. According to the testimony of the criminal files and diocesan documents, approximately 14%–19% of the perpetrators had homosexual tendencies on average, which is significantly higher than the 6.4% result in the control group, especially if we add that those abusing priests interviewed in the second sub-project, 72% declared themselves homosexual.

G3) Psychosocial predisposing factors

Among the perpetrators, the largest proportion that had been abused during childhood was identified in the 2nd subproject interviews: 36% confessed that they were also victims as children. Although ecclesiastical and criminal files contain only a small amount of source material on this, abuse during childhood can be indirectly inferred from behavioral disorders other than sexual violence among the abovementioned proportion: these (isolation, alcohol problems, social behavior disorders, etc.) might also be signs that the person himself was a victim in childhood.

4.4. Recommendations

The report makes use of eleven proposals rooted in victim-centeredness (including financial compensation), transparency, reform of the clerical power structures present in the Church, and the importance of training, among others.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ MHG, 2018b, p. 5.

⁷⁶ MHG, 2018b, pp. 12–15.

5. France – the CIASE report

Similar to the American and the Irish report, the French report, published on October 5, 2021, was prompted by a prominent abuser. A priest from Lyon, Bernard Preynat, sexually abused at least 80 boys between the ages of 7 and 15 years between 1971 and 1991. The court sentenced the priest to five years in prison in 2020. During his four-day trial, ten of his victims testified against him.⁷⁷ The Archbishop of Lyon, who had not reported Preynat's actions to the authorities, was also prosecuted and received six months in the first instance but was acquitted in the second instance on the basis that he had never tried to obstruct the work of justice. One of the victims also testified saying that the cardinal specifically advised him to go to the authorities with the crimes committed against him.⁷⁸

In the wake of the case, and thanks to the activities of the “La parole libérée” (Freedom of speech) organization, it became obvious that abuses and related events (silence and procrastination of Church leaders in relation to the cases) showed a systemic problem.⁷⁹ No one could believe anymore that the “French exception” existed - that is, that unlike the American and Irish Churches, there were only isolated cases.⁸⁰

Similar to other countries, in France, in November 2018, the Bishops' Conference and the Conference of Religious Sisters and Brothers established an independent commission (Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l'Église; CIASE) to investigate sexual abuse by members of the clergy and religious orders.

5.1. Questions—four areas of research

Similar to the John Jay investigators, CIASE was required to act on four issues. (1) Find out about sexual abuse cases in Church institutions from 1950 to the present day. (2) Check what measures have been taken in relation to these by the relevant Church bodies and superiors, or if no measures have been taken. (3) What steps has the Church taken and is it taking to deal with this “plague”. (4) Make any recommendations you deem necessary.⁸¹

⁷⁷ BBC, 2020a.

⁷⁸ BBC, 2020b.

⁷⁹ CIASE, 2021, p. 11.

⁸⁰ CIASE, 2021, p. 10.

⁸¹ CIASE, 2021, p. 2.

5.2. Research team and methodology

The Bishops' Conference and the Religious Conference did not entrust an organization or a higher education institution, but one individual person, Jean-Marc Sauvé, an economist and former president of the French State Council, with the organization of the research, including the formation of the research team. In all actions during the procedure, he was given a completely free hand.

During the selection of the research team, Sauvé tried to ensure that its composition would serve the achievement of the set goals in all respects, as well as professional excellence, coverage of various relevant disciplines, diversity of worldview and religious beliefs (from different denominations faiths, as well as agnostics and atheists), and gender ratio. The committee comprises experienced professionals in the fields of law (criminal, church, and child protection law), psychiatry and psychoanalysis, medicine and healthcare, education and social work, history and sociology, and theology. Sauvé selected specialists with outstanding knowledge who were recognized for results in their own fields, thus creating the basic conditions for in-depth interdisciplinary work. The committee comprised 12 men and 10 women from different generations, with an average age of 57. In addition, two office employees and three employees responsible for contact with the victims helped with the commission's work.⁸²

The team devoted the first three months to methodological foundations—processes, parameters, data collection and analysis—as follows.

They first gathered data from witnesses through an online questionnaire and in-person or online interviews. Over almost a year and a half (June 2019 to October 2020), 6,471 contacts were obtained, and an additional questionnaire gathered another 1,628 samples. In addition, a national-scale public opinion survey was conducted with a list of 28,000 people, between November 2020 and January 2021.

The second research block involved the collection and analysis of existing documentation and data. First, the questionnaires requested by the Bishops' Conference and the Religious Conference were prepared and sent to the individual bishops and provincial superiors of the orders. They requested archival documents (including previously classified documents)

⁸² *Compositon*. CIASE. Available at: <https://www.ciase.fr/composition-de-la-commission/> (Accessed: 10 June 2022).

from 31 dioceses and 15 church institutes. All but two of the requested materials were received, so the organization's willingness to cooperate was evident. They gained full access to relevant state (interior ministry, judicial, and police) files. A questionnaire survey was conducted in which clerics and members of various religious orders were asked about a range of topics, including questions about their training and chastity vows. All available testimonies were collected, including those sent to CIASE and those that could be found already in publication or online. Finally, all available statistical and data analyses were taken into account, including those published by the French press.

The third element was a socio-anthropological investigation, which consisted of two parts: one was the analysis of the testimonies received, the final results of which were also recorded in a separate book⁸³, while the other analyzed media coverage related to the abuse of children in the church from 1950 (but essentially from 1990) to the present day.

The perpetrators were also analyzed in two separate groups: one group conducted interviews with 11 clerics who responded to CIASE's call to be interviewed; the other examined documents containing personality analysis and other psychological or psychiatric reports of the perpetrators in 35 court judgments of conviction for church abuse.

Finally, 20 interviews were conducted with priests and seminarians from all over France and with interviewees of all ages and profiles.

In addition, the researchers also used non-programmed, not previously planned interviews: 73 conversations with various expert groups and individuals, with one or maximum two interviewees at a time; conversations with 174 victims, which took between 2 to 3 hours each, as well as interviews with 67 people at the plenary sessions of CIASE who had expertise in ecclesiastical or secular fields or had requested a plenary hearing as witnesses.⁸⁴

The organization and analysis of thousands of pages of material, establishment of diagnoses, and formulation of proposals were carried out by four working groups. (1) Working group responsible for theological, ecclesiastical, and church government issues. (2) Working group responsible for studying canon law and civil law and making proposals for canon law reform. (3) Working group responsible for the situation of victims, responsibility, and reparations. (4) Working group investigating

⁸³ CIASE, 2021, Annexe.

⁸⁴ CIASE, 2021, pp. 5–6.

church responses (or the lack thereof) and countermeasures taken by the church after 2000, implemented based on the victims' reports.

The researchers divided the results of the research work into 3 large chapters. (1) "Casting light": analysis of data and information collected on the quantity and quality of the abuses committed. (2) "Revealing the shadows": to diagnose the revealed phenomena and (3) "Dispelling the darkness": to find the right ways and ways to process the phenomena of the past, to deal with abuse in the present, and to prevent future events.⁸⁵

5.3. "Casting light": The prevalence of child sexual abuse in France

5.3.1. General prevalence of sexual abuse in France

In a study commissioned by CIASE, 14.5% of women and 6.4% of men had suffered sexual abuse as children in France. Expressed in figures, this means that a total of approx. 5.46 million French residents were sexually abused during childhood, including 3.9 million women and 1.56 million men.⁸⁶ In the words of the president of CIASE, "these numbers are depressing, they call into question our entire society".⁸⁷

It is no coincidence that on January 23, 2021, the President of France set up an independent commission, the Commission Independent sur Incest et les Violences Sexuelles faites aux Enfants (CIIVISE; Independent Committee on Incest and Sexual Violence Against Children), to deal with sexual abuse of children inside and outside the family. Based on the testimony of victims and analysis of other data, this commission must form a position on the extent of the problem and make suggestions to the state leadership for steps related to the treatment and prevention of this traumatic situation.⁸⁸ The commission's results show that 160,000 children in France go through the horrors of sexual abuse every year. As in the Church, there is also a serious systemic problem related to the abuse of the state system. According to the research, "doctors are the weakest link," but they add that

⁸⁵ CIASE, 2021, pp. 6–7.

⁸⁶ CIASE, 2021, pp. 6–7.

⁸⁷ CIASE, 2021, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Commission Independent sur Incest et les Violences Sexuelles faites aux Enfants - CIIVISE (Independent Committee on Incest and Sexual Violence Against Children), made its first report by 31 March 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/11/17/la-ciivise-a-deja-recu-6-200-temoignages_6102386_3224.html (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

the entire child protection system needs to be strengthened, since in 4 out of 10 cases reported by victims, nothing happens.⁸⁹

5.3.2. Sexual abuse by priests, deacons, and religious personnel

A) Temporal and geographical distribution of cases

The report divided the examined timeframe into three periods. The period from 1950 to 1970 experienced the most abuse. From 1970 to 1990, cases showed a downward trend, whereas at the beginning of the third period, from 1990 to 2020, they rose again.

Examination of the geographical distribution showed that although in terms of absolute numbers, the regions where religious activity was higher produced a higher number of cases, if we look at the relative numbers examined in light of the number of priests, less religiously active places showed much higher rates. This may be because clerics living in such settlements have received less attention from the leadership.⁹⁰

B) Statistics of occurrences

During the study period, members of the clergy and religious orders sexually abused 216,000 minors. If we add this number, sexual abuse committed by laypeople employed by the church increases to 330,000.⁹¹ Across all social spheres (family, friends, acquaintances, school, etc.), we find that 4% of sexual abuse is committed by priests, deacons, or religious personnel, while another 2% is committed by laypeople employed by the Catholic Church. Thus, the Church was implicated in approximately 6% of all such crimes committed in society during the examined period.

In general, it can be said that the highest number of victims of sexual abuse by Church personnel were boys aged 10–12, while similar acts within the family are more often committed against girls, and in other social spheres (school, sports, camps, etc.) equally against boys and girls.

The researchers concluded that the main reason for this difference was probably that priests interacted with boys in much greater numbers than with girls. This was especially true for the first period examined, when a large number of residential institutions were still maintained for boys in this age group, including those in which the residents studied to become priests

⁸⁹ Elzas, 2022.

⁹⁰ CIASE, 2021, p. 8.

⁹¹ CIASE, 2021, p. 9.

(minor seminaries). According to psychiatrist Bernard Cordier⁹², there may have been a possible “recruitment bias” in the selection of priests:

the majority of those who are preparing for the priesthood are deeply convinced that the conscious renunciation of women belongs to their vocation. However, it is conceivable that such renunciations are easier for those without heterosexual attractions or who are asexual.

This might in turn mean that men without heterosexual attraction are drawn to a Church career.

Regarding the number and proportion of abusers, according to the report, at least 3,000 clerics and religious personnel committed sexual crimes against minors during the period under review. This is 2.5–2.8% of those on active duty. To calculate the ratios, the numbers of priests and religious personnel serving were obtained from the statistical data of the episcopal and religious conferences, which deemed⁹³ reliable and “very accurate.” More than 93% of the perpetrators were men; numbers overlap to a degree because one perpetrator often abused several children; there were many victims (more than 30%) who were abused by perpetrators who abused two (10.5%), or even more (19.7%) victims.

C) The costs

Considering the legal and compensation costs incurred in connection with the abuse was not part of the task of CIASE. However, CIASE’s own costs were quantified, totaling €3.8 million, including fees for 26,000 working hours and all costs incurred.⁹⁴

Regarding compensation, the report notes that many did not demand financial compensation; they felt uncomfortable doing so, and some saw compensation as the “price of silence,” which they were not willing to accept. At the same time, many people considered it fair to be paid for their suffering. The committee’s proposal included attention to compensating the victims.⁹⁵

⁹² Cited in CIASE, 2021, p. 105.

⁹³ CIASE, 2021, p. 158.

⁹⁴ CIASE, 2021, p. 5.

⁹⁵ CIASE, 2021, p. 299.

D) Profile of offenders

Most of the perpetrators (30%) were employed in parishes, closely followed by clerics engaged in teaching (25%); 15% of the perpetrators were chaplains or leaders of youth movements, while 7.7% were religious, and 22.3% belonged to other categories. The average age of the perpetrators changed significantly over the decades, from 38 in the 1950s to 46 in the 1970s, 48 in the 1990s, and 58 in 2020, at the beginning of the study. This does not mean that the age of the perpetrators when they (first) committed violence increased, but rather that acts committed many years ago are coming to light. Among the priests convicted after 1990, many were convicted relatively quickly after a sexual assault in the 1990s and were found to have been guilty in past cases. This is called the “catch-up effect” in the literature.⁹⁶

E) Typology of victims

Regarding the relationship between victims and perpetrators, the report states that there were almost no cases where the cleric (or monk) and his victim did not know each other (the rate of such situations was 1 in 750). Most of the abusers (47%) met their victims in the world of education; the second largest group was connected to places of spiritual connection (parish, rectory, etc.) (36%), while the members of the third group were those who knew each other as close family members (17%). The crime sites vary: the parish appears most often (39%), while the school accounts for 30% and the home for 15%.

The social profile of victims was relatively uniform. Although all social strata and professional qualifications were represented, the victim most often lived in modest circumstances. The family breadwinner was a worker in 33.7% of cases, another employee in 23%, and casual worker or unemployed in 9.9%, so approximately 2/3 of the families came from a middle-class social environment or below. Victims usually grew up in religious families, where the priest was venerated.

The victim’s profile often showed psychological instability caused by emotionally neglectful parental behavior. Most victims were boys between the ages of 10 and 13. The physical superiority and authority given by the age difference itself created an imbalance between the victim and the

⁹⁶ CIASE, 2021, p. 90.

aggressor, to which was added the particular status of the cleric—partly as a substitute for the parents.⁹⁷

F) Causes of sexual abuse in perpetrators

The report included a series of interviews with the perpetrators. The researchers contacted all bishops and religious superiors and asked them to connect with all offenders who had either been convicted or confessed to committing a sex crime. In the end, they found 11 (10 priests and one deacon) perpetrators with whom they could sit down and talk about the crimes committed and their motives.

In the interviews, no perpetrator complained that they received little love or attention in their family; they came from average families, mostly with parents from a working-class background. No family tragedy interfered with their development. It is an interesting and important point that there was no single one among them who said that a transcendent or supernatural motive was the reason for their profession.

Regarding sexual orientation, more than half of the respondents declared themselves homosexual, and some had sexual relationships with adults of the same sex.⁹⁸ In relation to sexuality, they said that having sex with women outside of marriage was considered a sin, and some considered any sexual relationship to be a sin.

Several had been sexually abused; others testified—although no violence was mentioned—that there had been “physical closeness” with fellow seminarians and with the teachers in the seminary on more than one occasion. These phenomena are consistent with those reported in several studies. The results of a survey showed that there were strong mechanisms for the reproduction of sexual violence in the Church, especially in minor seminary centers (where underage boys studied and prepared for priesthood). According to another study, 27% of priest abusers were themselves victims of sexual abuse in childhood.⁹⁹

In relation to the crimes committed, perpetrators’ attitudes generally fluctuated between minimizing the significance of the cases, denying responsibility, and sincere acknowledgment. However, in most cases, their actions were relativized, and their significance was downplayed.

⁹⁷ CIASE, 2021, p. 91.

⁹⁸ CIASE, 2021, p. 145.

⁹⁹ CIASE, 2021, p. 146.

5.4. “Revealing the shadows”: diagnosing the revealed phenomena

For a long time — according to the CIASE report, until 2015 — the Church prioritized the protection of itself as an institution and the avoidance of scandal over the interests of the victims. The problem was systematic. The Church had neither the conceptual basis nor the intention to deal with the cases, not because it accepted or supported the perpetrators and their behavior, but because it did not know how to deal with them.

According to the analyses, distortions of Catholic teaching also contributed to the spread of sexual violence against minors: clericalism, a false interpretation of obedience and respect for the priestly person that cannot be derived from the Gospels, and the overvaluation of the celibacy and sanctity of the priestly profession are among the reasons.¹⁰⁰

5.5. “Dispelling the darkness”: finding the right ways and means to process the actions of the past, to deal with abuses in the present, and to prevent them in the future

CIASE formulated recommendations for the French Catholic Church in the third and final chapter of its report. The recommendations are based on taking responsibility, which the authors assert must be done both individually, as regards individual perpetrators (and those who enable them), and systematically, with reference to the Church as a whole.

Regarding practical implementation, the report recommends that the Church develop specific procedures for dealing with abuse and mitigating damage. It recommends reforming the church organization in such a way that it leaves less room for the abuse of power.

According to the proposals, the most important supporting element is anti–sexual abuse training for all those who can potentially become perpetrators or victims (priests, religious people, deacons, laypeople working with juveniles, and juveniles themselves and their parents). Training is identified as a key element of prevention, and churches are invited to implement it on a wide scale¹⁰¹, as is continuing education.¹⁰²

The report asserts that the Church must enter the “path of truth and reconciliation” by acknowledging its responsibility, which it has tried to avoid for so long. This is true not only in terms of criminal law, but also in terms of social and civil law. The Church must do everything it can to serve

¹⁰⁰ CIASE, 2021, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ CIASE, 2021, p. 12.

¹⁰² CIASE, 2021, p. 15.

justice and attempt to address the damage caused financially, regardless of the duration of the incident.¹⁰³

Therefore, CIASE recommends that a compensation system be developed to assess the size and method of the amounts to be paid and other considerations for each individual. It is important that they do not recommend the use of categories or payment frames, but instead think about finding a way of compensation in each case separately, completely independent of each other. The report also recommends that an independent body control this process¹⁰⁴ and that resources be managed by a special committee created for this purpose.

Moreover, the report suggests continuous monitoring of personnel's psychological suitability.¹⁰⁵

Finally, CIASE state that they are aware of the consequences of the excessively bureaucratic measures (like the obligation to copy emails between priests and minors to parents, or forbidding even an insignificant touch like caressing a child's face, etc.) of the procedures and the exaggeration of transparency. The Church's evangelising mission, based on human relations, can be made impossible, as over-bureaucratized systems suffocate those relations. Therefore, it is necessary to find a healthy balance that ensures the freedom necessary to form and nurture relationships, but at the same time leaves no room for exaggeration or abuse of power.¹⁰⁶

The Bishops' Conference took these recommendations extremely seriously. At their conference held in Lourdes in November 2021, they developed a completely victim-centered procedural protocol in accordance with the proposals, created a fund to compensate the victims, jointly apologized, and held a prayer of atonement for the crimes committed.¹⁰⁷

6. Summary

The examined reports are similar in many ways, but there are also significant differences that deserve more serious analysis. Below, I

¹⁰³ CIASE, 2021, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ This committee was also established, in June 2022 (the Instance Nationale Indépendante de Reconnaissance et de Réparation (INIRR)). Chambraud, 2022.

¹⁰⁵ CIASE, 2021, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ CIASE, 2021, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ Zengarini, 2021.

summarize the main figures of the data presented above by juxtaposing the situation in each country.

Sexual abuse of minors showed certain differences across countries. A total of 10.5% of adults surveyed in France admit that they were sexually abused in childhood; this percentage was 22% in the USA, 27% in Ireland, and 18% in Germany. As for current abuse, the number of sexual abuse cases among minors is increasing every year in Germany. In 2021, there were 17,704 police cases on file, while more than 30,000 cases related to child pornography were registered (the latter number has doubled since 2020). However, the number of current cases is even more terrifying in France, where 160,000 cases have been registered annually in recent years, which is why the state has created a commission similar to the one the Catholic Church created. It is therefore not an exaggeration to talk about a kind of “child abuse pandemic” in our developed world—certainly in the countries examined, and especially in France.

The age and sex of church victims fall into roughly the same patterns as in society as a whole, except that boys are the overwhelming majority everywhere, in contrast to the rest of society, where there are many more female victims. The age of those affected everywhere starts above 10 years; in the American report, the majority are 13-to-17-year-old boys, at the age of puberty, while the French and German reports found the majority of victims were between 10 and 13 years of age, at the pre-pubertal age. The Irish report did not examine the ages of the victims, only stating that children between the ages of 5 and 15 lived in the investigated institutions.

The profile of church abusers showed a high degree of similarity among the countries examined. In Ireland, the Ryan Report did not include data on the absolute number of priests and religious involved. According to one study,¹⁰⁸ the number of priests and religious was 8,000–9,000 from the 1930s to the 1970s, but fell continuously from the 1980s onward, to 2,700 by 2016. Of these, the proportion of religious was, on average, a quarter. The Ryan Report discusses about 800 offenders over nearly 70 years, and it is difficult to calculate how many priests and religious passed through in the institutions that the report investigated, including deaths and new entrants. At a rough estimate, I would place numbers at 10,000–15,000 at most. I did not include the nuns, whose proportion among the abusers was a maximum of 10%. Thus, according to my estimation, the rate of offenders is higher

¹⁰⁸ McSweeney, 2022, pp. 12-13.

than in other countries, at least between 5.3% and 8% (whereas in the other examined countries, the rates was between 2.8 and 4.5%).

There were no significant differences in the absolute numbers of offenders. In the USA, 4,392 offenders were found, in Ireland 800 (remember, these are only cases occurring in schools maintained by religious; the results of diocesan investigations are missing here), in Germany, 1,670; and in France, 3,000 of the investigated 50-to-70-year-olds in periods.

The number of victims in the examined countries and periods was as follows: in the USA, 10,667; in Ireland, 2,000; in Germany, 3,677; given population differences, these numbers show no difference in magnitude. In France, however, approximately 3,000 clerical perpetrators were responsible for the abuse of 220,000 victims, which is unusual compared to previous cases, as if we were moving into another universe. These data raise many questions, but they are far beyond the scope of this study.

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