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Scottish cardinal's replacement: Credibility of church dealt 'serious blow'

Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 4, 2013 NCR Today
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Revelations about sexual impropriety by Cardinal Keith O'Brien have "dealt a serious blow" to the credibility of the Catholic church in Scotland, said the archbishop who will fill in for the embattled cardinal.

"This is a sad moment for the church in our country," Glasgow Archbishop Philip Tartaglia said during a sermon at a Lenten Mass in his archdiocesan cathedral Monday night.

"The most stinging charge which has been leveled against us in this matter is hypocrisy, and for obvious reasons," said Tartaglia, who was appointed apostolic administrator of O'Brien's St. Andrews and Edinburgh archdiocese following the cardinal's resignation.

"I think there is little doubt that the credibility and moral authority of the Catholic church in Scotland has been dealt a serious blow, and we will need to come to terms with that," Tartaglia continued.

O'Brien, who as a cardinal is entitled to take part in the conclave to determine the next leader of the Roman Catholic Church, said Sunday [1] his sexual conduct had "fallen below the standards expected of me as a priest, archbishop and cardinal."

The Vatican announced his retirement [2] Feb. 25 after the cardinal was accused of improper sexual contact with three priests and one former priest in incidents over the last three decades.

O'Brien has said he will recuse himself from voting for the next pope.

Questions about the Vatican's reaction to the O'Brien situation surfaced at a Vatican press briefing earlier Monday [1], when one Scottish reporter said the Scottish "are not very happy" with the explanation of O'Brien's resignation and asked what additional disciplinary action might be taken.

Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi referred the reporter to O'Brien's Sunday statement, in which O'Brien apologized and said he would now "play no further part in the public life of the Catholic Church in Scotland."

Tartaglia's remarks were made available in a press statement [3].

"We will endure it with prayer and patience and hope," Tartaglia said. "We will not forget for a long time, but we will heal and we will carry on.

"We will draw what conclusions and lessons we can from it and, if anything, we will learn to trust even more fully in Jesus Christ who is alone the Lord of the church."

"As for the church's mission in our country: Yes, our credibility and moral authority have been undermined," Tartaglia continued. "It will take time, perhaps a long time, to recover these intangible but important realities.

"But we cannot be defeatist. The answer to this sad episode is not to throw in the towel. We need, rather, to renew our faithfulness to Jesus Christ and to go about our business humbly."

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