

Pope calls church to be 'humble' model on abuse

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 19, 2010 NCR Today

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In his final act before departing the U.K. for Rome, Pope Benedict XVI has challenged the Catholic church to humbly present itself as a model for all society in the protection of children and young people from abuse.

It marked the fourth time the pontiff has addressed the sexual abuse crisis during his Sept. 16-19 trip to Scotland and England. The crisis has not taken on the same dimensions here as in the United States, Ireland, Germany, and other countries, but it nevertheless formed an important subtext to the trip.

This was the first time the pope has explicitly suggested that the experience accumulated by the Catholic church over the last decade could be a model for the wider world.

Your growing awareness of the extent of child abuse in society, its devastating effects, and the need to provide proper victim support should serve as an incentive to share the lessons you have learned with the wider community, Benedict said.

Indeed, what better way could there be of making reparation for these sins than by reaching out, in a humble spirit of compassion, towards children who continue to suffer abuse elsewhere?

Our duty of care towards the young demands nothing less, the pope said.

Benedict also acknowledged that the crisis has undermined the moral authority of church leaders.

The remarks came in an address to the bishops of England, Wales and Scotland in Birmingham, England, where earlier in the day he beatified the 19th century theologian and apologist Cardinal John Henry Newman, a convert from Anglicanism. It was delivered in the spot when Newman delivered a famous sermon called *The Second Spring* in 1852, marking the restoration of the English hierarchy which had languished since the English Reformation of the 16th century.

Though Benedict has tackled the sex abuse crisis head-on throughout the trip, including a private meeting with victims yesterday, so far his words and deeds have played to mixed reviews.

Critics have charged these are empty PR gestures, clamoring for disclosure of Vatican files on abuser priests and stronger collaboration with police and civil authorities. Some papal supporters, meanwhile, are openly questioning the wisdom of endless apologies, asking if it's preventing the church from moving on.

As he has throughout the trip, Benedict also once again took on secularism with the bishops. He urged the bishops to present the Christian message in its fullness, including those elements which call into question the widespread assumptions of today's culture.

In that regard, he invited them to draw upon the resources of the new Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, whose mission is to reawaken the faith in traditionally Christian, but now broadly secularized, Western nations.

Acknowledging the fallout from the global financial crisis, including high unemployment and the carnage caused by ?ill-advised investment policies,? the pope asked the bishops to highlight ?the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, who can so easily be overlooked in the allocation of limited resources.? He also called on British Catholics to continue to be generous in support of those in need.

Finally, the pontiff asked the bishops for help on two projects, both of which have drawn mixed reviews at both the top and the bottom of the Catholic community in the U.K.: Implementation of the new Roman Missal, the official translation of texts for the Mass, and his recent document *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, which created new structures (called ?ordinariates?) to welcome former Anglicans seeking to become Catholics.

While the new missal has been criticized in some quarters for using an obscure ?sacred language? and thus reversing the emphasis of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) on adapting the liturgy to the culture, Benedict urged the bishops ?to seize the opportunity that the new translation offers for in-depth catechesis on the Eucharist and renewed devotion in the manner of its celebration.?

Benedict also asked the bishops to be ?generous? in utilizing the new structures for Anglicans, arguing that they represent ?a prophetic gesture that can contribute positively to the developing relations between Anglicans and Catholics.?

At the time the structures were first announced, some Anglicans complained of ?poaching,? and also suggested that they could destabilize the Anglican Communion at an already difficult moment. Liberal Catholics objected to rolling out a red carpet for the most traditionalist elements within Anglicanism, while some bishops privately wondered if there was actually much real-world market demand for these structures.

The pope said the move is a reminder of the ultimate goal of ecumenism, which is ?restoration of full ecclesial communion in the context of which the mutual exchange of gifts from our respective spiritual patrimonies.?

The *Daily Telegraph* styled the pope?s words on full ecclesial communion as ?dramatic,? and warned that they could hamper efforts to build bridges with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and the Anglican Communion. Ecumenical experts, however, said this language has often been used to describe the aim of dialogue among the various Christian churches, and did not mark a new bid from Benedict to absorb the Anglican Communion.

John Allen will be filing reports throughout the Papal visit to the U.K. Sept. 16-19. Stay tuned to [NCR Today](#)[1] for updates.

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- [Joint statement on meeting between Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury](#) [9]
- [Benedict in Britain: We get it, we've got it, let's share it](#) [10], by John L. Allen, Jr.
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- [Full text of pope's comments on the crisis](#) [12], by John L. Allen, Jr.
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Links:

- [1] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today>
- [2] <http://ncronline.org/node/20317>
- [3] <http://ncronline.org/node/20316>
- [4] <http://ncronline.org/node/20315>
- [5] <http://ncronline.org/node/20314>
- [6] <http://ncronline.org/node/20313>
- [7] <http://ncronline.org/node/20309>
- [8] <http://ncronline.org/node/20308>
- [9] <http://ncronline.org/node/20303>
- [10] <http://ncronline.org/node/20306>
- [11] <http://ncronline.org/node/20293>
- [12] <http://ncronline.org/node/20281>
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- [23] <http://ncronline.org/node/20241>
- [24] <http://ncronline.org/node/20220>
- [25] <http://ncronline.org/node/20181>
- [26] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/when-benedict-meets-victims>
- [27] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/blast-past-newman>
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