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Bishop apologizes for sexual abuse of students at two Scottish schools

Simon Caldwell Catholic News Service | Aug. 5, 2013
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The bishop of Aberdeen, Scotland, has apologized for the abuse of children at two Catholic schools in Scotland over a 30-year period.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert expressed regret over the abuse during a homily at a Mass on Sunday in Fort Augustus in the Highlands.

He said it was a "most bitter, shaming and distressing thing that ... a small number of baptized, consecrated and ordained Christian men physically or sexually abused those in their care."

The comments of the bishop came just six days after the British Broadcasting Corp. screened "Sins of the Fathers," a program in which former students accused seven monks of physical and sexual abuse.

The abuse was alleged to have taken place from the 1950s to the 1980s at the Fort Augustus Abbey School, a Benedictine-run boarding school that closed in 1998, and its feeder school -- Carlekemp Preparatory School -- in East Lothian, Scotland.

Gilbert, a Benedictine, said he wanted to unite his sentiments with Abbot Richard Yeo, president of the English Benedictine congregation, who had earlier apologized to the victims.

"We are anxious that there be a thorough police investigation into all this and that all that can be done should be done for the victims," the bishop said. "All of us must surely pray for those who have suffered."

Gilbert added that the Scottish church had been increasingly effective in addressing abuse concerns.

"We want to work with all public bodies which care for the young and vulnerable adults," he said. "We wish to share our experience and share best practice so that lessons can be learned and children can always be fully protected."

The BBC interviewed more than 50 former students as part of a six-month investigation into alleged abuse at the schools.

Although many reported positive experiences, five men claimed that they were either raped or sexually abused by one priest, Benedictine Fr. Aidan Duggan, an Australian who taught at the schools between 1953 and 1974. He died in 2004. Other complaints of abuse relate to men who are still alive.

One victim, Christopher Walls, a former Carlekemp student, said the Scottish church had to atone for the crimes of the priests.

Speaking to the BBC on Sunday, he said Gilbert's apology was "thin," adding, "Let's hope that it's the beginning and not the whole thing.

"I have had nearly 60 years of having to deal with this on a daily basis," he continued. "On a daily basis I've had to swallow anger, fear and regret over my lost childhood."

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