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Vatican's top ex-cop on abuse: Mahony must 'decide in conscience'

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Bishop Charles Scicluna of Malta served for 10 years as the Vatican's top prosecutor on child sex abuse cases and is today seen as a global leader for a "zero tolerance" stance. In an interview today in the Italian paper *La Repubblica*, Scicluna commented on the furor surrounding Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles and his looming participation in the papal election, saying that Mahony made mistakes and will have to "decide in conscience" whether to take part.

Scicluna also commented on the case of the late Mexican Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, asserting that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was the lone official of the Roman Curia who kept his distance from Maciel as the facts of his misconduct became known in 2004.

An *NCR* translation of the interview, conducted by Paolo Rodari, the Vatican writer for *La Repubblica*, appears below.

Monsignor Scicluna, who is Mahony?

A very humble cardinal who wasn't successful in stemming the cases of pedophilia in his diocese in a way that would have been correct.

Did you ever meet him?

Several times, in private meetings in my office, both in the years when Joseph Ratzinger was prefect and with William Joseph Levada. He came to ask help and advice about how he should act.

What did you talk about?

It was after 2002, the year in which the American bishops meeting in Dallas decided for the first time to adopt the policy of "zero tolerance" on pedophilia. Mahony, like all the bishops, was trying to understand how to act after years in which the church hadn't acted correctly.

Are you saying that before 2002, the American bishops covered up pedophilia?

There weren't clear policies, above all at the diocesan level. Everyone did what they could, and unfortunately in some cases like Mahony, they made mistakes. His error was not only not knowing how to tear out the roots of pedophilia. When he realized the phenomenon had exploded in the diocese, he published the names of all the accused priests.

Was that the right thing to do?

No, because it's one thing to communicate the names of the guilty and another [to communicate] the names of

those suspected of being guilty. He even put his own name on the list because two monsignors in the Vatican had suspicions about him. Frankly, to me it seemed too much.

Will he be in the conclave?

I believe so, but in any case he'll decide in conscience what to do. It's not an easy situation for him. Recently he had a spat with his predecessor, Jose Gomez, who removed him from every responsibility, and Mahony reminded him that in the past, he'd always accepted his way of handling things. It wasn't a good example, and I believe these polemics have contributed to his agitation.

Was Ratzinger always informed about Mahony and the cases of pedophilia?

Always, certainly. He struggled to clean house, to act for the well-being of victims. It's not just a matter of offenses against the sixth commandment, but also of arrogance and a lack of humility and poverty that sometimes characterizes the behavior of ministers of the church.

Did Ratzinger also know about Father Maciel?

In 2004, Maciel celebrated his 60th anniversary of priestly ordination at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. All the Roman Curia went, bishops and cardinals included. The only one to stay home was Ratzinger, then the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In fact, he knew well who he was dealing with, so much so that a month later, he officially moved forward a Vatican investigation of him. It caused him enormous suffering because he was well aware of how much esteem Maciel enjoyed in the Roman Curia. However, he went against the tide for love of the truth.

However, I'd like to say something else.

Go ahead.

The policy of Ratzinger was to purify the church from its filth, but also to use mercy. He was always aware, like St. Paul, that the people of God hold a treasure in vessels of clay. The strongest image he tried to refer to was a vision of St. Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th-century German mystic and naturalist. She saw a beautiful woman whose clothing was ripped and torn on account of priests and their sins. That woman is the Catholic church, muddied by the sins of priests but still beautiful despite it all, desirable, and a place whoever errs can always start over, in other words a place of mercy.

Many in the Vatican believe the church is under attack with regard to pedophilia. Do you share that?

Everyone in the Vatican wants cleansing. The repetition of the scandals in the media saps energy and enthusiasm. In my view, the attention directed at the church is exaggerated, but at bottom it's also legitimate, because it means that there are great expectations and standards for the priest and the style of life he incarnates.

Did the pope resign not just for old age, but also because of the scandals?

I don't believe so. The problem of pedophilia worried him and caused him suffering, certainly. But he knows well that no one should cast the first stone, in the sense that no one is without sin.

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