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Graviora Delicta

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 15, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

?Crime? is both a technical term and a non-technical term. For example, it remains to be seen if there was any technically criminal activity on Wall Street that led to the collapse of the economy, but the greed, the ponzi-like schemes, the betting against one?s customers, all that was certainly a crime.

The Vatican?s new directives revising a 2001 *motu proprio* designed to give the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explicit jurisdiction over cases involving the sexual abuse of minors are to be welcomed. They extend some of the provisions devised by the U.S. bishops to the universal Church. They may not go far enough, as many victims? rights activists argue, but they are undeniably a step in the right direction.

But, as I wrote on Monday, [1] it is beyond unfortunate that the Vatican used this occasion to also deal with other issues, such as the attempt to ordain women, and classified this as a ?crime? alongside the abuse of children. In a press conference, Msgr. Charles Scicluna of the CDF made clear that there was no intention to suggest that abusing children and ordaining women were similar offenses, but that is precisely what the documents released today do. And, while the Vatican documents, in conformity with canonical requirements, may use the word ?crime? to describe the attempt to ordain women, there was no need for a press advisory from the USCCB to use that word as well.

Here is another ?crime?: Mishandling your own press relations. It may not be *graviora delicta*, but the Vatican is making its own job more difficult by its failure to anticipate how its pronouncements will be understood by the faithful. Whatever you think about the issue of women?s ordination ? and I have yet to find a convincing theological argument in favor of it ? mentioning it in the same breath as the sexual abuse of children is *graviora stupidita*.

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