

## **WYD indulgences: Rome fiddles while we burn**

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Aug. 12, 2011 | Bulletins from the Human Side

The sex abuse crisis among priests and other church personnel has now exploded like napalm across the entire Catholic world. New revelations tell an old story almost every day: that of the suffering of its victims, often in secret and compounded by ecclesiastical ineptitude, inattention, or moral insolvency.





How Irish that the scandal has turned into a brawl between the Irish prime minister and the Roman authorities he has criticized for their handling of the crisis. That reveals that Ireland's green is really base metal beneath the phony gilt of its claims to be the land of saints and scholars.

## Vatican announces indulgences for World Youth Day

By Carol Glatz Catholic News Service

Things are even worse in Germany where the non-stop revelations of sex abuse have stunned the world and embarrassed Pope Benedict XVI who, while all this is going on, is busily promoting a return of the church to the pre-Vatican II period that served as the incubator for a tragedy that has brought immeasurable grief to innumerable people, including the priest sex abusers themselves whose lack of inner growth led them into lives of pseudo-celibacy that made them seem virtuous to their bishops when they were actually menaces to their people.

Now, while Catholics burn with the shame inflicted on them by this crisis, Rome seems so pre-occupied with entering the shadowed yesterday of clerical domination that it has no interest or enough spiritual energy to lead the church to a fresh dawn of self-examination and self-cleansing.

The latest example is found in promising plenary indulgences to those who fulfill certain conditions when they attend World Youth Day in Madrid, Spain, Aug. 18-21. BUT WAIT -- as they say on infomercials -- partial indulgences are also available to those who pray appropriately during this gathering even if they cannot attend in person.

As part of the Reform of the Reform, this unfortunately rings like a church bell with associations of selling such indulgences during medieval times when bartering for grace and time off from Purgatory with cash scandalized Catholics and helped bring on the Reformation.

It is worse now because it confounds the mystery of Time and Eternity in which Roman officials should have an interest even if they lack any understanding of them. These are also critical variables in the human experience of the sexual abuse crisis and confusing them can only increase the suffering of the victims of sex abuse.

Indulgences are airily explained as lessening the temporal, or in time, punishment for sin that actually takes place beyond the reach of time, or the application of its parameters, in eternity. Where there is time, as Joseph Campbell has expressed it, there is sorrow. That is a function of time not of eternity and indulgences make no sense, sold 500 years ago or promised now, as any kind of spiritual currency to bail us out of the timeless sphere of eternity.

Time, with its sorrows, has a meaning for sex abuse victims because there is no time in the human unconscious; it is always NOW. That means that a wound that was seemingly inflicted on a certain date breaks free of the calendar's grip and is always as fresh in the victim as the moment it was inflicted. There is no statute of limitations for victims and their suffering, no plenary or partial indulgences to relieve them of their wounds.

By turning back to the concept of giving "Get Out of Purgatory" cards to those who attend an event in time demonstrates how estranging to human experience this return to another age really is. The world's victims are burning with suffering that is not cured by the passage of time and Rome fiddles, neglecting to plumb the depths of the still continuing sex abuse crisis, while talking irrelevantly in the language of plenary and partial indulgences.

To promise to relieve the so called temporal punishment due to sin through indulgences while failing to understand the timeless nature of the suffering of the sexually abused makes one think that Nero may have had it right when he did the fiddling while letting Rome do the burning.

The decree, signed by Cardinal Fortunato Baldelli, head of the Vatican office that deals with indulgences, said a partial indulgence also is available to all Catholics who are contrite for their sins and offer their prayers with the pope for young Catholics.

The cardinal also asked priests around the world to make themselves available to hear the confessions of those who want the indulgence and to encourage public prayers for the success of World Youth Day.

In central Madrid's Buen Retiro Park, 200 portable confessionals will be set up for confessions that begin Aug. 14. The pope will hear confessions at the park Aug. 20.

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