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Sex abuse trials overshadow the good news of Catholicism

Isabella R. Moyer | Jun. 13, 2013 NCR Today

News from Winnipeg, my neck of the woods, was highlighted in Dennis Coday's Morning Briefing on Wednesday [1]. Archbishop Kenneth William (Saraphim) Storheim, Canada's highest-ranking Orthodox church cleric, is accused of assaulting two young boys more than 25 years ago. His trial is currently underway [2].

Storheim had been on the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests' radar for years, according to Melanie Sakoda [3]. She also acknowledged that his trial is possible because Canadian law does not offer him statute of limitations protection.

Fr. George Mulligan is a risk analyst for Praesidium Inc., a Texas company that gives training and assistance in abuse-risk management. He spoke last month at a mandatory workshop for all priests in the archdiocese of Vancouver. According to a report in *The B.C. Catholic* [4], Mulligan said, "What the Canadian Church has done from day one is be transparent, respond, enter into conversation, and tell its leadership at every level what was going on." In this sense, he believes the Canadian bishops did a better job responding to the sexual abuse crisis than their American brothers to the south.

This is small comfort and doesn't take away the anger at each new headline -- and there have been too many headlines for too many years. The sexual abuse of children by clergy and religious first became national news in Canada with the 1988 reports from the Mount Cashel Orphanage in Newfoundland. Reports of other abuses spread like wildfire. Our government and churches have been dealing for decades with the aftermath of the residential school abuses. In 2009, Antigonish Bishop Raymond Lahey made headlines when his laptop was seized at the Ottawa airport and found to be filled with child pornography. Now we have the accusations against Archbishop Storheim.

The heart says, "Enough. I don't want to hear any more!" But the mind knows we need to keep our eyes and ears open to this gruesome and unthinkable reality. Rape of any kind belongs in the category of the gravest and most disgusting of sins. It is a violent act of power and control. When children are raped, molested or used in any way for sexual gratification, then I can't help but hope for a special seat in a very hot place for the perpetrators. When the violence is committed by those who claim spiritual authority over us, then it is all the more inexcusable and disgusting.

We must keep airing this dirty laundry for all to see. We must ensure that the perpetrators and those who knowingly protected them be brought to justice. And we must ensure that necessary support, compassion and compensation are given to all victims.

We are all, together, the body of Christ, and the rot from the abuse crisis is making us all sick. Mistrust of the clergy and religious hurts priests, bishops, sisters and brothers of integrity. The legal consequences are bankrupting dioceses and religious orders, draining money from good works done by faithful women and men. Unavoidable clouds of suspicion now hang over any adult who works closely with children and young people, making it difficult or impossible to form healthy relationships.

And the good news of our faith continues to be buried under the headlines of corruption and sin.

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