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Full text of pope's comments on the crisis

by John L. Allen Jr.

NCR Today

LONDON -- Day one of Benedict XVI's Sept. 16-19 trip to the United Kingdom has featured new comments from the pope on the sexual abuse crisis. Aboard the papal plane en route to Scotland, Benedict took five questions from reporters, including one on the crisis.

These are not impromptu exchanges, as the Vatican collects questions from reporters in advance, selects the most common themes, and then submits the questions to the pope so he can prepare a response. That means Benedict knew what was coming and chose to deliver a message about the crisis at the beginning of the trip, as he did in April 2008 en route to the United States.

The following is an *NCR* translation of the full text of Benedict's response to the question about the sexual abuse crisis this morning.

As is known, the scandal of sexual abuse has shaken confidence in the church. How do you think you'll be able to help rebuild it?

"First of all, I have to say that these revelations were a shock to me, a great sadness. It's difficult to understand how this perversion of the priestly ministry is possible. The priest, in the moment of ordination, having prepared for years to say 'yes' to Christ in this moment, commits to making himself Christ's voice, his mouth, his hands, and serving for his entire existence so that the Good Shepherd who loves, helps and guides us to the truth will be present in the world. How a man who's done this and said this could then fall into this perversion is difficult to understand, it's a great sadness, and it's also a sadness that the authorities of the Church were not sufficiently vigilant and not sufficiently quick and decisive in taking the necessary measures.

For all this we're in a moment of penance, of humility, of renewed sincerity, as I wrote to the Irish

bishops. It seems to me that now we need to experience precisely a time of penance, a time of humility, and to renew, to learn again, absolute sincerity.

Regarding the victims, I would say that three things are important. The victims are the first interest, how we can repair [the damage], what we can do to help these people to overcome this trauma, to find life again, and also to find again trust in the message of Christ. The commitment to the victims is the first priority, with material, psychological and spiritual help.

Second is the problem of the guilty persons: a just penalty is necessary, and they must be excluded from every possibility of access to young people, because we know that this is an illness where willpower doesn't work, and therefore we have to protect these people from themselves, and find the way to help them as well as excluding them from any access to young people.

And the third point is prevention and education in the choice of candidates for the priesthood. We must be careful to prevent, as much as humanly possible, future cases.

I'd like in this moment to thank the British episcopacy for its attention and collaboration, both with the See of St. Peter and with the public authorities, as well as for its attention to the victims and to the law. The British episcopacy has done and is doing great work, and thus I'm very grateful.?

[John L. Allen, Jr. is *NCR* senior correspondent.]

John Allen will be filing reports throughout the Papal visit to the U.K. Sept. 16-19. Stay tuned to NCR Today for updates.

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