

The Jesuit sex abuse settlement

Renée Schafer Horton | Mar. 28, 2011 NCR Today

Thank God. That's all I can say about the news that the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus will be paying \$166.1 million to hundreds of now-adults who were abused as children by various Jesuit priests.

I can't say "Thank the Jesuits," because, like their diocesan colleagues before them, the Jesuits fought paying this settlement and fought admitting that anyone in their ranks had done the reprehensible.

I don't know what the problem is with clerics admitting fault, but we sure seem to have an institutional problem with that. I actually heard a Jesuit a few months ago say he was concerned about his province's finances because of the Oregon problem. That "problem" would be [the crime of sexual abuse of minors](#) [1], but you know how it is with the English language -- so many words can stand for the same thing, right?

I'm exhausted by my Church failing to act like Jesus in these horrific events. Abuse happened guys, this is not new news ([especially in the case of the Oregon province](#) [2]).

Quit dancing around the issue and using excuses like "the best advice we had at the time" and fighting lawsuits with fear mongering: "How will we continue our many good works in universities, missions and parishes if we are bankrupt?" (For folks who believe in the afterlife, maybe you all need to be asking, "How will we get to heaven when we are morally bankrupt?")

The settlement will help more than 450 Native Americans and Alaska Natives abused at the order's schools in the far Pacific Northwest from the 1940s to the 1990s. It goes further than some prior settlements, [in requiring a written apology to the victim](#) [3] and disclosure of documents the schools kept on the students, according to the AP report out of Seattle.

Yet, in the consistent back peddling all too frequent among Church higher-ups, the spokesperson for the Oregon Province said the Jesuits wouldn't comment on the settlement announcement "out of respect for the judicial process and all involved."

Really? You think the Jesuits are really worried about disrespecting the judicial process? Disrespecting victims?

Seems to me respect would be shown more fully by standing shamefaced (and, being Lent and all, perhaps in sackcloth and ashes,) in front of the media and any victims wanting to be present and confessing the following:

"We, as an organization and individually, have sinned terribly in the past by allowing abuse to occur. We admit that in fighting this claim for so long, our religious organization *continued to sin* by denying harm had occurred or by using excuses provided us by lawyers or psychologists.

"We admit that we ignored the sick feeling in our guts when abuse was first reported, turning away from that God-given instinct and leaning instead on our own rationalizations about "scandalizing the faithful."

"We take full responsibility for what has happened, and we know this money isn't going to make what we did

go away; you cannot buy your way out of sin, nor can you erase the murder of small children's souls.

However, we believe it is a step in the right direction and we repent of dragging our feet through this whole process. Furthermore, we recognize that we were sheltering criminals during this time and we promise that will never happen again.

We will turn over the criminals in our ranks to the police, and do our best to protect children. We will listen to mothers, fathers, or children who come to us with stories of abuse and take them at their word instead of first thinking of protecting our Jesuit reputation.

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[1] http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2008709219_jesuit05m0.html

[2] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/11/19/us-catholics-abuse-idUSN1918914620071119>

[3] http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/3d281c11a96b4ad082fe88aa0db04305/Article_2011-03-25-Jesuits-Sex%20Abuse/id-c2017568356f480aa6669a8e68732fe6