

WHEN PRIESTS SIN

John Paul Speaks

*Notable quotations from Pope John Paul II and
official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church*

“DEEPLY GRIEVED”

I ... have been deeply grieved by the fact that priests and religious, whose vocation it is to help people live holy lives in the sight of God, have themselves caused such suffering and scandal to the young. Because of the great harm done by some priests and religious, the Church herself is viewed with distrust, and many are offended at the way in which the Church’s leaders are perceived to have acted in this matter.

“APPALLING SIN”

The abuse which has caused this crisis is by every standard wrong and rightly considered a crime by society; it is also an appalling sin in the eyes of God.

“MORE RELIABLE CRITERIA”

It is true that a generalized lack of knowledge of the nature of the problem and also at times the advice of clinical experts led bishops to make decisions which subsequent events showed to be wrong. You are now working to establish more reliable criteria to ensure that such mistakes are not repeated.

“THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION”

While recognizing how indispensable these criteria are, we cannot forget the power of Christian conversion, that radical decision to turn away from sin and back to God, which reaches to the depths of a person’s soul and can work extraordinary change.

IMMENSE GOOD

Neither should we forget the immense spiritual, human and social good that the vast majority of priests and religious in the United States have done and are still doing.

“DEEP-SEATED CRISIS”

The abuse of the young is a grave symptom of a crisis affecting not only the Church, but society as a whole. It is a deep-seated crisis of sexual morality, even of human relationships, and its prime victims are the family and the young. In addressing the problem of abuse with clarity and determination, the Church will help society to understand and deal with the crisis in its midst.

“TOTALLY COMMITTED”

People ... must know that bishops and priests are totally committed to the fullness of Catholic truth on matters of sexual morality, a truth as essential to the renewal of the priesthood and the episcopate as it is to the renewal of marriage and family life.

AN URGENTLY NEEDED PURIFICATION

We must be confident that this time of trial will bring a purification of the entire Catholic community, a purification that is urgently needed if the Church is to preach more effectively the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its liberating force.

WE MUST TURN TO GOD

God alone is the source of holiness, and it is to Him ... that we must turn for forgiveness, for healing and for the grace to meet this challenge with uncompromising courage and harmony of purpose.

SUPPORT PRIESTS AND BISHOPS

I beg the Lord to give the bishops of the United States the strength to build their response to the present crisis upon the solid foundations of faith and upon genuine pastoral charity for the victims, as well as for the priests and the entire Catholic community ... I ask Catholics to stay close to their priests and bishops and to support them with their prayers at this difficult time.

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