

## **Clergy Accountability and the Media's Response**

Media coverage - Role of journalists and media in relationship with the  
Catholic Church - Overall impact these events have had on the Church

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### **Media coverage**

This is the first time I have spoken to a group of journalists and experts in media on the topic of sexual abuse. Previous discussions have always been with in-house canon lawyers, Bishops, Procurators General and Religious Superiors. Most of the time they come to us at the Congregation. If I may be honest, because of the delicate nature of the work of the Congregation, I instinctively hesitated before accepting this invitation. Then I thought about it and decided to come. Here are my thoughts and some personal reflections on what I see as some elements of clergy accountability and the media response from the view point of someone who works at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The first thing I would like to say is that often the media response to anything to do with sexual abuse takes place at a different pace in respect to that of the church. It is often much swifter, more immediate, often more agile than the Church's. We live in a world of breaking and rolling news. Let me give you an example. A year before I was ordained to the priesthood in July 1993 I was studying at the Irish College in Rome. One day Bishop Eamonn Casey from Galway, probably the best known, most media-friendly member of the Irish Episcopal Conference at the time, came to visit. Some students had heard through the grapevine that the real purpose of his trip was to see the Pope. As it turned out he did in fact go to see Pope John Paul II. The following day, I saw his slightly hunched figure shuffle into the elevator. A car arrived at the front door and brought him to the airport. He was never seen again in Rome.

Just before he departed, I remember instinctively waving to him and he half waved back, but the gesture did not have any enthusiasm, more an overtone of dejected resignation. The next day a faxed copy arrived of one of the main newspaper's coverage of the Pope's acceptance of that very resignation because of his relationship

with a woman which had resulted in the birth of a child, a son, Peter. I said that the media is often swift. We in Rome saw him with our own eyes but didn't have the full story. The breaking news about him came from elsewhere.

I was only a deacon at the time, fresh with enthusiasm, but I felt that something profound and existential had changed not only in Ireland in 1992 but in the world and also in the church. On the day the fax came, I knew that I was experiencing for the first time a pivotal movement in my country's relationship with the Catholic church as well as the direct impact of media coverage on the context in which I was about to minister.

As it turned out that moment was a to be watershed. Over the course of the next quarter century the reality, implications and subsequent coverage of other aspects of clergy accountability, including sexual abuse, became a constant theme worldwide. I am convinced that recent developments in Ireland like the referendum to change the Constitution to allow same-sex marriage as well as the recent passing of abortion legislation are due in great part to the fallout of sexual abuse in the Church. Some have said that for many years there was a constant drip-drip approach in the media, and as it turns out they certainly had a lot of material to disseminate. This is certainly the way we felt in Ireland. However, as is often the case, many people are convinced that their experience feels more intense, as is perhaps the case now in countries like Brazil, Chile and Poland. As Journalists and media professionals you will have mapped the significant shifts and developments, and you know from conversations you have had that people's lives are changed. One who was impacted by the global events was my pastor, already a shy man, who declared to me in 1996 that he would no longer wear his roman collar outside the parish because he felt guilty by association of sexual abuse. He used to retreat into himself and often reminisced on how in happier times he used to minister to full churches, with sodalities and societies of men and women each week and faith groups of young people. He remembered the joy he once had. He thought with fondness of how carefree he felt in being in the presence of children. He also remembered how the clergy had been united and supportive of each other. He died soon afterwards but felt that the remaining years of his ministry had been contaminated by something he had not created.

Fast forward to 1998. Five years after priestly ordination I found myself back in Rome for what I thought was a period of graduate studies. After these were completed, I was set to return to Ireland but instead was called to work at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, under Cardinal Ratzinger. The main purpose of my employment, I thought, was to examine matrimonial cases but after a very short time I was drafted into the study of child sexual abuse in the Discipline

Section, on a part-time basis. I felt a sense of relief to move away from this work when I was appointed Financial Administrator and head of the matrimonial section for two years but then I was then thrust back into the world of sexual crimes against minors, this time as the Head of the Discipline Section in January 2017, a post I have occupied now for two and a half years.

A bit of context: The CDF has historically been known for its doctrinal portfolio, particularly under Prefects like Cardinals Ottaviano, Bovone and Ratzinger. Now for the first time since 1542 things have changed. The Discipline Section is now the largest of the four departments at the CDF both in terms of profile, staff, input and output. One Cardinal said to me as he looked at the piles of disciplinary cases in front of him that we only deal with problems. In part he was right. I said to him that it is important to remember that we may receive problems but that our main task is to offer solutions.

In secular terms, we are the church's supreme court for this area of particular responsibility. We also are about quality control. We are the appeal tribunal for courts of lower instance and also have the role of supervising the application of justice worldwide. One of our superiors has the title Promoter of Justice. Since Bishops and Religious Superiors have the obligation to report cases that have the semblance of truth to us, we are privileged to have a unique bird's-eye view of the whole global situation. On the one hand, since we specialize in this work, my colleagues and I feel somewhat like they are like doctors working each day in accident and emergency because we just see problems, crimes and scandal. Being removed from the local church, however, we have the freedom to examine each case with impartiality, with cool and calm heads, based on the law and the facts of the case. The other aspect to consider is that our office located at the cusp of Saint Peter's Square and we find ourselves in the role of being an instrument in the hands of the Pope while also being his outreach to Bishops and Religious Superiors. The task before us each day is to evaluate and judge cases and present them to the Pope for a determination and thereafter carry out his decisions. While an Official may have the case on his desk, it is not his case. Rather it is a case before the Congregation and everything to do with it, from the initial report to the final decision, is viewed and reviewed by every Superior, in a collegiate fashion. It is impossible for any procedural step or any decision be taken by an individual alone. We are conscious that our work will eventually be filed in the archives of the Congregation where future generations, yet unborn, will have access to it and will judge us on how well we carried out our responsibilities.

Most people think of the Discipline Section of the CDF and the exclusive question of sexual abuse. However the office has the competence to examine other allegations of crimes committed by clerics – deacons, priests, bishops and cardinals – for instance in the celebration of the sacraments of the penance and the Eucharist as well as handing delicts of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults, and by that we understand those who habitually have the imperfect use of reason. This enormous task was given to us and formulated in the *motu proprio Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* of John Paul II in 2001. It was later renewed in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI with some modifications in order to give victims more time to present their cases for evaluation.

So over the years the legislation has developed and so too has the office. When I first began in 2004 there were five officials. Now there are now seventeen, fifteen priests and two lay people. Four other officials of the Congregation help us out from time to time with individual cases. In all honesty I could do with more. I know that our Superiors are actively seeking to take on more staff. However, put yourself in the shoes of a Bishop or a Major Religious Superior. You have sent a priest or a religious to study canon law and he or she is ready to defend a doctorate. You need him or her to come back home straight away and then suddenly the Vatican calls, asking for staff. The other difficulty is that there are people who are not suitable for this kind of work, people who would not be comfortable dealing with this material, inside an office all day, far from home. It takes a special person and a special set of skills. My goal is that we should some day be able to reduce the numbers to a skeleton staff and so that my priest colleagues can go back to what they were ordained to do. I wish that we will be able to work ourselves out of a job.

Talking about staff, only recently, for instance, the Ratzinger Foundation has offered some funding to allow us to take on two people for three months in order to compile a more substantive set of statistics which should be of interest to us and to other authorities in the Church. Those who examine the cases each day come from all over the world so that we can examine read the material in the approved curial languages (English, Italian, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Polish). All but one colleague is a canon lawyer and 15 of the 17 have doctorates in canon law. We work in close collaboration with our six superiors who are a Cardinal, three Archbishops, a Monsignor and a Jesuit priest. It is important also to remember that the team of seventeen can best be described as the day staff. The Congregation is composed of those six Superiors who are present in the office alongside the other Cardinal and Bishop members who have been named to the Congregation by the Pope. They are the real Congregation. In many ways you could describe them as the Board Members

with voting rights. A full list of who they are is available in the *Annuario Pontificio*, that red directory produced by the Vatican each year.

Coming back to our topic today, the description of this presentation says it perfectly. Throughout mainstream and Catholic media, the topic of the clergy abuse crisis is front and centre in our culture. Certainly no theological topic or any other kind of heresy comes close. I would even go even further and say that it is deeper than this. For me it is at the heart, at the very core, and some have even suggested that the church's heart has been broken in this crisis. It might be easy if you looked out my window to think that things are otherwise. Take Wednesdays, for instance. Week after week crowds gather, cheering and singing. Musical bands play uplifting music while others wave banners and flags. Newly-married couples come hand-in-hand, dressed in their wedding garments and are given front row seats. All of this is true, beautiful and real but with one eye on the cases on my desk my mind goes to other realities and to who is perhaps not there or those who no longer feel they are part of this ecclesiastical reality because of abuse. I think of those I know at home who have abandoned the church, who have said, "Count me out," who no longer believe in God, who don't teach their faith to their children. Some of these are members of my own family. In part their anger and frustration are directed at the abuser but a greater part, from my experience, is directed towards those who covered up in a pathetic attempt to protect the institution. For this reason, the latest *motu proprio*, *Vos estis lux mundi*, which came into effect on 1 June of this year, is a welcome development. I have heard that for others it is a little too late and falls short in terms of mandatory reporting to civil authorities.

This latest legislative improvement is good news. However, it is a feature of all kinds of good news that it does not make headlines. Naturally, and it sounds strange to think that it should be natural, some will tell you that they only hear and read about the bad stuff. They say that very little of what is good is broadcast. This is not altogether true. Take the Italian network RAI Uno. The national television channel broadcasts a live programme every Sunday morning prior to and after the Pope's Angelus prayer in Saint Peter's Square. They invite a variety of people who comment on the events of the week from a faith perspective and then discuss the Pope's message. When I tell my Irish friends that this is a normal part of Sunday viewing, that air time is given to this every week, they are amazed. They often tell me that they feel starved of any information like this. In fact, one couple, who had come to Rome in preparation for their marriage, was so amazed by the crowds of young people in Saint Peter's Square and of their witness to the faith, that they

decided then and there that they would return to Mass and the sacraments in preparation for their wedding.

In fact, this last example illustrates just what Pope John Paul II had foreseen when he had entrusted this work to Cardinal Ratzinger's office. He was instinctively aware of the impact these cases would have both on the credibility of the church's mission but more importantly on the faith life of a person who had been abused. He had personally witnessed the devastating impact and legacy of communism and National Socialism in Europe and now foresaw what sexual abuse might do globally. Cardinal Ratzinger and Pope John Paul II met every Friday evening and they discussed the cases that the office had prepared for submission. On Saturday mornings the Cardinal would bring back the material and the decisions, and the officials prepared the responses and sent them around the world. On Monday the cycle started again in preparation for the following audience.

### **Overall impact these events have had on the Church**

When it comes to sexual abuse and the impact on faith, on the injury to the relationship between the soul and God caused by abuse, to the tearing apart of that sacred intimacy, I sometimes find it hard to assess the full impact. I can honestly tell you that, when reading cases involving sexual abuse by clerics, you never get used to it and you can feel your heart and soul hurting. There are times when I am pouring over cases that I want to get up and scream, that I want to pack up my things and leave the office and not come back. I joke from time to time with the other department heads by offering them by desk and job. None of my friends at home wants to swap places with me.

One day I remember being in a meeting where we were discussing sexual abuse involving a particular bishop. Usually I am a very calm person but that day I wanted to get out of the chair and go home, for good. If I were to write a novel and include the details of a case or two, you might accuse me of either being very warped or having a vivid imagination. Just before Christmas, a priest came to the Congregation to discuss something. I went to meet him, a man in his early 70s, and he spent the first twenty minutes speaking about everything good that he had done. I was wondering about the purpose of his visit. He was sounding like he should have been presenting his own case to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, or at least to the Congregation for Bishops. Then, as calmly as you can imagine, he told me that he had always had a problem when it came to relationships with boundaries and young people. I will spare you the rest of the details from the file. He recounted in broad terms what he had done. What I will add, however, is that there was not even one

sign, one hint, one trace element of repentance, sorrow or acknowledgement for the damage he had inflicted. It all sounded so ethereal and disconnected to reality.

One of the worst things is seeing photographs and exchanges of chats or messages that are often presented in the acts of the case. Perhaps you have seen them too. My brothers work in the field of computer forensics, both are parents, and they just can't bring themselves to mention anything of what they see. In all honesty, this work has changed me and all who work with me. It has taken away another part of my innocence and has overshadowed me with a sense of sadness. I imagine that if you have reported on these cases it will have changed you as well. A lawyer friend in England shared some aspects of his work and said it very eloquently for me. He is fortunate because he deals most with other kinds of cases but is nevertheless convinced that this kind of work takes something away from you, something that you never get back. The only way you can do this work is if you do it in a spirit of sacrifice and service, and prayer.

Yet, having shared all this with you, I cannot even begin to imagine what the personal impact has meant in an individual case of a victim. I read the facts, I feel repulsed, angry, frustrated at what is in print before me, knowing that this was a brother cleric who had done this to an innocent minor. I have the luxury of closing the case, of going home each day and not bringing the files with me. However, I do carry it on the inside, but this is nothing compared to those who have borne this for years, in silence. What of the father, mother or siblings of the child who have to look at that child and live through this? What can they say? Everything has been taken from them. You believe me when I am telling you these things. Can you imagine what it might be like not to be believed by church authorities? What would it be like to remain silent because a person did not have the courage to come forward and name their abuser? In a broader context, and just taking one dramatic example, a recent statistic shown on BBC news reveals that one child is abused sexually in India every 15 minutes. That makes a total of 35,040 per year, and these are just the ones that are known. How many more cases are there?

In other ways, it is a privilege to be part of a dedicated group of faith-filled persons who are working quietly and efficiently, out of view, and who are not exposed to either public criticism or accolade. We are doing this because, in a word, it needs to be done. Our goal is to help and support victims, to bring about justice, repair scandal and restore what has been damaged. The only way to do something is to actually do something. Abuse is by its nature often a hidden phenomenon. Our work is by its nature partially hidden but it is also important that we produce results that can be brought out into the light. Many of the aspects of the church's response to

sexual abuse at the local level are already in the public forum and are covered by, commented by and even criticized by the media. Although I have enough cases on my desk, I would prefer them all those that are still hidden somewhere to come out. I have seen in some cases that the news of an abuse allegation reaches the Congregation by means of the media and not because it is forwarded to us by the Bishop or Religious Superior. I welcome this because it ultimately means that we can get to deal with it.

My brother says that bad news does not get better with the passage of time. He is right. Bishops and others who have delayed dealing with these cases or those who covered up in some way were in fact doing a great dis-service to everyone, beginning with the victims. With the Pope's *motu proprio, As a loving mother*, the heat has been turned up on those who are neglectful and who do not fulfil their responsibilities. I see no reason why everyone should not be on the side of the truth, in our words and in our deeds. Someone more eminent said this many years ago. Cardinal Ratzinger, my first boss at the Vatican, chose as his motto the phrase, "Co-operators of the Truth". He himself explained why: "On the one hand I saw it as the relation between my previous task as professor and my new mission. In spite of different approaches, what was involved, and continued to be so, was following the truth and being at its service. On the other hand, I chose that motto because in today's world the theme of truth is omitted almost entirely, as something too great for man, and yet everything collapses if truth is missing".

When we look at statistics from a particular country, or between dioceses in the same country, we cannot help but make a comparison, and it seems that there are only two reasons it seems why one figure is lower than the other. The first explanation is the clerics are saints and very holy in one part or the other reason is that we are not being told about the cases. This is a message we give to Bishop and Religious, not to scold them but to encourage them to be thorough in their vigilance and reporting, and do the right thing in a timely way.

### **Clergy accountability.**

If you look at the title, you will that these are the first words: Clergy accountability. I have heard some people who make the classic mistake about talking about this whole abuse question and linking it, even blaming it in part on the media rather than talking first about the clergy. That is a bit like looking into my brother's eye before taking the splinter out of my own. Fundamentally, however, it is our problem. It is a clerical problem. Of course, it is present in other walks of life but when clerics abuse, they betray a sacred trust that is placed in them in their privileged role as

pastors of souls. If it is our problem, then we should be the first to solve it. We should not need to be encouraged or pushed to do so just because it appears in print or because people are talking about it. For this reason, I applaud Pope Francis in his recent *motu proprio* as he has now made the denunciation of sexual crimes an obligation. He has called time on abuse.

There is another aspect to the question of accountability. I often ask myself how accountable are the clergy? Who has ever felt free to walk up to a priest and give him an evaluation of what he is doing, how good his homilies are, how meaningful his liturgies are, how punctual he is and how hard he is working overall? Why don't we do it? Most clergy don't have reviews. I, for instance, find myself now as a department head having to write an annual evaluation for my staff. I imagine that the same happens in your organisations. It seems that most clergy either are or perhaps feel vaccinated from this requirement after having passed through six or seven years of rigorous seminary training and assessment. I think we need to continue to be more accountable. In this context, each report in the media, every credible accusation, and condemnations of criminal activity should be a wake-up call to clergy to re-focus and be better in all that they do. The Gospel, the church's teaching and the example of countless saints and faithful should give us pause for thought. We should hear in our ears the ringing words of Pope John Paul II who said that there is no place in the Roman Catholic priesthood for those who molest the young.

### **Role of journalists and media in relationship with the Catholic Church**

Journalists and clergy are similar in many ways. For two millennia the church has been sharing its news about Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world. A journalist is a person who collects, writes, or distributes news or other current information to the public.

We know that in a topic as sensitive as abuse, there is and always will be media coverage of the facts, of what is being done or not being done in order to protect minors. However, we at the CDF find ourselves like any other lawyers in that delicate situation of not being able to comment on an open case. Sometimes our silence can be misinterpreted as inaction. Our work is covered by Pontifical Secret which sounds mystical and evasive but is in fact better expressed as confidentiality and respect during an investigation, like doctor-patient confidentiality. A person's guilt can only be established when a penal process has concluded and an appropriate penalty imposed. After that there are various possibilities for the accused to make an appeal. The precautionary measures that have been imposed remain in place for the ongoing protection of minors until the final decision is reached.

I imagine that journalists and those of you who work in the media also find themselves in the same position of having some facts to hand that they cannot share, or being privy to sources that they cannot reveal. I suppose that it is difficult being a journalist and having to investigate and report on these kinds of situations, which sometimes might involve criminal activity by other journalists, possibly neighbours or friends. There is a parallel between what you do as journalists and what we do: you are part of the medium of communication, and we are instrument in the hands of the Pope in assisting Bishops and Religious Superiors deal with these most grave crimes. We both have the same starting point, namely the situation where a possible crime has taken place, and we should both have the same purpose, which is speaking about the truth for the public good. If we consider that the purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments, then we can understand that the church's legal process and mission have the goal of offering its judges the best possible opportunity to be able to deliver justice in this particular aspect of its life.

Let me give you an example of confidentiality. Accusations of sexual abuse of minors was made against Father Boniface. His three victims lived in different parts of the country, were all blood relations but were unaware of each other's involvement with the cleric. It was something which was just never discussed. The principal victim who brought the case to the attention of the Bishop had all but given up hope of getting justice until the two others came forward following media coverage of a government review of historical abuse cases. It turned out that the cases were barred civilly by the statutes of limitations, but hopes were revived when the local pastor told them that canonical prescription could be lifted by the CDF. While the victims knew that the cleric would never face jail time, they wanted to see him be held accountable and punished in some way for his crimes. If it had still been possible to go to court, they would not have done so because they did not relish the idea of revealing the details of the past to their tight-knit community. They certainly did not want to see their photographs being taken outside the local courthouse and on placed the internet. In fact, their wives did not even know about the alleged abuse. Perhaps a frank discussion of this with the spouses might have gone some way towards healing some of their unresolved marital difficulties and mental health issues.

In a spirit of confidentiality, they approached the bishop, testified under oath, signed their statements and asked that the church do something to protect other children who might become victims of this priest. The bishop believed them, did a preliminary investigation, discussed it with his review board, found the allegations to have

semblance of truth, reported the case to the CDF and requested permission to undertake an administrative penal process. The CDF wrote back, supported the Bishop in his endeavour, and authorized an administrative penal process. Upon its conclusion, the cleric was found guilty and the Bishop imposed the penalty of dismissal from the clerical state. Refusing to accept his punishment, the cleric made use of the full appeal process, firstly to the Bishop, next to the CDF and lastly to the College for Recourses established by Pope Francis, but in the end the penalty was confirmed.

In this case the role of journalism served to provide not only information but perhaps the stimulus the victims needed to make the best possible decision for their lives. In other cases, journalists were the catalyst for change. In this case we just discussed, some journalists published a story at the insistence of the cleric and his advocate who wanted to try and paint everything in a more favourable light. The former cleric revealed names and details, something that the three cousins had tried so hard to avoid. The case became public and all the Bishop's efforts at limiting the damage were overturned. However, nothing more could be done in terms of a canonical process since the most severe punishment had been handed down already.

The world of child abuse and media reporting is not immune to the phenomenon of fake news. Let me give you an example.

Bishop Leo, a manipulative type, has from of old a particularly difficult priest in his diocese who has, in recent times, been accused of sexual abuse of a minor. They were students together in the seminary but never saw eye-to-eye. Seeing this as his chance to finally sort the disobedient and rebellious priest out for once and for all, the Bishop, after initially delaying for some time, finally got in touch with the CDF and reported the case in the hope of obtaining a punitive outcome that would see him relieved of the burden of the cleric, permanently. The CDF studied all the details presented and then wrote back, offering him guidance and correctly indicating to him what the law permits. It was clear to the CDF that the Bishop was not a canon lawyer and that his knowledge of procedural law was lacking. In fact, the accusations in this instance were not particularly grave, since they involved an exchange of chats and messages between him and 17-year olds with some mild sexual content. The Bishop reported that the cleric, under the influence of alcohol, had also requested but had not received naked photographs of the male victims. Unhappy with the advice, the bishop decided to go on an extended period of self-imposed sick leave but before departing he issued a false statement to the local media that the CDF had already resolved the case several weeks earlier which had resulted in the dismissal of the priest from the clerical state. This was clearly not true and we came to know about it

because the cleric made an appeal to us, attaching cut outs from a local newspaper. Yet we found ourselves in a position of being unable to comment on any of the details publicly. Rather, we took steps to rectify the situation so that the process could be concluded properly and so that a finding of innocence or guilt could be established for the crimes alleged. Afterwards a report was sent by the CDF to the Congregation for Bishops on the actions of the bishop in question. Throughout the entire exchange, it was not possible for the CDF to discuss any of the details of an open case in the media, even though you might think that it would have been wise to do so, especially since CDF had been named as the authority that had dismissed the priest.

What is the role of media pressure in our work? Media pressure is something which is certainly a factor in abuse cases. We see it in the acts, we read the stories on line and we are aware of it also because the bishop often mentions it in his *votum*. It is also the case that we receive reports about the case from the Apostolic Nuncio, the Religious Superior, the advocates or other parties involved. Some of these make mention of the impact media coverage has had.

Whether media pressure is present or not, we treat all cases equally. Every case gets an initial hearing either before a select group which makes procedural decisions or before a full hearing of the Congregation's Superiors. Just because we don't see the victim, just because we don't live in the parish where the abuse has divided opinion against the priest or the bishop, does not mean that we do not feel the impact. Scandal and pressure do not substantially change the incriminating facts for us, and we focus on examining the allegations. They do, however, allow us to appreciate and evaluate the impact and to take it into consideration in our overall evaluation. Scandal for us means both something that causes disgrace or damage to a reputation but also that which acts as a stumbling block to a person's belief in God. In some ways both are incalculable and perhaps even irreparable.

For us sexual abuse is itself a scandal whether it is known by one, a few or by the entire nation. We are, however, sensitive to the fact there are certain circumstances which make matters worthy of special attention. Factors prompting special consideration might be the long-standing nature of the abuse, the high office held by the alleged abuser, the tender age and number of victims, the outcome of civil legal action, those additional factors in the case that render it more grave such as the psychological damage caused such as the physical and emotional impact. If the cleric has also been accused of other problematic behaviour such as financial irregularities and abuse of authority, the CDF will take this into consideration. In a process, the Congregation often asks the Bishop to judge not only the specific allegations of

abuse of a minor but also the consider the other behaviour of the cleric, by connection, so that the full picture is considered and evaluated.

Let me give you an example. Father Erasmus has always had a special bond with children and was admired, even envied, by his peers for his ability to relate and minister to troublesome teenagers, something they felt unable to do. Father Erasmus used to target children of economically challenged families where the father-figure was absent. He also reached out to children who had been abused. He had created a kind of safe house, a residential association aimed at taking youths off the streets. He would spend inordinate amounts of time with young men, bringing them with him as he carried out his duties, send them messages late at night, lavish them with gifts such as money, cell phones, expensive clothes, designer watches and holidays. A parish audit later revealed that the cleric had kept no financial records and had deposited all parish funds into his own personal bank account. Often, while away on vacation, he would share a bed with the young men, touch them inappropriately and watch pornographic movies with them. In some cases he introduced young people to alcohol. To relieve their sense of guilt, Father would tell the victim that this was quite normal in a caring relationship, nothing to be ashamed of, and he would even absolve them in the sacrament of confession the following morning. While hearing their confession, he would often touch them in an inappropriate way. To take the young men into his confidence even further, he would often tell them what others had told him in confession. When the young men would turn 18, he would then initiate full sexual relations. In a canonical process, the Bishop was authorized to investigate and adjudicate the crimes of sexual abuse of minors, absolution of an accomplice and the direct violation of the sacramental seal as well as consider the other sinful and criminal activities. In this case the Bishop was provided by the CDF with a mandate to impose a perpetual penalty, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state.

I often ask myself how we can be more accountable? Before I try and answer this part of me feels like I need someone to come and help me get inside the mind of a person who abuses a child, to know how exactly what that person is thinking and how the whole thing comes about. Of course, I read in some of the files that some clerics were abuse as children but this explanation does not satisfy me or explain their subsequent behaviour. I believe that tackling the crisis is a nothing less than a multi-layered, collaborative project. After nineteen years of exclusive competence in dealing with this question under three Popes, the CDF has a lot to offer in terms of advice and prevention. Part of our difficulty is that we feel like firemen putting out fires and we haven't had the time to come back to the fire station to reflect on how houses should be built with more fire resistant materials. In part this is now the

responsibility of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. It is hoped that our statistics project will go some ways towards tackling this.

Other projects that we have undertaken have also been very helpful. The circular letter to all episcopal conferences instructing them to prepare guidelines has borne much fruit. We work very closely with the Congregation for the Clergy in clarifying areas of responsibility. Our on-going discussions with episcopal conferences when they make their *ad limina* visits have been informative and helpful. The same applies to the meetings we have had with Religious Superiors and Conferences of Major Religious Superiors. In some communities Major Religious Superiors are nominated for periods such as three or five years, and so our regular meetings allow us to keep the Religious Order up to date with the latest developments. Regarding a Religious who is accused of sexual abuse, the CDF has the responsibility of confirming the decree of Dismissal from the Institute. The CDF also dedicates time to informing groups of canon law students and other educational groups from all around the world who come to visit regularly. Individual bishops, Religious Superiors and Procurators General come to the office on a daily basis. We have discussions with advocates and other experts. Some of my team teach in faculties of canon law in Rome and one is a professor who has several publications on the question of sexual abuse. Two of our staff were involved in the special mission to Chile to begin the work which has already brought about a lot of change. I am a board member of DCYIA, Deaf Catholic Youth Initiative of the Americas, and recently suggested to the Board that a mission be undertaken in Chile in order to help both the deaf and to assist those deaf who had been abused sexually. My sources tell me that a deaf child is 2.2 times more likely to be abused because of the language difficulties in denouncing the abuser. Our Superiors and staff have participated in conferences and symposia all over the world. I often have to remind myself that we are doing a lot but that most of the time it is a daily challenge that is being carried out in an invisible way, away from the glare of society and without any reporting.

A story will illustrate this. I was at home in Dublin for my mother's birthday at the end of April. I arrived last on Monday evening and spent the entire next day painting the ceilings in two rooms, one with one coat, the other with two, and then the walls of both. There was a huge sense of satisfaction in that I could see what I had done and it was beautiful. My work in the office does not offer the same satisfaction. The only visibility is a kind of invisibility in that every new case of sexual abuse that we prevent means that we are doing a good job. We have to keep the focus and remind ourselves that particularly as priests who thought we were being ordained to work in parishes and to share the joys and sorrows of the faithful, we are being asked to

provide solutions to problems we personally did not create and to do it in a way that is far from the limelight and often open to misinterpretation. It is a humbling yet freeing experience to study a case, make your observations and then hand it on to your Superior who then signs off on your work and puts his name to a letter that you compose. It is like being a speech writer for the President or the Prime Minister. In so many ways your work remains invisible but not less any ineffective.

The human side of other things that you experience can, I will be honest, be a little hard to swallow. While on holidays in Ireland, and instead of staying in bed late one morning, I went to a funeral Mass. Afterwards, instead of joining the other priests who had retreated to the sacristy to have coffee, I was talking to various people in the churchyard before the coffin departed for the cemetery. A woman I did not know approached me, abruptly interrupted the conversation I was having, told me that she knew I was in Rome and then proceeded to scold me on account of the whole sexual abuse scandal in Ireland. "The church has a lot to answer for," she said, shaking her head. She kept shaking her head at me as she scowled. Part of me wanted to tell her what I was doing each day, that the office was open six days a week to combat this, that we were working as hard as we could, that we had limited resources, and the other part of me wanted to tell her to be more respectful, to leave me alone, that I was on holidays, that I am not responsible for the worldwide crisis and that there were so many things that I would love to share with her but could not because the cases were open. She eventually, having stared at me intensely, went away, still shaking her head. As she left, I told her that I agreed with her that the church has a lot to answer for and left it at that. In human terms, both the abuse its coverage, can sometimes both leave a legacy of seemingly unresolved feelings because people are only going to believe what they want to believe. I have had other experiences where groups who come to Rome are amazed that so much is being done and express their gratitude for what must be a very difficult job.

What is the overall impact of these events on the Church? Let me tell you stories from the office. I have seen bishops who were once smiling pastors turned into morose, burdened figures. A newly-elected, but to date not ordained, Bishop told me that he found out that there are many cases of historical abuse cases to be tackled in the diocese. No one told him this before they asked him to accept the responsibility. Now it is too late to say no. Some Bishops who have come to discuss cases with me have cried. There were only ordained a few years and did not expect to have to deal with this in their ministry. A South American Bishop lives in fear because an abuser priest has threatened to kill him if he takes action against him. The priest has a reputation, a wife, a child and a gun. Another Bishop came to me recently to give me

some documents in three cases we are handling for him. Five minutes would have sufficed to hand them over. He spent the next hour and a quarter telling me about the impact this whole thing had had on the diocese, on how he had felt unprepared to face this when he was ordained and how he had been happier as a missionary before being called to be Bishop. Like any Bishop, he had no one in the diocese he can talk to, no one who is in his shoes, no one who fully understands all the implications of abuse. Only the CDF can offer him any comfort. He goes away feeling lighter of heart, we return to the office with a fresh case to solve.

In addition to the damage to victims, what church leaders have found to be negative is the damaging of credibility leading to a weakening if not even a loss of faith, lower attendance in church, fewer vocations with consequent increasing difficulties in terms of staffing parishes and providing sacraments. In country after country, they witness a diminishment in the role and influence of the church and its replacement by secular values. I cannot imagine that any of you who has to write about it has noticed anything different. As Catholics you probably experience the same feelings of embarrassment, shame and repulsion in the face of abuse. You are probably aware of the extent of this in your local church and of its possible disproportionate impact on the life of believers. It is something like seeing a black spot on a white page. 99% of the page is clean but all you see is the black spot. In many ways, you might agree that the issue may seem to be sexual abuse by a small number of clerics but the real elephant in the room here is the worldwide crisis in faith, the eclipsing of truth, the rise of relativism and the loss of hope which in part is the cause of abuse and its devastating aftermath. It seems to me that there is no appetite to hear and acknowledge these realities until we sort out the abuse problem first.

In terms of media involvement, there are positive aspects to an increased awareness of this whole question: greater protection for children, greater transparency, honesty, no more hiding behind institutions, no more cover-up, people being evaluated and respected on their merits rather than on automatic respect and dignity, more authentic relationships between members of the Church, a greater democratization you could say or at least a greater meritocracy, perhaps a smaller but a more fearless and authentic church because everyone is now involved not only in the protection of children as a team concern but also in the same mission. It is like a church that is being pruned, purified, prepared for a new season. My gardener told me that I have to prune the jasmine that I have growing around the perimeter fence. He told me to do it in July. It seemed somewhat out of season for me. Then he explained the reason why. If I prune it in July, when the white flowers have faded and died, then there is time for the plant to grow back so that throughout the winter it will have

green leaves. If I wait until October, which sounds like the correct time, I will have bare branches throughout the Winter until next Spring.

A few final thoughts. I have often mentioned to bishops who were considering putting a priest back into ministry after an allegation of sexual abuse that every person with a mobile 'phone is a potential journalist and that a photo or a video of that priest seen ministering could become a headline in a newspaper and for whom the Bishop would have to respond. That is often enough to make them reconsider.

Can a Catholic media respond? I feel sure that this gathering, at which I have already heard much good news, is already a great event because it allows for a frank and direct exchange of ideas. It is always helpful to have a conversation about difficult things, to look at the complexities together and to plot a course for future progress. Like many others, journalists and media experts often have their fingers on the pulse and are in a position to do their part, and especially to encourage victims to come forward and bring their cases to the attention of the Bishop of the Religious Superior. Journalists and media professionals also have the possibility of explaining to a wide audience what is actually taking place to tackle these cases, of presenting what the church is doing and of aiding the great work of prevention. Today many people don't read beyond the headlines and we consume a lot of sound bites. Good journalism will always be good, in season and out of season, and a good journalist can change things. Good actions too will always stand the test of time. We all share the same goal which is the protection of minors and we have the same wish to leave world a little better than how we found it.