

The Vatican Summit on Sex Abuse: Searching for Radical Solutions March 31, 2019

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Introduction

1. Speeches, witness of victims, responses, assessments
2. These notes are not for publication.
 - I. Vatican Summit
 - A. Officially called "Meeting on the Protection of Minors," Feb 21-24, 2019; convened by Pope Francis; held in Vatican City; themes: responsibility, accountability, transparency; 190 participants including 114 presidents of the world's Bishops' Conferences; 22 superiors of religious orders; 14 Curia members and 15 other bishops and cardinals; videotapes of testimony from five survivors from Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America; major speeches each day including German Cardinal Reinhard Marx, U.S. Cardinal Blaise Cupich, Nigerian Sister Veronica Openibo, Mexican journalist, Valentine Alazraki; a penitential liturgy on the third evening: Francis presided; a long examination of conscience on what bishops did or failed to do; reading of Prodigal Son or Merciful Father parable; homily by Archbishop Philip Naameh of Ghana asking them to see themselves as the prodigal son recognizing mistakes and seeking forgiveness; a talk by a survivor who said the memory of abuse was always with him but he tries to go forward and then played a piece on his violin; the pope led a closing prayer asking for the grace "to overcome injustice and to practice justice for the people entrusted to our care."
 - B. Background
 1. History of abuse of minors in the Church; St. Peter Damian (1007-1073) demanded priests guilty of sodomy be dismissed from Holy Orders, making an appeal to Pope Leo IX who failed to act decisively.
 2. Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald (1884-1969) warned American bishops and Pope Paul VI that clergy abusers could not be safely returned to ministry.
 3. In 1984 press reports of Fr. Gilbert Gauthé of Lafayette who pleaded guilty to 11 counts of molestation of boys.
 4. Boston 2002, *Boston Globe* published a series of articles that led to conviction of five priests including John Geoghan who allegedly molested over 130 minors, led to resignation of Cardinal Law (*cf* movie *Spotlight*).
 5. Dallas Charter 2002 adopted zero tolerance, meaning any credibly accused priest had to be removed from ministry; set up a National Review Board that commissioned the John Jay Report that said 4.7% of more than 100,000 priests and deacons ministering from 1950 to 2002 were accused of sexual

abuse of minors; from 1950-2012 Catholic dioceses paid out more than \$3 billion to settle claims.

6. In February 2012, there was a major meeting in Rome of delegates from 110 episcopal conferences and 35 religious superiors. Organizers included Zollner, Scicluna, and Marx; bishops advised to develop guidelines for their own dioceses (was previously prescribed in 2011).
7. Situation in Chile: Pope Francis in 2014 appointed Juan Barros bishop of Osorno over objections and later in 2018 admitted serious error in judgment, apologized, met with Juan Cruz and others, fired five bishops and sent Archbishop Scicluna to facilitate a healing and reform in Chile.
8. August 2018, Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report claiming: "Priests were raping little boys and girls, and the men of God who were responsible for them did nothing; they hid it all. For decades." Peter Steinfelds, religious reporter for the *New York Times*, wrote an article in *Commonweal* (January 9, 2019) arguing that the blanket condemnations of bishops for covering up and shielding perpetrators is "grossly misleading irresponsible, inaccurate, and unjust." He claims the Dallas Charter has worked, improving the performance of U. S. bishops. The dominant narrative: Catholic bishops for over 7 decades ignored victims and covered up crimes, a "deeply entrenched, largely unabated and uniquely Catholic problem."
9. August 2018, Francis issued Letter to the People of God admitting "We showed no care for the little ones," condemning all abuse, asking for forgiveness, and suggesting solutions required the efforts of all the faithful.
10. Shortly after Archbishop Cardinal Maria Vigano issued a statement accusing Francis of lifting sanctions on Cardinal Theodore McCarrick imposed by Pope Benedict and called on Francis to resign. Francis later dismissed McCarrick from being a cardinal and a priest.
11. In November of 2018, the Vatican told American bishops to halt their efforts to deal with bishop accountability and wait for the Vatican Summit. The U.S. bishops will take this up in June, 2019.

II. Perspectives on the Vatican Summit

A. Survivors and Advocates

1. Many are wounded for life and have courageously performed a great service by telling their stories; they are driving the narrative and have great credibility.
2. On the first day stories from all over the world were told anonymously by videotape: An African woman repeatedly raped by a priest beginning at age 15, forced to have 3 abortions, said her life has been destroyed, she could not escape because she was economically dependent on him; a 53-year old priest from Eastern Europe was abused as a teenager, reported it to the

bishop who attacked him verbally leaving wounds he still suffers while trying to minister as a priest; a man from Chile (Juan Cruz) who reported abuse was treated as “a liar” and an enemy of the Church; a woman who endured five years of rape starting at age 11 said “I who loved coloring books and doing somersaults on the grass have not existed instead engraved in my eyes, nose, body and soul, are all the times he immobilized me, the child, with superhuman strength,” she still suffers physically today (eating disorder) and emotionally (suicidal tendencies);” a man from Asia said he was abused over 100 times and continues to endure “traumas and flashbacks.”

3. Responses: Anne Barret Doyle, a founder of Bishop Accountability described the Pope’s closing talk as “recycled rhetoric,” “he’s undone the tiny bit of progress that possibly was achieved this week” while exhibiting “no responsibility, no accountability and no transparency.” The pope failed to put pressure on bishops to take action or lose their jobs. Doyle spoke for many advocacy groups disappointed by the Vatican Summit.

B. Global Perspective

1. Many bishops in developing countries thought clergy sex abuse was a western problem. They have other more pressing problems with youth (starvation, forced military service, lack of education, etc.). Some feel a need to avoid giving authoritarian regimes a reason to persecute priests.
2. The Catholic Church is a large multinational institution with over a billion members in process of becoming a world church. While membership is shrinking in Europe it is growing in the southern hemisphere, especially Africa.
3. The Vatican summit was designed to convince bishops that sex abuse is a global problem. The stories of victims included survivors from Asian and African countries. Speakers included a Nigerian sister (Veronica), a Mexican journalist, Cardinal Antonio Tagle of the Philippines.
4. Zollnar thinks the summit was successful in its goal to educate the bishops, but only time will tell if reluctant bishops recognize the crisis. Doyle did say the Summit was a “public consciousness raising on a massive scale,” increasing global awareness of clergy sex abuse.
5. Marie Collins, Irish survivor who served on the Vatican Commission for the Protection of Minors for three years was heartened by admissions of Cardinals of cover-ups and was impressed with the pope’s language but frustrated with no action and failure to name perpetrators of videotaped victims.
6. SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) the founding president was Barbara Blaine (from Toledo and now deceased), in 1989, current president Tim Lennon told his story of abuse by a parish priest when he was

11 and buried for 30 years as a way of encouraging other survivors to come forward. SNAP wants greater transparency and accountability which did not happen sufficiently at the Summit.

7. In as many as 22 countries (not U.S.) especially in Africa there have been reports of clergy abuse of nuns because they are presumed to be free from AIDS.

C. American Perspective

1. The Summit delayed action by U.S. bishops at their November, 2018 meeting, which they will take up at the June, 2019 meeting; with our history of headline news many found the Summit disappointing; the U.S Church has a good deal of experience and progress to share with others.
2. The Dallas Charter (2002) with its zero tolerance, while not perfect, has been quite effective in reducing the number of reported cases and in promoting greater transparency as Peter Steinfelds has documented in his critique of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report. The U.S. Church has done a better job on the issue than most any other country (zero tolerance, background checks, education of priests and other church workers, finger printing, removal from ministry upon credible accusations, mandatory reporting of current accusations to proper civil authorities, lay involvement in judging credibility and producing annual reports).
3. Cardinal Blaise Cupich of Chicago gave one of the major talks at the Summit highlighting 4 orientations based on synodality: (1) Radical Listening to survivors and their heartrending stories; (2) Lay Witness and participation at all levels, especially parents calling clergy to account and those who can help “construct structures of accountability; (3) Collegiality which means mutual cooperation between the Curia and episcopal conferences; the Pope and College of Bishops, the bishops and the people they serve (Francis reminds us the pope does not have all the answers); (4) Accompaniment which involves treating victims with compassion, avoiding coverups, rejecting a clerical worldview that puts clergy in a privileged position; Cupich added suggestions for holding bishops accountable giving that task to metropolitan bishops (for example, the Archbishop of Cincinnati for the suffragan bishops of Toledo, Columbus, etc.) aided by lay experts with a lot of qualifications protecting accusers and respecting the rights of the accused bishops including the “presumption of innocence during the investigation.” He cited John Paul saying institutional reform needs a spirituality of communion that “supplies institutions reality with a soul.”
4. *Commonweal* editors: the effectiveness of the Summit designed to change hands of bishops will only be recognized in the future when we see if the pope’s “healthy decentralization” is effective at the local level. They quote Cupich that structural reform will work only if “we anchor all our

deliberations in the piercing pain of those who have been abused and of the families who have suffered with them.” There was “real progress” but the closing talk of Francis ended it “on an unfortunate note.”

5. *National Catholic Reporter* editorial: The Summit was meaningful for a number of reasons: It included an admission that abuse and coverup are global problems; Cardinal Marx admitted documents were destroyed in Germany; it included “searing testimony of victims” and a direct challenge to the pope and bishops to be on the side of victims (Sr. Veronica); bishops were charged with devising local plans to be approved by the Vatican (not very specific). More negative factors: it took outside pressure to force the Summit; no answer to who is holding bishops accountable; the pope’s closing talk blunted his earlier strong words; the clerical culture must be changed to make progress.
6. *First Things* ran a series of six articles, Letter from the Vatican ed. by Xavier Rynne II (presumably in part by George Weigel, calling the Summit “a complex affair,” including “a sober and severe examination of conscience a moment of cautious but real hope.” There was “a tacit recognition” that combatting sexual abuse should be a priority issue. The pope made the case in a “lucid and concise way” in his concluding talk; agreed with Steinfels the Dallas Charter made a difference and could be a guide for other countries; some good things on reform of recruitment and seminary formation; the need for spiritual conversions; criticism of clericalism (“taking advantage of the reverence for the priesthood and episcopate that is deep in the Catholic DNA”); a recognition that we need “a code of conduct” for bishops that holds them accountable and a “green light” given to develop structures tailored to different national situations prominently involving laity. Weigel also claims the Summit did not do enough on various issues: reforming the clericalized Curia; or the need for chastity (the “integrity of love” – JP11) among members of the Church; on how bishops are selected with lay participation; on doctrinal dissent on moral issues as a cause of the problem (child abuse is an intrinsic evil); could have been clearer that a married clergy is not the solution; on priest abusing adults. In summary, there were some “modest but real accomplishments” that give us hope.
7. Church Militant Michael Voris: The Summit (a phony dog and pony show) failed to address the real cause of the scandal homosexuality among the ranks of the clergy. Pope Francis will go down in history not as a great reformer but as the man “buried under a mountain of homosexual filth, homopredator priests and the hierarchy that tried unsuccessfully to keep it all covered up.”
8. *America* ran an article by Gerard O’Connell claiming the Summit did succeed in changing hearts, setting the stage for more concrete reforms; publishing a

handbook to give bishops; revising Vatican laws on pontifical secrecy; creating structures to hold bishops accountable; establishing task forces to assist bishops.

D. Papal Perspectives

1. Criticisms of Francis: took too long after his election to establish a commission to deal with the problem; was unable or unwilling to get the Curia (CDF) to hold bishops accountable; misread the situation in Chile, appointing the unpopular bishop Juan Barros, either did not read or ignored the letter of Juan Cruz, and has never explained that ; took advice from McCarrick and did not fire him soon enough; picked abusers to be part of his Council of Cardinals; did not schedule ahead of time a meeting with survivors during his U.S. visit (did finally do so); did not personally respond to Viganò charges (some say this was wise); did not meet personally with victims at Summit; talked about need for concrete action but failed to do that in his closing talk which disappointed many.
2. The statements by Francis: August, 2018 Letter to the People of God confessing we did not act in a timely manner to protect the little ones; condemning the “atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons; asking for forgiveness; stressing whole People of God must be involved in solutions; calling for personal and communal conversion to create a “culture of care.”
3. Francis provided 21 reflection points for Summit: for example, prepare a handbook, set up listening structures to judge allegations; inform civil authorities; provide safe environment for minors; establish protocols for handling accusations against bishops; accompany victims; learn more about causes and consequences; care for injured communities; distinguish real cases from slander; raise minimum age for marriage to 16; facilitate participation of lay experts; follow principle of presumption of innocence; observe principle of proportionality of punishment; establish programs to help seminarians develop their “human, spiritual and psychosexual maturity;” formulate codes of conduct for all clerics and church workers; explain dangers effects, signs and reporting of abuse; establish groups to facilitate reporting.
4. Pope’s Introduction to Summit: “The Holy People of God look to us and expect from us not simple and predictable condemnations, but concrete and effective measures to be undertaken. We need to be concrete.”
5. Concluding Address: The first part puts the issue in global context, many cases go unreported, most violence by family or someone close to family, around 70% in the home, in the U.S. over 700,000 children are victims of violence each year; pornography is rapidly spreading world-wide; 3 million people travel each year to have sexual relations with a minor. This evil is “all the more grave and scandalous in the Church; for it is utterly incompatible

with its moral authority and ethical credibility; we are dealing with the “mystery of evil” and must use “spiritual means” (prayer, penance, humiliation, self-accusation) to overcome it. The People of God have a right to pastors committed to Christ the Good Shephard. We must protect children; bring perpetrators to justice; purify the Church and do not blame others; strengthen rules against coverups; beware of threats from the digital world; protect children from sexual tourism. It will be up to the People of God “to liberate us from the plague of clericalism, which is the fertile ground for all these disgraces.”

6. The approach of Francis: he was willing to admit his mistakes in Chile, ask forgiveness and fire 8 bishops; he is committed to “Synodality” as the primary means of reform (involving all members of the local church in decision making and reform efforts); he follows the principle of subsidiarity (decisions made at lowest effective level); he favors nuanced judgments and proportional punishments (his removing McCarrick from priesthood for abusing minors while not accepting the resignation of French Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, convicted of coverups); he thinks clericalism is a root cause of the problem (making an idol of the Church – ecclesialotry); he has genuine empathy for victims especially those he meets personally; he is convinced a top down approach does not work and the Vatican cannot give concrete directions applicable to all cultures; he knows he is in charge of a complex multicultural Church; he believes in the spirit of Vatican II especially its emphasis on the People of God and the universal call to holiness; he believes it is important to start to deal with problems even without having a sense of how it will be solved; he has given some indication that he knows that women religious have been abused by priests (reports from Mexico; he suffers from a theory of gender complementarity that limits his view of women; he is still working on reform of the Curia after six years and is sending the restructuring document *Predicatum Evangelium* to national episcopal conferences for review and suggestions; in dealing with accused cardinals Francis let the civil legal system reach a decision, showing a certain humility and embrace of the cross as a means of purification of the Church.
7. Francis and accused cardinals: accepted resignation of Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati archbishop of Santiago, Chile accused of coverup; removed Theodore McCarrick from priesthood; he dropped George Pell, convicted of abuse by Australian court, from C-9, his role as economic minister and public ministry pending result of his appeal; refused French Cardinal Barbarin offer of resignation.

II. Needed Reforms

- A. Recruitment and formation of seminarians cf *Child Sex Abuse and the Catholic Church* by Marie Keenan

1. Be more selective, look for pastoral skills and not just orthodoxy, involve laity in the process.
 2. Send to major universities (Notre Dame, Boston College, etc.) for theology education.
 3. Have more women involved in formation process, concentrate on greater psychosexual maturity and the importance of healthy adult relationships (lack of which is a common factor in abusers); a realistic approach to celibacy that recognizes the human diminishment, especially not being forced to learn the give and take, compromises and forgiveness needed on a daily basis to make an intimate relationship work; learning to deal with the power differential between clergy and laity and the new situation where the traditional Catholic respect for priests encounters the residue of sex abuse.
- B. Opening up the clerical culture
1. Clericalism: giving exaggerated importance to clergy; making an idol out of the institutional Church (ecclesialotry); creating a closed culture of priests more interested in defending fellow priests than serving the people; overly secretive and lacking transparency; the spiritual father language popularized by John Paul II that can be used to justify treating lay persons as children, Pope Francis thinks clericalism is a root cause of sex abuse, calling it “our ugliest perversion.”
 2. A theology of the priesthood that sees Holy Orders as a specification of the primary sacrament of Baptism so that the character of Orders is seen not as creating an ontological difference but as establishing a new relationship (the priest as the publicly recognized servant leader of the community of believers); learning from the example of the historical Jesus who came to serve and not to be served (historically a neglected notion until Vatican II). Priests serve Christ and participate in his mission to spread the kingdom. The Church is not the kingdom but its sign and instrument.
 3. Priests need healthy relationships with lay women and men, married couples, fellow priests and a confidant or spiritual director, which respect proper boundaries.
 4. U.S. priests must abide by the Dallas Charter which includes reporting credible allegations to proper civil and church authorities.
- C. Episcopal Clericalism
1. Concerns: bishops seeing themselves as branch managers of the Vatican putting that loyalty ahead of their responsibilities as leaders of the local church; placing institutional loyalty above care for victims leading to coverups; many bishops are not really actual leaders of a community (titular bishops); moving bishops to more prestigious suffragan dioceses; bishops are not now accountable to anyone except the pope which has enabled many coverups.

2. Solutions: local input on choice of bishop by clergy and laity; don't move bishops from one diocese to another; develop synodal structure; have listening sessions at parishes (Ken Untener living for weeks and months in Saginaw parishes); performance reviews of bishops by laity and priests; suffragan bishops accountable to metropolitan bishop (archbishop) on abuse issues or to Vatican tribunal or National Review Board (June meeting of U.S. bishops may set a direction).

D. Priest Shortages

1. Concerns: priests serving 2 or more parishes which reduces presence, creates stress and fatigue, weakens relationships, divides attention; all male clergy can be insular, deprived of experience and wisdom of women and the benefits of healthy male/female relationships.
2. Selection: expand pool of candidates: ordain virtuous married men; make celibacy optional; expand role of women (pastoral administrators, possible deacons); the discussion of women's ordination continues among theologians and lay persons despite clear statements of recent popes. Before this papal teaching, Karl Rahner argued that there were no compelling historical or theological arguments against it and suggested local Christian communities surface real leaders and ordain them.

E. Homosexuality

1. Must insist against neo-traditionalists like Church Militant and some bishops, for example, Vigano, that gay priests do not abuse at higher rates than heterosexual priests, cf *John Jay Report*. A so-called gay culture is not a cause of clergy abuse.
2. It is true that a good number of Catholic priests are gay (common estimates say 30 to 40 % or higher with only about 10 priests in the U.S. openly and publicly ministering as gay) and that a high percentage of victims are boys.
3. James Martin, S.J. points out that we lack public role models of good faithful celibate gay priests who are reluctant to reveal their orientation because of official church teaching (homosexual orientation is fundamentally disordered). Martin gives reasons for the reluctance (homophobic culture, could be targeted by homophobes, culture induced shame, fear of being singled out).
4. We do need further discussion of the official position on homosexuality. Pope Francis has opened up the issue by his comments: For example, to Juan Cruz: "God made you that way and God loves you." John Langan suggests we think about new stances on the topic: recognizing that we have more to learn from science and experience; overcoming homophobia; welcoming gays in the Church; public attitudes have changed dramatically during the past couple of decades, especially among the younger generations; need for compassionate ministry.

5. Margaret Farley in *Just Love*; we cannot demonstrate an absolute prohibition against gay relationships on the basis of Scripture, Christian tradition or science. The experience of gay partners suggests such partnerships can be fruitful in the broad sense and assist human flourishing, which should be brought into the discussion of the development of Church doctrine on this issue. Gays are bound by the same ethical principles as others: respect for persons and their capacity for self-determination and relationships; free consent and no coercion; truth telling and keeping promises; mutuality and reasonable equality; commitment; fruitfulness; and social justice from society and the Church to overcome homophobia.
6. Progress on homosexuality is essential to opening up the clerical culture so there can be open conversations.

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Thursday, July 11, 2019: Bridging the Generational Divide: Christian Perspectives

Thursday, Aug. 8, 2019: (Topic TBA)

Thursday, Sept. 12, 2019: (Topic TBA)

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