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Vatican consultant: sex abuse of minors 'repugnant'

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Feb. 17, 2010

VATICAN CITY -- Clerical sexual abuse of a child is "particularly repugnant" because a priest's paternal role in the life of Catholic children means "the act has something incestuous about it," said a German psychiatrist who works closely with several Vatican offices.

Dr. Manfred Lutz, chief of psychiatry at Cologne's Alexanier Infirmary, said the Catholic Church also "cannot remain indifferent" to the fact that abuse at the hands of a priest "destroys or seriously shakes faith in God."

The Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, printed an article by Lutz Feb. 16, the same day the Irish bishops ended their meeting at the Vatican with Pope Benedict XVI to discuss the sex abuse scandal in Ireland.

However, the German psychiatrist, who is a consultant to the Congregation for Clergy and a member of the executive council of the Pontifical Academy for Life, wrote his article in response to a growing sex abuse scandal in Germany.

In late January, a former Jesuit admitted that he forced boys to have sex at Canisius College in Berlin between 1975 and 1983. Since then almost 100 men have come forward claiming they suffered abuse at the hands of Jesuit priests or lay teachers at Jesuit schools in Germany.

The Jesuits have issued a public apology and hired a lawyer to work with the victims and investigate the claims.

Lutz, who organized a conference for the Vatican in 2003 on legal, psychological and other scientific aspects of sexual abuse, said that in many cases the Catholic Church has become "the scapegoat" for cases of sexual abuse that have exploded since the 1960s.

He said critics of the church are like a broken record: "It's the fault of the church structure, the church's sexual morality, celibacy. However, this is nothing other than an open abuse of the abused and, especially, a dangerous form of disinformation that protects the guilty."

Any institution that deals with children and adolescents -- whether the church, the school or an after-school sports program -- "attracts people who are looking for illicit contacts with minors," he said.

No scientific research has ever shown a connection between celibacy and a likelihood to sexually abuse children or young people, he said.

"Unfortunately, science still has not been able to develop a method of screening that would allow us to identify" likely abusers, he said.

"The only possibility remaining is responsible observation and quick reaction in the case of anomalies," he said, and the Catholic Church in Germany and other countries has been a leader in instituting specific child protection programs over the last 10-20 years.

"The discoveries of science must be used without blinkers, protective and preventative measures must be taken, and transparency must be sought," he said.

Lutz added that, these days, a Catholic bishop or religious superior who thinks he can keep secret a case of sexual abuse perpetrated by one of his priests "must have completely lost his senses."

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