

Vatican Official Thanks Media for Uncovering Church Abuse

The Vatican's new sexual crimes prosecutor on Tuesday acknowledged that the U.S. media "did a service" to the Catholic Church through its aggressive reporting on child abuse that helped the Church "confront the truth."

The rare acknowledgement came from Father Robert Oliver, a canon lawyer from the U.S. diocese of Boston, speaking at his first public appearance since becoming the Vatican's "Promoter of Justice" last week.

"I think that certainly those who continued to put before us that we need to confront this problem did a service," he said in response to a question on whether the role of an aggressive American media was, in hindsight, a blessing for the Church.

"They (the media) helped to keep the energy, if you will, to keep the movement going so that we would, honestly and with transparency, and with our strength, confront what is true," he told a news conference.

Since the abuse scandal erupted in Boston in 2002 and spread around the world, some Church and Vatican officials have accused the media of irresponsible journalism and exaggeration.

One Latin American cardinal once famously said sexual abuse was "an American problem" in part "invented" by the media.

Oliver was speaking at the presentation of a report on a conference called "Towards Healing and Renewal", held last year, on the Church's attempts to become more aware of the problem and to make a universal commitment to listen to victims and prevent future cases of abuse.

Asked whether some in the Church were still in denial about the extent of problem, Oliver said: "Every single one of us begins with denial. I think it is one of the great things about the work that is being done here, that we all come to know that, in order to prevent this from happening, we all need to come to better understanding."

"I think the leaders of the Church, the members of the Church, we are no different from anyone else. In the beginning our reaction was 'no this is not possible, people don't do this to children,'" he said, adding that the Church had now found a proper way to respond to the crisis.

New Abuse Guidelines

Oliver, whose Vatican department investigates cases of abuse, is the successor to Monsignor Charles Scicluna, who held the post for 10 years before being named a bishop in Malta.

Last year's landmark symposium brought together some 200 people including bishops, leaders of religious orders, victims of abuse and psychologists.

Officials said about 600 cases of abuse—most of which took place from 1965 to 1985—are being reported each year.

The Church's crisis began in Boston in 2002 when media began reporting how cases of abuse were covered up systematically and abusive priests shuttled from parish to parish instead of being defrocked and handed over to civil authorities.

Since then, the Catholic Church in many countries has set up new guidelines to deal with cases of past abuse, prevent new cases, report abuse to police, and stop potential abusers from entering the priesthood in the first place.

But victims groups say there is much still to be discovered about how the Church behaved in the past and want more bishops who were aware of abuse to be held responsible.

Last week, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, after years of legal battles, released files of priests accused of molesting children. The city's former archbishop, Cardinal Roger Mahony, was banned by his successor from carrying out his priestly duties in public.

The files were made public after Church records relating to 14 priests were unsealed as part of a separate civil suit, showing that Church officials plotted to conceal the molestation from law enforcement as late as 1987.

Editing by Robin Pomeroy

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