

Francis and Sexual Abuse. The Pope Who Knew Too Much

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Pope Francis has already made it clear for some time how he judges and how he intends to address the question of sexual abuse among sacred ministers. As a problem not primarily of sex but of power, not of individuals but of caste, the clerical caste.

He gave this to be understood in the [letter](#) on this question that he addressed to the “people of God” on August 20, 2018, in which he never mentions “sexual abuse” on its own, but in the combination of “sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience .”

He reiterated it in this year’s January 1 [letter](#) to the bishops of the United States, in which he continues to systematically use the triple formula, but changing the order: “the abuse of power and conscience and sexual abuse.”

He restated it even more explicitly in the closed-door [meeting](#) he had in Dublin on August 25 with the Irish Jesuits (see photo), carefully transcribed and published by Fr. Antonio Spadaro in “La Civiltà Cattolica” of September 15: “Elitism, clericalism fosters every form of abuse. And sexual abuse is not the first. The first abuse is of power and conscience.”

The [final document](#) of the synod of last October, in the paragraphs concerning sexual abuse, also made this theorem of Francis its own, attributing the cause of everything to “clericalism,” meaning “an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation,

that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given.”

Against this backdrop, the convocation in Rome of the presidents of the episcopal conferences of the whole world, scheduled from February 21 to 24, should be according to the pope’s intentions the calling to account of an organic representation of the clerical caste, before which he would present himself as the alternative and immaculate authority, entirely at the service of the powerless and the victims of power.

That’s the way it should be, in Francis’s plan. But meanwhile, events are moving in the opposite direction.

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The latest event that Settimo Cielo covered a few days ago is the case of Argentine bishop Gustavo Óscar Zanchetta and his stupefying career all the way to an elevated position in the Vatican curia, in spite of his manifest demonstrations of inadequacy and unreliability, and charges of sexual abuse against a dozen seminarians:

[> Francis From Innocent To Guilty. Bad News From His Argentina](#)

The Zanchetta case is a blatant example of those “abuses of power and conscience and sexual abuse” so stigmatized by Francis. What a shame that the whole career of such a character should be the fruit of the pope’s friendship and protection.

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A second case is that of former cardinal Theodore McCarrick. The congregation for the doctrine of the faith - as [Catholic News Agency](#) revealed on January 7 - has almost completed an “administrative” penal process, more rapid and stringent than the regular canonical one, on his misdeeds, collecting the testimonies of two other victims whom he abused, even during the sacrament of confession, when they were 11 and 13 years old, and of twelve other seminarians made the object of sexual practices when he was bishop in Metuchen and Newark.

It is therefore probable that before the February 21-24 meeting Pope Francis will adopt a further and extreme sanction toward McCarrick: reduction to the lay state.

Here as well, however, there continues to weigh against Francis the responsibility of having provided McCarrick with cover and honors for years, in spite of being aware - on a par with other representatives of the hierarchy, in this and in the two previous pontificates - of his reprehensible homosexual activity, deciding to sanction him only after there had come out into open, a few months ago, his abuse of minors as well.

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A third case concerns Cardinal Donald Wuerl, until last October the archbishop of Washington and still the apostolic administrator of the diocese while awaiting the appointment of his successor, whom Francis [thanked](#) with emotional words of pride and esteem for the “nobility” of mind that he demonstrated - according to the pope - in dealing with the accusations of having covered up sexual abuse that he

knew about, including that of McCarrick.

In effect, last June Wuerl stated that he had never known anything about the allegations of abuse against McCarrick before one of these, against a minor, had become known in the spring of 2018.

But on January 10 of 2019 both the diocese of Pittsburgh and the archdiocese of Washington **confirmed** that back in 2004 Wuerl, at the time the bishop of Pittsburgh, had learned about McCarrick's bad behavior from a former priest of the diocese, he too the victim of homosexual acts on the part of McCarrick, and had forwarded the claim to the apostolic nuncio in the United States at the time, Gabriel Montalvo.

In the summer of 2018 the report of the Pennsylvania grand jury on sexual abuse by the clergy also came down against Wuerl, who was accused of having left various cases of abuse unpunished when he was bishop of Pittsburgh.

And then there came to the field, also against him, the authoritative former vaticanista of "Newsweek" **Kenneth Woodward**, who in a commentary for the progressive Catholic magazine "Commonweal" wrote that the diocese of Pittsburgh had been known for some time as one of those most invaded by homosexual priests, starting with its bishop from 1959 to 1969, John J. Wright, later made cardinal and prefect of the Vatican congregation for the clergy, he himself with many young lovers and as his personal secretary none other than that Wuerl who was his successor.

And yet, incredibly, the word "homosexuality" never occurs in Francis's letter to the "people of God" of August 20, 2018, nor in his letter to the bishops of the United States of January 1, 2019, nor in his conversation with the Irish Jesuits. As if this problem did not exist.

When instead it is precisely homosexual activity that is the statistically dominant factor among clergy who abuse, in recent decades. Just like it is homosexual activity with young and very young men that characterizes the behavior of McCarrick, for whom only a few cases of abuse against minors are known, although these too are males.

And it is this deliberate removal of the homosexuality factor that is the Achilles heel of Francis's anti-abuse strategy, as denounced in recent days by two cardinals.

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The two cardinals are the Germans Walter Brandmüller, 90, a Church historian and former president of the pontifical committee for historical sciences, and Gerhard L. Müller, 71, a theologian and former prefect of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith.

Brandmüller, in a January 1 interview with **KathNet** and in another on January 4 with **DPA**, indeed reiterated that the problem of abuse among the clergy is predominantly a problem of homosexual activity. And therefore it must be addressed by ruling out, for starters, the admission of young homosexuals to the priesthood. All the more so in that the erosion of Catholic doctrine that is underway facilitates a growing moral justification of homosexuality.

These statements - replicated in a subsequent January 9 [interview](#) with him for the German edition of Catholic News Agency - earned Brandmüller a storm of indignant reactions, from outside of and above all from within the Church.

And that led Cardinal Müller to intervene in turn, with a hard-hitting January 7 interview on [LifeSite News](#), which sounds like a direct critique precisely of Pope Francis's theorem according to which sexual abuse among the clergy is primarily a product of clericalism, meaning the abuse of power by the clerical caste.

Müller writes:

“When a clergyman commits the crime of sexual abuse of an adolescent, the ideologues are not hesitant to accuse priests in general or ‘the’ Church - as they say - in a theologically uninformed way. This is the only case where it is still permitted to generalize in a reckless way, and even to present gleefully their phantasies of a collective guilt. When an Islamicist commits an act of terror, it is exactly the same people - with their dull prejudices against celibacy and against the despised moral teaching of the Church - who acquit Islam of any complicity and who - justly so - defend the majority of peaceful Muslims.”

And he continues, raising the stakes:

“When an adult or superior sexually assaults someone who is entrusted to his care, his ‘power’ is only the means (though also abused) for his evil deed, and not its cause. It is indeed about a double abuse, but one may not confuse the cause of the crime with the means and occasions for its implementation in order to unload the very personal guilt of the offender onto the circumstances or to ‘the’ society, or to ‘the’ Church... The offender's will for sexual gratification is the cause of the violation of the physical and emotional intimacy of a person entrusted to him. To babble on here of clericalism or of Church structures as the cause (of sexual abuse), is an insult of the many victims of sexual abuse (outside the Catholic Church) by persons who have nothing to do with the Church and clergymen.”