

Defending Life: on the Sexual Abuse to Minors and Vulnerable Adults

**Pastoral Letter of
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Dear brothers and sisters,

Last February 2nd, the Holy Father Pope Francis signed a *Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life concerning the Pontifical Commission of the Protection of Minors*. In it, the Pope, like his predecessors, insists on the fact that: “Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children. They should also know that they have every right to turn to the Church with full confidence, for it is a safe and secure home. Consequently, priority must not be given to any other kind of concern, whatever its nature, such as the desire to avoid scandal, since there is absolutely no place in ministry for those who abuse minors”. On the other hand, *the Holy Father “urges the Dioceses”* “to identify programmes for pastoral care which include provisions for psychological assistance and spiritual care”, and asks for the “close and complete cooperation with the [Pontifical] Commission for the Protection of Minors”, also “through an exchange of best practices and through programmes of education, training and developing adequate responses to sexual abuse”. The whole letter is of the utmost importance, but it contains another element that I think must be underlined: *it refers not only to minors, but also makes several references to vulnerable adults*, emphasising the importance of taking “whatever steps are necessary to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults”. This latter aspect is a lesser-known reality that the Roman Pontiff invites us to tackle it with faith, intelligence, and diligence.

1. Some relevant issues

For the reasons stated above, in full adherence to the Church and its visible head the Pope, as well as with all due respect for people, I want to unequivocally emphasise a number of relevant issues:

- a) The safekeeping of the person’s physical, psychological and spiritual integrity is derived from the “defence of the sacredness of human life” (Pope Francis, 12-5-2013) from conception until natural death. While sexual abuse applies undoubtedly to the sixth and ninth commandments of the Law of God, they should not be reduced to the sphere of private morality. These abuses are an attack on the dignity of the person in their sexual difference (man-woman). The sacredness of human life and the self-possession of the person are therefore also the basis of social morality. Thus, sexual abuse is a crime against one’s neighbour, against God and against the community. For all these reasons, *this blemish within the Church must also be analysed from the perspective of the Church’s Social Doctrine: “opus justitiae pax – peace is the fruit of justice” (Is 32, 17)*. The corruption of the Church ministers’ moral authority, converted by the corrupt into *despotic power* and manifested as *clericalism*, has much to do with the problem; so does *the progressive deconstruction of the appropriate anthropology*.

To raise the issue of justice and solidarity with the youngest or the weakest without also proposing the redemption of the heart is to ignore the necessity of both for the human soul. Charity and chastity demand and need one other. As the Catholic Church Catechism teaches us “chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy” (C.C.C. 2339). It certainly does not mean renouncing or suppressing anything that is truly human: instincts, affection, feelings, one’s own

will, etc. What chastity provides is the integration of all the dynamisms in the person's *ethos*, so that the body becomes personal language and can become the expression of the love of one's gift, each one according to his or her situation: whether celibate or married. Chastity for the celibate means a vocation to love through perfect and perpetual continence for the Kingdom of Heaven; for the married, chastity guides one's own gift in the language of the body. Both vocations (virginity and marriage) need the redemption of the heart that is achieved only by means of God's grace and the virtue of charity. No one can give what he or she does not possess. Whoever does not live in chastity and does not learn, with divine assistance, how to govern themselves, will not be able to donate himself or herself truly in any sphere of life: marriage, family, ecclesial community or social circle (work, politics, etc.). Without chastity, relations become power relationships or manipulation of the other - making them an object in one's own interests.

- b) That having been said, no prejudgement is intended against those priests, deacons and religious people that do good work and behave as exemplars. It is necessary to affirm, once more, that abuses and sexual harassment both to minors and adults *is not only a most serious sin, but also a very serious canonical and civil crime that demands, according to the law, loyal collaboration with the legitimate ecclesiastical and civil authorities.*
- c) Sexual abuse and harassment must never be evaluated from the quantity of cases; one victim is already too much, it is an atrocity.
- d) The very serious offence of sexual abuse must be tackled "with clarity and determination", (...) people need to "know that there is no place in priesthood and religious life for those who harm the young" (Saint John Paul II, 23-4-2002). The authors of such cruel action must "answer for it before the Almighty God and before properly constituted tribunals" (Benedict XVI, 19-3-2010), *obviously with all the legal guarantees for all parties.* Beloved Pope Francis has also explained it most clearly: "There is no place in the Church's ministry for those who commit these abuses, and I commit myself not to tolerate harm done to a minor by any individual, whether a cleric or not. All bishops must carry out their pastoral ministry with the utmost care in order to help foster the protection of minors, and they will be held accountable" (7-7-2014). Besides the Holy See's regulation on the matter, there are *both canonical and civil action protocols of the Spanish Church.* These protocols are necessary to do things well and to give moral and legal security to the parties involved. However, as the Holy Father points out, it is necessary to go deeply into everything regarding abuses (education, formation, diffusion, prevention, redress, etc.), and most especially into everything concerning the support of the victims in every respect (pastoral, psychological, medical, legal, etc.).
- e) Scandal does not consist in knowing the truth and doing justice, but simply by the occurrence of these abominable actions. Scandal necessitates that truth is known and justice done. Knowing the truth and doing justice is necessary for the victims of abuse, for potential victims, for the Church, for society and, even though they may not agree, also for the assailants. Any other position regarding this issue is nothing more than corporatist clericalism. We must be on guard against those who find reasons (apparently pious, as Pope Francis has warned us, such as to avoid impending scandal, etc.), to suggest hiding the truth from those who have the right or the obligation to know it. The "*truth will set you free*" (Jn, 8, 32). Statements by the Magisterium of the Church on clericalism – by Popes Francis, Benedict XVI and Saint John Paul II – can be found in: www.obispadoalcala.org/clericalismo.html

In relation to offences against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue committed by a cleric with a minor under the age of eighteen (here the minor is on a par with a person usually having an imperfect use of reason): a reminder is necessary here that the Church has extended the

“prescription of the criminal action after twenty years, with due regard to the right of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to derogate it” and that the “prescription begins to run from the day on which a minor completes his eighteenth year of age” (Cf. *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, Art. 6-7).

- f) The Church is grateful for the good work carried out by the State Security Forces, the public prosecutors, judges, and others who investigate and discover, with truth, the clerics who commit abuse. We must also be grateful to those within the mass media who legitimately and truthfully give information or do their research to discover the true perpetrators of the crime, always mindful of the need to avoid “misinformation, slander and defamation” (Pope Francis, 15-12-2014). Nevertheless, the presumption of innocence for the accused and the victims’ right to privacy must be carefully adhered to. In fact, *we must express deep gratitude to the victims*, who alert us to the horror they have suffered, and still suffer, because of the abuse perpetrated by some clerics. We must not mistake those truthfully uncover and publicize abuse within the Church, as is so characteristic of clericalism, for enemies of the Church. On the contrary! They help the Church to purify itself! I would add that, sometimes, even those who consider the Church an enemy can be the means in God’s hands to purify ourselves.
- g) The Church offers its solid love, shelter, pastoral charity and support to all the victims of sexual abuse and harassment. The victims’ trust has been wickedly betrayed and their dignity has been violated, especially when the authors of abuses or harassment are priests, deacons or members of a religious order. *The Church condemns these evil acts, has asked, and still asks, forgiveness for them*. “On this issue we need to keep moving forward: zero tolerance” (Pope Francis, 26-5-2014).

2. Some precautionary and needed measures

On the basis of what has been previously said, it is necessary to implement all the legitimate measures to prevent such abuses. Among these measures we wish to highlight in particular the following:

- a) The efficient selection of teachers in seminaries and noviciates, and of candidates to the diaconry, to the priesthood and to religious life, as well as their right education. Regarding their education, which is academic but also spiritual, two elements are fundamental: 1) the teaching of the Church’s Magisterium on the “suitable anthropology”, which includes Pope John Paul II’s “Catechesis on Human Love and Theology of the Body”, always in the light of the Holy Scriptures, the Tradition and the Magisterium; and 2) the education of the heart and the mind, in God’s grace, for service, and not for “despotic power”: for we know that *sexual abuse is, above all an abuse of power; an abuse of power in the sexual sphere, that which is the most intimate and fragile of all; therefore to corrupt spiritual authority – which is a service – into despotic power is a horrific act against people, the Church and society*.
- b) The strict selection of such candidates both psychologically and spiritually. *No one should be ordained if he does not also demonstrate the potential to be a good husband and a good father*. Catechists, catholic school teachers, religion teachers, etc., must all also undergo rigorous selection.
- c) Besides preventing the ordination of non-suitable people, it is necessary to *unmask and break up, with a ‘pro-active’ attitude, any intra-ecclesiastical corruption net or structure*; and, of course, it is also necessary to provide the means to prevent, as much as possible, the creation of those nets.

- d) It would be of great utility to coordinate and prepare, in the ecclesiastical field, “preventative education programmes” to favour “secure environments for minors”, but also for adults. As is already happening in other nations, potential victims should learn the basic concepts for their own protection, according to their age. It would also be useful to prepare a verified *behaviour code* for the Church staff: priests, deacons, seminarians, catechists, catholic school teachers, etc.
- e) Likewise, supra-diocesan ecclesiastical supervision would be very helpful in this matter, so as to avoid conscious or unconscious mistakes and “self-delusion”. *Fully publicising matters is of no value, in this subject or in any other, if a procedure or argument cannot be verified in the ecclesiastical or civil forum, depending on the case.*
- f) Disseminating knowledge *of the Magisterium and the Church discipline* on this subject, as well as the measures (“best practices”) that are being taken in many places in the world, is very important; *ignorance works in favour of the assailants, accomplices and those who cover up the offence.* For this reason, the Diocese of Alcalá de Henares website has created, - with full transparency criteria, - a *specific portal* that can be useful for those interested in this issue: www.obispadoalcala.org/abusos.html
- g) Promoting, in all the educational areas, authentic, effective sex education that, supported by an *appropriate anthropology*, encourages respect for the other and the vocation to love. Our aim is to resist the moral relativism derived from global governance or the New World Order, a new intelligent power that, in the name of freedom, creates addicts to and slaves of sexual consumerism.

3. On the abuses against youngsters and vulnerable adults

On April 14th 2010, the Holy See published the following data, referring to, as indicated - and this is important so as to avoid misunderstanding - “the problematic of abuses by priests and not the population in general”: “As to the causes of children abuses by priests faced in recent years by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, we have to adhere only to the statistical data presented in Msgr. Scicluna’s interview, which defines 10% of cases as pederasty in the strict sense and 90% of cases defined as ephhebophilia (against adolescents), out of which a 60% related to people of the same-sex and the remaining 30% were of heterosexual character”.

As can be observed, according to this report, the most significant percentage of abuse by priests is against male adolescents. However, we are not yet publicly aware of another little-known reality, about which Pope Francis has told us in his recent letter on the subject: the prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment with over-eighteen young people and adults, especially those who suffer from any psychological or spiritual vulnerability. A number of these abuses and harassment are committed by corruptive networks within the Church that capture and abuse vulnerable men.

On the other hand, even though the victims are over-18, it is important to recall that:

- a) Also “the solicitation to a sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue in the act, on the occasion, or under the pretext of confession” is one of “the more grave delicts against the sanctity of the Sacrament of Penance reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith” (*Normae de gravioribus delictis, Art. 4, §1, 4^o*).
- b) On his behalf, in 2009, the Supreme Pontiff awarded the Congregation for the Clergy some Special Faculties, among which “dealing with and presenting to the Holy Father, for his specific approval and decision, those ‘in poenam’ cases of clerical resignation, with relative exemption from the obligations consequent to ordination, including that of celibacy” (...) “of those clerics

guilty of serious external sins against the Sixth Commandment (cf. Canon 1395, Sections 1-2)” (*Letter of the Congregation for the Clergy on the New Faculties given from the Pope to this Congregation, 18-4-2009*).

4. Networks

Within these corrupt networks inside the Church individuals may act as autonomous cells of power, information and influence. Yet at the same time, they usually have connections with other likeminded individuals so that, whenever necessary, they cover and back one another up in a coordinated manner, even at an international level. As has often been said publicly, their mutual covering and backing up becomes explicit in the parish field, continues in the access to the seminary (hiding, if necessary, relevant information about the candidate) lingers on in the seminary itself and, once these people have been ordained as priests, is mutually sustained in attempts to access those ecclesiastical offices that, in their opinion and according to their interests, signify the possibility of handling money, “power”, “influence capacity” or accessing sensitive information.

Moreover, these nets can usually count on a vulnerable lay environment, victims they treat as ‘*psyco-affective-sexual slaves*’: some are exploited economically, others sexually and others in both aspects. Without judging the person’s subjective legal responsibility, to which only God is entitled, these are the approximate characteristics “usually” found in these nets, though certainly not only in them: a) narcissism, vanity, egocentrism (in their behaviour, in their way of dressing, in their profile in the social nets, etc.); b) hedonism; c) clericalism, which implies, among other aspects, thinking, classifying and treating the *lay Christian faithful* as the “non-clergy under-class”, whose freedom and conscience must be controlled - ‘for their good’, according to their opinion -; d) greed for money; e) power ambition, abusing of this power whenever it is possible; f) secrecy (under various excuses – an alleged special choice of God, “mysteries only for the initiated”, etc.- they press those who they treat as *slaves* to create a wall of silence that is a hindrance to check publicly on the actions of the “net”, their singular interpretations of the Magisterium, their arguments, etc.); g) permanent search of important “contacts” in every sphere (ecclesiastics, influential politicians, big businessmen, etc.); h) what Pope Francis calls “careerism” (6-6-2013); this implies flattery of superiors, of powerful and rich people; i) mistreatment of the non-accommodating “subordinates” (both other clergymen and laymen) and, generally, defamation and slander against those seen as a risk to their own interests; j) some of them openly dissent from doctrine; nonetheless, frequently hiding under an appearance of “orthodoxy” or even “tenderness”; k) double life and l) when they are uncovered they deny reality and, depending on the case, they either express great aggressiveness or an attitude of false “surprise” (of course, they do not see themselves as a depraved net, but as a “particular elite of chosen people”). On the other hand, it is not uncommon for these structures to establish links with other nets of corruption in other spheres (economic, political, sects and occultism, etc.).

In this background, I think it necessary not to misunderstand the concept of tenderness. Tenderness is a virtue that denotes “a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love” (Pope Francis, 19-3-2013). However, there is the clear risk of mixing up tenderness with “weakness”. The Sacred Scripture tells us about this, but also Popes Francis, Benedict XVI, Saint John Paul II, the Blessed Paul VI and Saint John XXIII, to mention but a few, have dealt with these subjects. To sum up, Christ is and acts with tenderness with each one of us, but he is not at all “weak”, “sycophantic” or “affected”. Magisterium regarding this can be found at: www.obispadoalcala.org/ternura.html

As Bishop I condemn all unfair discrimination. Our diocese wants to keep on giving help to everybody, with a true compassionate heart, with scrupulous respect, without judging the others (*Cf.*

Pope Francis, 28-7-2013) and all this from truth. Once this said, it is necessary to make a final remark *related specifically* to the structures or nets infiltrated in the Church that abuse vulnerable people. I do not want my words to be manipulated by generalising my statements; this letter exclusively refers to some things that occasionally happen in the Church. In 1987 a North-American magazine published an article announcing, in a satirical tone, a strategy to promote sexual intercourse between people of the same sex, also inside the Church. The truth is that, unfortunately, what seemed a simple announcement or project has become - with all the necessary preciseness - a dramatic reality. Because of its topicality, I invite you to read the full article, which can be found both in its original English language and its Spanish translation at: www.obispadoalcala.org/colonizacionideologica.html. We must remind ourselves here that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with Cardinal Ratzinger's signature and Pope Saint John Paul II's explicit approval, already told us in 1986 about the debate that has recently arisen with great publicity in some areas and that is related to this leak: *an increasing number of people today, even within the Church, are bringing enormous pressure to bear on the Church to accept the homosexual condition as though it were not disordered; they seek somehow to undermine the teaching of the Church.* (Cf. *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, nn. 8-9*).

5. Candidates to priesthood

As the Church demands, not only for what has been stated, but also for it, it is very important to avoid the ordination of candidates feeling Same-Sex Attraction (SSA). As a matter of fact, the Catholic Church teaches: *Ordination to diaconate and priesthood of homosexual men or men having a tendency to homosexuality is absolutely ill-advised and imprudent and, from the pastoral point of view, very risky. A person having SSA is not, therefore, fit to receive the sacrament of the Holy Orders* (Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacrament, *Letter May 16th, 2002*). *It would be gravely dishonest for a candidate to hide his own homosexuality in order to proceed, despite everything, towards ordination. Such a deceitful attitude does not correspond to the spirit of truth, loyalty and openness that must characterize the personality of him who believes he is called to serve Christ and his Church in the ministerial priesthood.* (Cf. *Congregation for Catholic Education, Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders, n. 3*).

6. Some lines of action

In line with the Holy Father's suggestions, I want to point out some lines of action.

- a) It is my intention that this letter arrives to the whole Diocese of Alcalá de Henares (priests, deacons, religious men and women, catechists, families, educators, professionals, authorities, etc.); for this reason I ask all priests, religious men and women, Christian lay faithful and Catholic institutions (associations, communities, etc.) to copy it and distribute it widely.
- b) As already pointed out, the Diocese of Alcalá de Henares website has created a specific portal that may prove useful to all. I also ask you to make it known: www.obispadoalcala.org/abusos.html
- c) The Diocesan Bishop remains at everyone's disposal and, particularly, those who have suffered abuses and their families; in addition, as has been already implemented in other dioceses, I have taken the decision to create a *Pastoral Care Service for the possible victims of sexual abuse, their families and communities*, linked to the *Regina Familiae* Family Orientation Centre (COF

its acronym in Spanish) of our diocese. As well as offering any other good and necessary help, the COF will give the systematic support (spiritual, psychological, legal, etc.) that may be needed (www.cofalcala.com).

- d) Some time ago, I had a filter contracted for all the Diocese internet ADSL lines directly depending on the Diocese (Bishopric, parishes, seminaries, Caritas, etc.); this filter does not need installing, since it depends directly on the server, and it offers a lot of interesting protection services, among those is a service which limits Access to websites with inappropriate contents. I recommend its use; it is not only useful to protect minors, but it is also of great help for the self-protection of young people and adults of any age.
- e) As soon as possible, the Bishop will organise lectures for priests, lay people and seminarians, that will be given by a specialist in the subject.
- f) The Diocese will contact the *Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* with the aim of informing them about our initiatives and welcoming any suggestion made to us.

Conclusion: Hope and Invitation to Prayer

As the Apostle Paul reminds us “*hope does not disappoint*” (Rm 5, 5). Anchored in this hope, I invite you all to pray, in the first place, for the victims and their families, for truth and justice; we must also pray for the assailants’ conversion and, in general, for those who lead a double life. *Likewise, we must thank God and pray for our meritorious priests, deacons and religious men who, with the help of the Holy Spirit, remain faithful to their vocation at the service of God, the Church and neighbour; it would be unfair to favour a widespread climate of suspicion.* You should also pray to the Lord for us, the Bishops, so that we remain faithful to our ministry of teaching, sanctifying and ruling with love, mercy, tenderness, truth, courage and determination. “May the Lord Jesus instill in each of us (...) the same love and affection for the little ones which characterized his own presence among us, and which in turn enjoins on us a particular responsibility for the welfare of children and vulnerable adults” (Pope Francis, 2-2-2015). We all are called, with God’s grace, to live in humbleness, simplicity and praise, since we know that if we are not like children we will not enter the Kingdom of Heavens (Cf. Mt 18, 3). Lastly, let us ask God, by the intercession of the Holy Family - Jesus, Mary and Joseph - and of the Saint Martyrs Pelagius and Maria Goretti, for the gift, for all of us, of a pure, merciful, fair heart, anchored in Love and Truth: two names for God (Cf. Benedict XVI, 3-2-2013).

Alcalá de Henares, March 7th, 2015.

Festivity of the Return of the
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www.obispadoalcala.org/abusos.html