ABUSE, THE CHURCH GOES TO TRIAL (BUT NOT IN ITALY)

DOSSIER • Pedophile priests: new BBC investigation

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Backs to the victims
There is a lack of independent investigations. Bassetti and Papa Francesco

ANSA/ LAPRESSE



‘‘The goal is to do justice to the abused. But justice is not justicialism

Cardinale Gualtiero Bassetti, President Cei • 29 January 2022

THE PROTAGONISTS



Francesco Zanardi

“Italy is an anomaly on the world scene. In France, 216 thousand victims came out and the involvement of 3 thousand priests. Italy has 30,000 more priests



Mark Lowen

“We need an impartial investigation, as requested by the UN 3 years ago. It is a question of justice, responsibility, truth and independence. For survivors, for society and for the Church, most of which do important work, respected and based on true principles



Monsignor Ghizzoni

“We will never challenge the issue of abuse if we do not intervene before the abuse is committed. This is an absolute purpose also from a pastoral point of view, as well as an educational one



Padre Zollner

“We need to clarify everything about the allegations of child abuse, cover-up, obfuscation, because as a Church we have to face reality

“In memory of the two days spent in the cold of the Mountains”, reported the handwritten inscription on the gift poster. It was a memory, a "gift", to leave engraved in the mind, as well as in the body, the date and the place where everything happened for the first time.

THE NUMBERS OF THE PHENOMENON IN ITALY

360

CASES OF COMPLAINT in 15 years according to “Rete l’Abuso”

3-5%

ABUSING PRIESTS according of the German Jesuit Hans Zollner

32K

PRIESTS IN ITALY according to the CEI

“”I remember that room, the single bed. And then the pain, the blood ... The priest told me to keep the secret, a secret between him, me and Jesus”. Thus, began Mario, his invented name, to tell the story of his ‘sexual slavery’ in front of the BBC cameras for the first time.

The one that for 16 very long years - since 1996, when he was eight years old - stole his soul. His childhood priest was the then pastor of Ceprano: Don Jean "Gianni" Bekiaris, still a priest in the diocese of Frosinone today, despite being found guilty by canon law as well as by the Court of Frosinone. The prosecutor had asked for a seven-year prison sentence, but the trial ended in 2019 because the statute of limitations for the ascertained crimes began.

"What shocked me the most - says BBC journalist Mark Lowen who undertook the investigation - is to think that Mario today could enter the church with his son and find for himself Father Bekiaris, his rapist, officiating mass: the priest he remained a priest and even in the same diocese ... This could no longer happen in other countries”. "Italy's hidden sin: The true scale of clerical sex abuse in Italy" is the title of the investigation - which lasted over three months that Lowen conducted in Italy, and which aired last night on British TV. "There is a quagmire that ensnares cases of sexual abuse in Italy and deprives the survivor like Mario of justice. Some of the interviewees also blame it for the absence of a real MeToo movement in your country: sexism and patriarchy are still dominant here.

And so there is a lack of that attention and drive that elsewhere has led the Church, as well as society, to have to deal with the issue of sexual abuse committed by priests. Even when the Pontiff went on TV, he was not even asked a question on this subject: it is significant ... ".

ELSEWHERE: In France, the CIASE commission has estimated 330,000 victims of pedophilia in the Church since 1950, 216,000 by at least 3,200 priests. In Germany, an old report had previously counted, from 1946 to 2014, 1,670 abusive priests and 3,677 child victims.

Then came the shocking numbers of the report in the archdiocese of Munich and Freising, at the turn of the 70-80s. Those for which the same pope emeritus Benedict XVI, called into question for having covered those responsible in at least four cases, wrote that he felt "profound shame" and "sincere request for forgiveness". In Spain, after the publication of an investigation in the El País Spotlight (which lasted over three years and which brought to light over three hundred cases of abuse in the last 50 years), the request of three parties was accepted, the Spanish Socialist Party in head, to set up the first large government commission of inquiry into the abuse of minors committed by the Spanish clergy.

THE ITALIAN SPOTLIGHT. In Italy, everything is at a standstill. And even the decision on an independent commission - already urged several years ago by the United Nations - seems to be postponed for the umpteenth time, at least until the election of the new CEI president in May. So a few days ago, on February 15, the Coordination of associations against abuses in the Catholic Church in Italy was born: under the acronym # ItalyChurchToo, the Inter-religious Observatory on violence against women, Women for the Church, We are Church, met. Rete L'Abuso, Victims and Families Committee, Voices of Faith, Comité de la Jupe, together with the two magazines Adista and Left. Because "it's time for an Italian Spotlight", as Francesco Zanardi, president of Rete L’Abuso says. "Italy seems to be on another planet ... We are also far from Europe.

There is a clear unwillingness on the part of the Italian state to interfere with the Church, at the expense of the children. And there is also a cultural problem, in a country where over 80% of people call themselves Catholic, the Church for many remains an authority to which to show deference, which cannot be called into question ".

According to unofficial data, Italy is the second country in the world for the number of allegations of child abuse perpetrated by priests. There is potentially a million victims.

But the only cases that have emerged are those surveyed by Zanardi: 360, in the last 15 years. Just a tip of the iceberg. The Irish activist Mark Vincent Healy has always been convinced of this, who, before the UN Commission for the rights of the child, presented a study that hypothesizes the size of the phenomenon in Italy, taking into account that 4% of pedophile priests estimated from the John Jay Report, the largest survey on the subject conducted in the USA. Percentage also confirmed by the Jesuit Father Hans Zollner, theologian and psychologist of the Pontifical Gregorian University to which Pope Francis has entrusted the prevention of sexual abuse in the Church..

In an interview with the press, Father Zollner said: "By now the phenomenon is clear, in the world in every region between 3 and 5% of priests are abusers. We have criminals among us. This is why we still need to take steps forward to purify the Church".

"The time has come for the Italian Church to start an independent commission on sexual abuse committed by the clergy," they say from the #ItalyChurchToo movement. And they reject to the sender the proposal of Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, presented in an interview with Corriere: "Bassetti basically proposes the collection of data in the possession of the dioceses, - explains Zanardi - but this cannot be called an independent commission.

The effects of pedophilia within the Church are multiplied precisely as a result of the coverage guaranteed by the ecclesiastical hierarchies.

We do not question the good will of Pope Francis, but if in Italy the bishops continue to do what they want, nothing will change ". Even the State "is invited to remove all those obstacles that prevent the proceedings from taking place", they always explain from the network of associations. One figure above all: from a 2018 question to the Ministry of Justice, it emerged that out of 162 criminal convictions of priests, in Italian prisons there was only one priest detained for those facts. "The prosecutors often drop the complaints because they have now been prescribed, but on average a victim takes years to elaborate and go so far as to make a report", says Zanardi. "The prescription is in clear contradiction with the international treaties signed by Italy for the protection of minors". And it is precisely on this point that the Italian anti-abuse network has asked for the intervention of the UN, to put pressure on Italy again to set up an independent commission and to change the prescription.

Now that dossier is in the hands of the United Nations: "Before us there was nothing, and this speaks volumes about the climate of silence that surrounds the issue of pedophilia in the Church in our country".

THE INTERVIEW: Don Fortunato Di Noto

"Enough with self-defense and cover-ups: we need a real investigation"

Francesco Antonio Grana

“Today we cannot claim an attitude of self-defense. Defend ourselves from what? When the facts are there, they are there. When the facts are established, they are established. It is not that one can say that things are not true or that perhaps we are on a witch hunt.

I don't think there is any intention of going on a witch hunt. The problem of abuse is dramatic all over the world: 19 million cases in Europe. The real problem is that this data is never said".



“The facts are facts: 19 million cases in Europe alone The Church has a stake but the abusers ask for forgiveness

Don Fortunato Di Noto, founder and president of the Meter Association, which since 1989 has been fighting the scourge of pedophilia, even in the Catholic Church, goes straight to the heart of the debate. Just receiving the Sicilian priest and his collaborators at the Vatican, Pope Francis affirmed that "the abuse of minors is a sort of 'psychological murder' and in many cases a cancellation of childhood".

Don Di Noto, following the independent commissions for the pedophilia of the clergy established in France and Germany, is becoming more and more convinced of the hypothesis that a similar investigation also begin in Italy. If we do, we will be among the last in Europe to seriously analyze the scourge of abuse. I believe, due to the thirty years of experience we have with Meter, that each commission, if it obviously works well, can make a contribution of greater clarity and incisiveness in the commitment to the fight against pedophilia in the Catholic Church. It can also become a significant model for other realities, if we broaden the range of action.

What do you mean? Can you give us an example?

All this can also give a sense of concreteness to the commitment that the Church has undertaken for many years now, from Benedict XVI to Francis. Obviously, I start from a world observation which is that of Meter. Should the commission have the capacity to be able to make substantial contributions to the process of radical renewal, a fundamental one that the Church has already undertaken for some time and that we all hope for continuation?

I believe that the commission can truly become a sincere signal, not only formal, visible, and give concreteness in understanding better what the Church must do more and more to combat abuses and help victims, also working so that abusers can repent. The problem, then, is how the scientific criteria apply. If we analyze the last 70 years, it becomes problematic from both a scientific and a technical point of view, of justice and clarity. I believe that whoever joins the commission must have a calm and balanced capacity for evaluation. But it is clear that this investigation is desirable and I am personally convinced that it is also possible.

What could emerge?

The Catholic Church has its responsibilities, but a concept never passes: if I abuse, the responsibility is personal.

The Church enters the system when there is the question of negligence, of objection, that nothing has been done, that we have concealed, covered up.

Then there is all this attention to asking for forgiveness. But can it be that abusers never ask for forgiveness publicly? The institutions always ask for it and it is right and I understand it, from the Pope to the bishops. We take all the necessary steps, but allow the abusers too to have the humility and the conscience to say: we too ask for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness does not undo the evil done.

I believe that the commission is fine, it is desirable, with clear scientific and technical criteria that know how to give knowledge of the numbers and facts, even in the recognition of judicial systems, because from a criminal point of view up to the Supreme Court a person can always be declared innocent.

And then we need to take further, more measures, since so far I believe that the Church has given clear, sufficiently authentic, truthful answers, but it is clear to everyone that more needs to be done. This is obvious.



Monsignor
Tony Anatrella

UNEXPECTED ATTENDENTS

And the harassing monsignor goes to the conference in the Vatican

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"I did not take care of the invitations and I repeat that Monsignor Tony Anatrella was not invited". An irritated reply from Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, to those who ask him for the reason for the presence of the abusive priest at the international symposium "For a fundamental theology of the priesthood" held in the Vatican and opened by a long speech by Pope Francis. Monsignor Anatrella, as explained by Oltretevere, was not invited to the conference either by the Congregation for Bishops, or by the organizers of the event, the Center for Research and Anthropology of Vocations, but simply registered as a participant in the symposium. A presence like his, however, had at least to be screened and approved and not trivially ratified given his past.

Anatrella, now 81, a French priest and psychoanalyst incardinated in the archdiocese of Paris, was suspended from pastoral activity following a canonical investigation. For years he has sexually assaulted his young gay patients who asked him for help in dealing with their homosexuality.

The priest explained to his victims that this was the right way to "cure them", also instilling in them the belief that homosexuality is a disease.

Anatrella is also known for her campaigns against the rights of gay people. He even went so far as to argue that gay men raise violent children and to describe homosexuality as a "confusion of sex and feelings".

A presence, that of the abusive priest, in total contrast with what Cardinal Ouellet affirmed when introducing the symposium in the presence of the Pope: "What can one expect from a 'fundamental theology of the priesthood' in the current historical context, dominated by drama sexual abuse perpetrated by clerics? Shouldn't we rather refrain from talking about the priesthood, when the sins and crimes of unworthy ministers are on the front pages of the international press, for having betrayed their commitment or for having shamefully covered up those guilty of such depravity? Shouldn't we instead be silent, repent and seek the causes of such crimes? ".

F. A. GRA