

# MACSAS

Minister & Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors

## Response to and critique of Pope Benedict's Pastoral Letter to the People of Ireland

by

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I have taken time to analyse the letter from Pope Benedict. It is a very sad reflection on the Catholic Church. That our leader can obfuscate and deny responsibility for Bishops responses worldwide shows us the depth of the Vatican's manipulation and control via pastoral letters.

The Pope said:

*I am deeply disturbed by information which has come to light regarding the abuse of children & vulnerable youth...*

Has it only now dawned on the Pope the widespread abuse of Children? As Cardinal Ratzinger he had a high office dealing with child sexual abuse. He has known for decades the issues of Clerical sexual abuse. To suggest he is only now aware of the issues in Ireland is disingenuous.

*[Bishops in Rome from Ireland] ...offered an analysis of mistakes made*

They were not 'mistakes' there was a deliberate policy of 'preferential treatment for sex offender priests over the care and safety of children'. To say Bishops made mistakes as if they were schoolchildren blotting their copy books is a serious minimization of the truth.

*Meeting the pope has made Irish bishops stronger...*

Given that the meeting had no independent observers we have no idea what the Pope actually said to the Bishops...

*painful situation...resolved by perseverance and prayer and great trust in the healing powers of God's grace.*

The euphemism 'painful situation' ignores the horrendous experience of children across Ireland.

Is the Pope implying if we pray hard God (in his Grace) may or may not heal us! It is rather galling to even suggest that healing is actually on offer from God depending on our prayer!

*In order to recover from this grievous wound , the Church in Ireland...*

BEFORE addressing the needs of survivors the Pope addresses early on the wound of the Church

This indicates the real priority for the Church. He uses a rationale that to acknowledge harm done to children, and by sincere sorrow ...the CHURCH will recover.

Then he goes on to praise priests, elevate priesthood and suggests by *intercession with saints and purified by penance*, he **hopes** the CHURCH in Ireland will overcome this present crisis.

To read that the Pope is concerned the 'Church' survives before the survival of the victims is again a huge disservice to the victims. The present crisis is not for the CHURCH but for victims and survivors whose many lives have been destroyed.

The whole of paragraph 3 lauds the priesthood.

Para 4 *The Church in Ireland has had to confront new and serious challenges to the faith from rapid transformation and secularisation of Irish Society. ...often affecting people's traditional adherence to Catholic Teaching and values. ...*

The Pope continues in this vein describing our lack of devotional practices which were neglected. Thus he is directly blaming the people of Ireland...not the Hierarchy though he suggests the priests and religious (not bishops!) failed to consider the gospels. So faith itself will stop paedophilia. This shows gross ignorance about the nature of sex offending

*In particular there was a well-intentioned but misguided tendency to avoid penal approaches to canonically irregular situations.*

This is really very alarming. He castigates Irish hierarchy without any reference to the Vatican's role and policies. He says that this happened in Ireland yet fails to address WHY the consistent policies of Bishops WORLDWIDE was to move offender clergy, ignore and vilify victims and promote 'gag' orders.

What are 'canonically irregular situations': Child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of adult women who seek help (my PhD thesis), secret children born to priests 'partners', abortion of priests children.????

Is he now going to regulate all these abuses by his clergy.

He lays forth 5 'reasons' for the 'present crises' (sic) :

I read this to mean 'present crisis for the institutional Church' not the children or victims of abuse!

1. *Inadequate procedures for determining the suitability of candidates for the priesthood and religious life*

As vocations decline seminaries take 'anyone'. There is in the Vatican a total disregard of peoples wishes for married clergy and female clergy. This will not stop paedophilia but it might stop the tendency now to accept all and any male that puts himself forward.

2. *Insufficient human, moral, intellectual spiritual formation in seminaries and noviciates.*

He fails to mention the sexual abuse and exploitation of seminarians in days past. Placing the onus on moral standards does not address the widespread abuses in seminaries in the past. The almost pathological aversion to sex and dangerous messages that women are/were a dangerous species. None of this causes sexual abuse but I mention because it seems very disingenuous to blame formation for paedophilia. The Church's attitude to women and sex had had a profound detrimental effect on male clergy resulting in more Catholic Clergy abusing sexually women they minister to. With statistics showing more catholic clergy sexually abuse women than they do children.

3. *A tendency in society to favour clergy and other authority figures*

...and who encouraged that? Why blame the congregations for this. They were indoctrinated into the belief that clergy were next to God.

#### 4. A misplaced concern to avoid scandal

This seems to me the crux of the matter and THIS came from Rome.

#### 5. Failure to apply canonical existing canonical penalties

I believe directives from Rome to all Bishops mandated this.

In paragraph 5 he reminds us that in his address to bishops of Ireland in 2006 he said  
“to establish the truth of what happened in the past, to take whatever steps necessary to prevent it accourting again, to ensure that the principles of justice are fully respected and above all to bring healing to victims...”

Yet the Murphy inquiry (and most other inquiries) found obstruction, prevarication, and outright sabotage of the state inquiry processes. Even the Vatican’s ‘diplomat’ wriggled out of co-operating.

How come we STILL have Church insurers insisting on ‘Gag’ orders.

### **His individual paragraphs to different groups:**

#### **Victims and families**

By exhorting victims (and their families???) to keep close to the Church, to align with Christ’s suffering and by prayer he actually puts survivors on a ‘guilt’ trip. Those who cannot do this will not be healed...according to this theory. This I find insulting. Many survivors, if not most CAN distinguish Church from Christianity. They reject CHURCH but actually many are still Christian. This paragraph is a judgement on Catholic Survivors faith. Ergo...if you don’t align to Christ’s suffering (and be part of the body of the Church) you cannot heal.

#### **Offenders**

Still shrouded in the ‘prayer fog’ . A total inability to comprehend the nature of sex offending.

#### **To Parents**

Parents are told THEY have the task primarily of love, safeguarding, moral development and promotion of the Catholic Faith. Hence I read this as admonishment of parents. THEY have been asked to safeguard their children. This might indeed be part of parenthood but why say this in the context of CLERGY sexual abuse where the failings of the Church, the attitude to poor Irish families, the power of the structures all conspired to divest parents of their rightful position.

#### **To young people**

Too late...they’ve gone!

#### **To Priests & religious**

More ‘prayer fog’ , mentions nothing about fellow priests not reporting their colleagues, protecting them or sheltering them. Most clergy know of the behaviour of their ‘brothers in Christ’. This was not addressed by Benedict.

#### **To Bishops**

[Bishops] failed to implement the canon laws

Serious 'mistakes' were made

Grave error of judgements

Failures of leadership occurred

Yes, all this needs to be said, why did he take so long to say it! Basically the people of Ireland forced this out of him. Nevertheless he does not call them to account (dismissal).

Continue to cooperate with the civil authorities

Well the Murphy report describes continued obstruction and difficulties with the Church authorities & the Papal Nuncio also did not 'co-operate' so why is he saying they are co-operating and to continue this?

It is imperative that child safety norms of the church in Ireland

What about the civil norms of child safety?

Only decisive action...will restore the respect and good will of the Irish people towards the church.

Well I feel the betrayal has gone so deep I doubt that 'respect' and 'goodwill' will return...

Be Holy...

Nothing about restoring relationships with victims, but concentrates on bishops restoring the laity's trust in THEM and the CHURCH.

### **To all the faithful of Ireland**

Young people...should be encouraged to ...aspire to high ideals of holiness, charity and truth and to draw inspiration from the riches of a great religious and cultural tradition.

Not in Ireland it wasn't. The 'tradition' was subjugation, deference, fear and abuse for many. Truth we now know was not high on Bishops agenda, charity was compromised in Bishops responses to victims who were invariably annihilated or rejected (by the community as well).

Benedict says He Has...confidence in your ability to respond to the present challenges of the present hour by drawing renewed inspiration and strength from Ireland's noble tradition of fidelity to the Gospel, perseverance in the faith and steadfast in the pursuit of holiness...

Benedict fails to understand the true tradition in Ireland 'fear' of clergy & of God.

Damnation/mortal sins/confession for minor issues etc all transpired to create a culture of a fearful Christianity. Nothing noble in it at all.

I am praying earnestly that, by God's Grace, the wounds afflicting so many individuals and families may be healed and that the Church in Ireland may experience a sense of rebirth and spiritual.

Two things here... why should we hear that 'healing' is by God's Grace..as if God choses whom to heal and whom not. So 'grace' will only be poured upon some...I find this theology of God's healing offensive. Healing is not by God's Grace. It's by hard emotional and personal suffering and discovery of one's true self. Often years of help needed. Why should we believe if we suffered for 5 or 10 or 20 years then God did not grant the 'healing grace'.

If we are healed the Church will have a rebirth....

**Concrete Initiatives to address the issues:**

<p>Pray for an outpouring of God's Mercy and the Holy Spirit's gift of strength upon your country. Friday penances for one year to achieve this</p>	<p>Do we beg God for his 'mercy'? is God a vengeful God? Does God chose whether to offer mercy or Not (as above)? Pity the first initiative is to pray for mercy and strength rather than comfort or care of victims.</p>
<p>Offer up fasting, your prayer, your reading of scripture, and your works of mercy in order to gain the gifts of healing and renewal for the Church in Ireland...</p>	<p>Oh...not for the victims. I see... Should all survivors now enter this 'penitence' for their healing. Haven't they suffered enough. Does God want more suffering.</p>
<p>Avail yourself of the Sacrament of Reconciliation..to avail of the transforming power of its Grace</p>	<p>Yes...well as above</p>
<p>Adoration of the Eucharist...to make reparation for the sins of abuse...and [pray for] deeper sense of mission</p>	<p>If all these suggestions are for Bishops I see the point however this is under a section of 'concrete suggestions to address the situation' . personally I feel praying is not the primary initiative required. What about Vatican renewal , Vatican changes, new policies, new directives, new order and direction?</p>
<p>This will lead to a rebirth of the Church in Ireland</p>	<p>Everything seems geared to healing the Church...not survivors. The Church must survive. ..victims are invisible.</p>
<p>Apostolic Visitation..visit parishes, seminaries, and religious congregations to assist the local church on her renewal..</p>	<p>Not to assist survivors I note</p>
<p>A nationwide mission for all bishops priests and religious..discover the roots of your faith</p>	<p>What about child protection training for all Bishops, priests and religious orders so they discover a profound understanding of child abuse! It's not God they need to understand...it's sexual abuse, children, paedophilia, crime and punishment.</p>
<p>May the priesthood in Ireland be revitalised, and may the whole church in Ireland grow in appreciation for the great gift of priestly ministry.</p>	<p>Earlier he said the laity were at fault for raising priests on pillars...yes well... What about the great gifts of victims/survivors?</p>
<p>Prayer for Ireland</p>	<p>Better a prayer for survivors/victims...</p>

It is with deep worry that I have to say that the Papal Letter shrouds the issues in a religious/spiritual fog and expounding lack of faith, of vocation of secularization and so forth for the Church and Ireland's corruption. The constant exhortation to prayer leaves little by way of 'worldly' essential suggestions .

There is no apology for Vatican directives for secrecy, for Vatican sanction of moving clergy about, for Vatican sanction of not reporting to civil authorities, for perverting the course of Justice and so on.

There is nothing on how to help survivors heal other than we pray for God's Mercy to do that. (sic)

His references to Bishops 'mistakes' leave abuse in the realm of classroom errors not a travesty of Justice.

To imply abuse by clergy is due to lack of faith...hence the extensive exhortation to pray, simply compound's the pain of survivors for they too are included.

The Pope seems more interested in helping the Church survive...not the victims.

In essence the pope rejects the role of himself prior to becoming Pope and after for any abuse across the world

He acknowledges little except to blame Irish Bishops under direct obedience in Law. The ordination of Bishops and Cardinals includes an oath to keep secret anything that might cause scandal to the Church-perhaps this is why 'scandal to the Church must be kept secret by all and by survivors through 'gag' orders.

He blames Ireland for lack of faith.

The papal letter is one of abject rejection of transparency, truth and Justice. Better by far to blame the Irish Bishops rather than an intrinsic evil within the culture and tradition of Catholicism.

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