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Doyle responds to Tomasi

by Tom Roberts

NCR Today

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations, recently made a defense of the church's handling of the priest sex abuse crisis by citing suspect numbers and by pointing the finger at other denominations, largely on the basis of an article in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Following is a response from Dominican Fr. Thomas Doyle, the canon lawyer who distinguished himself in the mid-1980s by defying the ecclesiastical strategies of the day and strongly coming to the defense of victims of abuse.

Since that time Doyle, whose clerical career took a number of hits because of his refusal to go along with the strategy of moving priests and hiding perpetrators, has continued to work to get at the truth of abuse accusations. He has served as an expert in countless cases, bringing to the proceedings an insider's understanding of both church law and hierarchical practice.

His response:

October 21, 2009

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi,
Permanent Observer to the United Nations
20 East 72nd St.,
New York, NY 10021

Dear Archbishop Tomasi,

I recently read the statement attributed to you and addressed to the United Nations. This of course, was the Holy See's response to the statement of the International Humanist and Ethical Union of September 8,

2009.

I am aware that statements of this nature, when presented by officials of the Holy See, are usually prepared by staff members. In this instance it would benefit the Holy See and you as well to dismiss the staff member who prepared this report in your name. I say this because the report contains blatantly inaccurate information and reflects a level of research that is amateurish at best. There is a great deal of up-to-date data on sexual abuse by Catholic clergy available yet your writer chose secondary sources based on out of date information which of course seriously damages the credibility of the statement.

Every paragraph contains erroneous information. For example, shifting the focus from pedophilia to ephebophilia is meaningless. The root of the problem is not the nature of the sexual dysfunction of the perpetrator but the well-documented reality that the Catholic hierarchy has responded in a consistently irresponsible, non-pastoral and dishonest manner. The most reliable research data presents two facets of the problem: sexually dysfunctional clerics who have sexually abused minors consisting of at least 6% of the clergy population in the U.S., and, more important, the documented evidence that at least 66.6% of the bishops in the U.S. have, at one time or another, covered up at least one and in most cases, several instances of known sexual abuse by clerics which is criminal behavior in both Canon Law and civil law.

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The statement claims that most allegations of sex abuse by clergy are from non-Catholic denominations. The source is a 2002 survey mentioned in the Christian Science Monitor. At this point this information is inaccurate in light of events between 2002 and 2009. There are no reliable statistics to support this claim. In fact, the Southern Baptist Convention specifically rejected calls to create a data base. The secular media has covered claims of child sexual abuse by clergy in several denominations including the Southern Baptists, Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, Orthodox Jews, Mormons and Methodists. I would refer your writer to articles that appeared in secular news media in the summer of 2007 which were based on statistics released by three major insurance companies. Your writer repeats the conclusion that "most American churches being hit with child abuse allegations are Protestant." This conclusion is meaningless. Of course most Churches are Protestant. There is only one Roman Catholic denomination in the U.S. and hundreds of Protestant denominations. Combined numbers may come close to known cases in the Catholic Church but no single denomination has revealed as many as the Catholic Church has encountered. There are indeed problems in other denominations but there are no contemporary scientific survey results that support the claim that they are either collectively or individually more than the credible reports involving Catholic clergy. But again, we return to the relevance of this information. The problem is the contemporary history of negligent response by Catholic bishops. Attempts at blame-shifting in no way lessen the scope and gravity of the Catholic Church's problem.

The fact that there is sexual abuse of minors in other professions is important but irrelevant to the issue. The Catholic Church has a role in society that is radically different from that of the Boy Scouts, the public schools or any other private or public institution. The Church holds itself out as the source of authentic moral teaching. It asks that all of its bishops and priests be accorded complete trust and respect. It has betrayed this trust countless times through sexual abuse of the most vulnerable of its members and when called to account, has responded in a defensive and dishonest manner which has only brought further discredit to the clergy and to the entire Church. I'm sure you can see that the comparison of the Church to secular institutions is a meaningless distraction. Calling attention to sexual abuse of minors in other organizations or other religious denominations does not alter the reality of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy nor does it mitigate the responsibility of the hierarchy.

As to the Church cleaning its own house, I am quite certain you would want to know that the efforts of the U.S. bishops are looked upon with skepticism by many. They focus only on that part of the problem

that distracts from their own role in this tragedy. The "Essential Norms," the "Dallas Charter," the various review boards and the many statements of regret have all been forced upon the bishops by an angry public, by the honest reporting of the media and by the threat of additional law suits. The victims have approached the civil courts for many years only because they have consistently received no pastoral support and no justice from the Church's leadership. Had there been no media coverage and no civil court involvement it is almost certain that in spite of knowing of widespread sexual abuse, the bishops would have continued to cover it up.

More important, the bishops' organizational responses and their profuse public statements of apology, regret and promise of future change are rendered not only meaningless but insulting in light of the fact that many continue to place known sexually abusing clerics back into ministry. Others refuse to inform the public of the identity of credibly accused clerics and many others continue to punish the victims through abusive court proceedings. These proceedings by the way are financed by money donated by the faithful which would be better spent on help for the clergy's victims.

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Getting rid of every priest and deacon who ever abused a minor in any way is the general response of the Catholic bishops of the U.S. and Holy See. Nothing has been done to bishops who sexually abused minors or to bishops who have enabled and covered for priests who were known pedophiles or ephebophiles. Most important and most damning for the official Church has been the almost total lack of an adequate and compassionate pastoral response, especially from bishops. It is true that many have met with victims but that is such an obvious public relations ploy that it does not deserve mention. None of the hierarchy seems to comprehend the severe spiritual damage that has been done to countless victims and to those around them. It is as if the bishops were concerned only about themselves.

The statement issued in your name contains information that is inaccurate. The more important problem for the Holy See and for the official Church however, is the tone of the statement. It reflects an adolescent level of emotional response. As such, it defeats its own purpose. Rather than lend any credibility to the response of the Holy See and the hierarchy to the vast problem of clergy sexual abuse, it further erodes what little credibility might have been left.

Fire your writers. They make you look uninformed and callous.

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ttttSincerely in Christ,

tttThomas Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D

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