NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Global scope of abuse crisis makes case for reform

Tom Roberts | Mar. 12, 2010

In a 2005 file phpto, Pope Benedict XVI, center, attends a concert by the Regensburger Domspatzen boys choir with his brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, on the pope's right, in the Sistene Chapel in the Vatican. (AFP/L'Osservatore Romano/Arturo Maris)

[This analysis appears in the latest print issue of NCR, which went to press March 11.]

The clergy sex abuse crisis, once dismissed by some church officials as a product of U.S. anti-Catholicism and media hostile to the church, has begun sweeping through Europe, with damning government reports in Ireland and widespread allegations in recent weeks of abuse of youngsters in Germany and the Netherlands.

The growing international scope of the scandal of sex abuse and cover-up has prompted two U.S. experts, who have tracked the crisis for decades in the United States and beyond, to speculate that the evidence might soon become compelling enough to convince some in the hierarchy that the church?s system of governance needs a fundamental overhaul.

Amid all the investigations and continuing revelations, the Vatican newspaper, *L?Osservatore Romano*, ran a column written by Lucetta Scaraffia, an Italian journalist and history professor, asserting that if more women had been present in decision-making roles in the church, the cover-up may not have occurred. ?We can hypothesize that a greater female presence, not at a subordinate level, would have been able to rip the veil of masculine secrecy that in the past often covered the denunciation of these misdeeds with silence,? she wrote.

The highly regarded German Cardinal Walter Kasper was quoted by the Rome daily *La Repubblica*: ?Enough. We must seriously clean up our church. The guilty must be condemned and the victims compensated.?

Cleaning up the church, however, might be easier said than done, according to U.S. Dominican Fr. Thomas Doyle, a canon lawyer and one of the earliest advocates of church transparency and of victims? rights in the sex abuse crisis. He now regularly appears as a witness for victims suing the church.

He termed the spreading crisis as ?the worst symptom of deeper maladies, symptomatic of a deeply flawed, to use church terminology, governmental system. The crisis has made it very clear that the system we have had for centuries is incapable of leading the body of Christ to be a church. All it was capable of doing was defending

itself,? he said in a March 10 phone interview.

David Clohessy, a cofounder of the Chicago-based group Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, believes that the crisis ?will continue sporadically globally for decades to come.? The scandals to this point, he said in a March 10 interview, ?have emerged almost exclusively in First-World nations, and yet common sense tells us the crimes and cover-ups are likely more extensive for a variety of factors in the developing world.?

He said a ?greater power disparity between clergy and laity? often exists in the developing world. Combined with ?less aggressive journalism, less well-funded law enforcement, less independent judiciary, and more economic dependence of laity on church officials in many parts of the world,? this leads him to conclude that sexual abuse by clergy in many regions of the world simply remains underreported.

The significance of the spreading crisis in Europe, he said, is that ?on one hand, every additional country where the scandal erupts makes it harder for church officials to shift blame on, for example, a sexually loose culture or overzealous prosecutors or money-hungry trial lawyers.?
However, he is not optimistic that change will occur anytime soon in church structures because of the virtually unchecked power of the church hierarchy, where there is no independent oversight, no checks and balances, and a handful of men exercise all of the power.?

Support independent Catholic journalism

Support independent Catholic journ

[1]

http://openx.ncronline.org/www/delivery/ai.php?filer

Doyle wouldn?t speculate on whether the spreading scandal would bring any substantial change, but he believes that the bishops have engaged in ?denial and blame-shifting? since the earliest days of the scandal and that now ?we?re seeing the unraveling of a Teflon cover that kept this under wraps. The cover is rapidly unraveling now and what is obvious is that there is a broad and deep layer of corruption in the institution.?

[Tom Roberts is *NCR* editor at large. His e-mail address is troberts@ncronline.org. Religion News Service and Catholic News Service contributed to this report.]

Stories in this series

- Global scope of abuse crisis makes case for reform [2], by Tom Roberts
- Ratzinger's Responsibility [3], another essay by Hans Küng
- Divided loyalties: an incredible situation [4], by Sr. Joan Chittister

- Will Ratzinger's past trump Benedict's present? [5], analysis by John L. Allen Jr.
- Papal silence on crisis troubles German Catholics [6], report from Berlin
- CDF official details response to sex abuse [7], Msgr. Charles Scicluna on the record
- Sex abuse reports spread in Europe; focus on pope [8], a round up of stories
- Sex abuse requires rethinking of mandatory celibacy [9], An essay by Hans Kung

The Next Step FORWARD [10]

DONATE NOW [10]

Enjoy this article?
Help support more like it by **donating today!** [10]

Source URL (retrieved on *09/05/2015 - 02:53*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/global-scope-abuse-crisis-makes-case-reform

Links:
[1] http://openx.ncronline.org/www/delivery/ck.php?oaparams=2__bannerid=30__zoneid=56__cb=a2fbd2d8b1__oadest=ht
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/17463
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/17471
[4] http://ncronline.org/node/17447
[5] http://ncronline.org/node/17443
[6] http://ncronline.org/node/17428
[7] http://ncronline.org/node/17421
[8] http://ncronline.org/node/17402
[9] http://ncronline.org/node/17393
[10] http://ncrnews.org/webathon/donate/article-end