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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, speaks in this screen capture of Vatican video from an event sponsored by the Embassy of Italy to the Holy See, Dec. 13, 2022 in Rome. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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The Vatican's secretary of state has dismissed the claim that clergy sexual abuse is linked to homosexuality, labeling it a "serious and scientifically untenable association."

"Homosexual orientation cannot be considered as either cause or aspect typical of the abuser, even more so when it is decoupled from the general arrangement of the person," wrote Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

The cardinal's remarks were published as the preface to a new book, *Il dolore della Chiesa di fronte agli abusi* ("The Pain of the Church in the Face of Abuse"), a volume that includes contributions from a number of Catholic theologians, psychologists and other experts on clergy sexual abuse.

Yet while the cardinal's reflections are notable coming from the second-highest ranking person in the Vatican and indirectly push against claims from a number of right-wing prelates and activists who have repeatedly tried to tie clergy abuse to homosexuality, they are consistent with leading scientific findings on the origins of abuse.

The 2011 John Jay College of Criminal Justice study, which was commissioned by the U.S. bishops' conference, found no correlation between homosexual identity and the sexual abuse of minors. Nor did the report find that homosexual priests were more likely to abuse minors than heterosexual priests, which is consistent with the findings of other studies.

Despite pressure from a number of traditionalists and conservative Catholics, who have tried to draw a connection between homosexuality and clerical abuse and to push for a crackdown against gay priests, the Vatican, under Pope Francis, has repeatedly rejected the association.

Organizers of the high-profile 2019 Vatican summit on clergy abuse — which gathered the presidents of every Catholic bishops' conference from around the world

— flat out rejected efforts to suggest homosexuality is linked to clerical abuse, as reported by America.

"To generalize, to look at a whole category of people is never legitimate. We have individual cases. We don't have categories of people," Maltese Archbishop Charles Scicluna, who also serves as an adjunct secretary in the Vatican's doctrinal office, said at the summit.

"I would never dare to indicate a category as a category that has a tendency to sin," Scicluna added.

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Chicago's Cardinal Blase Cupich, who also helped organize the summit, dismissed the connection, as well.

"It is not as a result of being homosexual that you abuse, as though homosexual people are more prone to abuse children than straight people," he told reporters at the time.

Even so, as recently as last November, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference blamed homosexuality for the abuse crisis.

"I think it would be naive to suggest that there's no relationship between the two," Archbishop Timothy Broglio said during his first press conference after his election last year, defending comments he made in 2018 that "there is no question that the crisis of sexual abuse by priests in the USA is directly related to homosexuality."

Jesuit Fr. Gerald McGlone, a clerical abuse survivor and formerly the chief psychologist at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, rebutted claims of an association between homosexuality and abuse in a Nov. 22 article in the online publication Outreach.

"Today, we know that the majority of pedophiles and other types of sexual offenders in the United States are white, married, heterosexual males," wrote McGlone. "It would be illogical, a tad uninformed and potentially harmful to suggest that being white, heterosexual or married has a role in, or even causes, pedophilia or sexual offenses."

McGlone went on to call for "more nuanced pastoral acumen and sensitivity that goes beyond simple conclusions that cause more harm" as a proper response to combating clergy sexual abuse.



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, is pictured in a Jan. 1, 2021, photo. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Parolin, in his preface to the new volume, offered a similar reflection.

"Any parceling of the person to a single datum of his or her history or personality represents a heavy and unfair a priori condemnation," he wrote.

The tragedy of abuse, he observed, is increasingly linked to "serious personality deficits," particularly regarding an individual's emotional and relational capacities.

"It becomes clearer, then, how the scourge of abuse, inside and outside the church, is linked rather to personalities that are disharmonious, severely emotionally and relationally deficient," he wrote.

In the new volume, the Italian cardinal also dismisses the link between clerical celibacy and abuse.

Instead, he calls for seminaries and religious institutes to dedicate more time and resources to the psychological vetting of priests and the formation of the full dimensions of the human person, before and after ordination.

"Human maturity: this is precisely the central, though not exclusive, aspect to be taken into serious consideration in the evaluation of those on a vocational journey, in seminaries and religious communities, and not only in the initial phase of the journey," he wrote.

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