



Safeguarding and A Theology of Childhood

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On Protection of Minors (2014-2018)



**“...anyone who is an obstacle to
bring down one of these little ones
who have faith in me would be better
drowned in the depths of the sea with
a great millstone around his neck.”**

(Matthew 18:5-8)

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Protection of Children and Vulnerable

- The Church loves all her children as a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenseless. This is the duty that Christ himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults."

- Pope Francis 2016 *As a Loving Mother*

Vulnerability

- “The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being harmed physically or emotionally”. *O. E. D.*
- Vulnerability is inevitable in being embedded in families and communities and embodied in flesh and bone... a condition of the moral life ...trusting in others and ...learning that relations of dependence are open to the possibility of loss and even abuse.
 - C. Mackenzie et.al. *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (2014)



Pathology in the History of Sexual Abuse

- Abuse of power, trust and sacred office in harm to vulnerable children and youth
- Secrecy, silence, denial to protect offenders, leaders and institution and avoid scandal
- Bureaucratic responses of canons, policies and protocols
- Failure to address underlying systemic and cultural beliefs and practices
- Slow learning from empirical evidence



First & Foremost: The Harms of Sexual Abuse

- Victim-survivors
 - Short-term effects
 - Long-term broken lives
- 'Double damage' to victims of clergy
 - The priest represents Christ Himself
 - Loss of spiritual solace in healing
 - Scandal in the biblical sense
 - Ongoing silence and denial



Insights From

"The Dynamics of Child Sexual Abuse"



The Dynamics and Preconditions of Abuse

- Motivation to abuse
- Overcoming of internal inhibitions
- Overcoming victim resistance
- Overcoming of external protection
 - D. Finklehor 1986



Church Culture and the Abuse Crisis

The Culture of the Church and Children

- Church culture is
 - Imperial,
 - hierarchical,
 - patriarchal
 - Clerical
 - Papesch ML. 2004. *Clerical Culture: Contradiction and Transformation – the Culture of the Diocesan Priests of the United States Catholic Church*.
- Children are sometimes to be seen but not hear; paternal 'property'



Clericalism

- “Clericalism is grounded in the erroneous belief that clerics form a special elite and, because of their powers as sacramental ministers, they are superior to the laity.”
 - Doyle TP. 2007. Clericalism and Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse. In: Frawley-O’Dea MG & Goldner V, editors. *Predatory Priests, Silenced Victims: the Sexual Abuse Crisis and the Catholic Church*.

Children – Cultures & Societies

Culture is an essentially meaningful arrangement of society (***relationships***), ideology (***ways of thinking and valuing***) and technology (***means regarding material things***).

- M. P. Gallagher, 2003, *Clashing Cymbals: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*
- Contemporary cultures abuse and oppress children in child pornography, trafficking, child labor and child soldiers
- Also in consumerism and selfishness



“Structural reforms are secondary-that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude.” (Pope Francis)



Pope Francis and Conversion

2018 Letter to the People of God

- “every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does... To see things as the Lord does, to be where the Lord wants us to be, to experience a conversion of heart in his presence.”

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Contribution

- "Preventing sexual abuse ...must be a present concern and a future goal for the Church and society...the goal of prevention is first and foremost a call to conversion... identifying longstanding practices linked to sexual abuse; and transforming those practices ensuring they are more closely aligned with the Gospel and the Church's mission." (71-72)
 - *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation and Transformation* (2018)

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Elements of A Theology of Childhood

- The words and witness of Jesus
- Insights from empirical research
- The family as “the domestic Church”
- Accepting the integral relationship to theology more broadly:
 - The nature of God
 - Ecclesiology
 - Moral theology
 - Meaningful dialogue

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Learning From Jesus and Children

- Jesus demonstrates a counter-cultural interaction with children.
 - M.J. Bunge ed. 2008 *The Child in the Bible*.
- Jesus rebukes disciples who keep children away (Mk 10:14)
- He proclaims "*It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*" (Mark 10:16)



Learning From Jesus and Children

- He places a child in their midst (not the powerful and privileged)
- Jesus cures children-girls and boys
- A boy provides loaves and fishes
 - A. E. Orobator 2019 “Between Ecclesiology and Ethics” Promoting a Culture of Protection and Care in Church and Society” Theological Studies vol 80 (4) 897-915

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Research on Children & Childhood

- Insights from research on children themselves and childhood as a unique time of development include:
 - Children's cognition and ways of knowing
 - Moral agency
- J.M. McEvoy 2019 "Toward a Theology of Childhood: Children's Agency and the Reign of Go" Theological Studies 80:3 673-691



The Family as “Domestic Church”

- Children as the purpose of marriage
- Confirmation of father’s masculinity
- Preference for the boy child
- Risks for the girl child
- Challenges of forming children and youth in the faith in an age of blog and secularism
- Children growing up with “priest pedophile”



The Nature of God

- God loves us so much He sends His Son, Jesus, who “emptied himself...” and takes on our vulnerability
- He know abuse of trust and power
- Our God is ever faithful and with us in our joys and sadness
 - “I will not leave you orphans” (John 14:18)



Ecclesiology

- The Church continues the healing and reconciling mission of Jesus
- Relationships should reflect our interdependence in the Body of Christ
 - Even the weakest members
- Roles responsibilities are for mission, not power and status
 - All have gifts needed for the mission and ministry



Meaningful Dialogue

- We all proclaim the reign of God in our actions and our speech
- We are called to speak out against injustice, especially to the vulnerable
- Empowerment for meaningful dialogue in the Church is essential to breaking the silence on abuse of all kinds
- All must speak for the voiceless



Ethics and Morality

- Renew a relational understanding of morality and harms to 'the other'
 - Norbert J. Rigali, "Moral Theology and Church Responses to Sexual Abuse," *Horizons* 34 (2007): 183–204.
- Develop a consistent and seamless ethic of life for all vulnerability
- Commit to formation of conscience and fostering virtue
 - To see and do the right and good



Lessons From Being Church in Pandemic

- *"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new."* (2 Cr 5:17-19)
- An unprecedented experience of vulnerability, powerlessness and dependence on others to care and protect
- Possibility for a new commitment to protect the vulnerable

