



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Pope speaks of the “grave scandal” of perverted priest



The Pope. A "worried head" of a "worried institution"

Pope John Paul II, responding for the first time to the “grave scandal” of the perversion amongst the Roman Catholic priesthood which has resulted in the sexual abuse of youngsters has written of “the sins of some of our brothers” in his annual letter to the world’s Roman Catholic priests. His comments were very general and brief. Many Roman Catholic commentators wished the pope had gone further. The statement did not use the phrase “sexual abuse” or “paedophilia,” and offered no specific criticism of the church's handling of the issue.

The pope has spoken out on sexual abuse by priests several times since 1993, when he first denounced “suffering and scandal caused by the sins of some ministers of the altar” in a speech during World Youth Day in Denver. But this latest letter marked the first comments on the issue by the pope since a USA newspaper, “The Boston Globe”, reported on the Archdiocese of Boston’s handling of a paedophile priest, John J. Geoghan, and sparked a national crisis for the Roman Catholic church. Evidence of that growing crisis is to be seen every day in the US press. The reports are too numerous to reproduce but one indicates the nature of the atmosphere developing in the USA over allegations against the Roman clerics.

The following extract is from an article which appeared in “The Boston Globe” on March 26th. “PORTLAND, Maine Prosecutors looking into accusations of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests in Maine said yesterday they have asked the Diocese of Portland to provide information about allegations that go back 75 years.” Just what such an investigation will reveal is anyone’s guess. Boston is the Roman Catholic “capital” of the USA. It is the home of the Kennedy clan and to see Roman Catholics beginning to turn on their tormentors in this city, heralds a change of heart of earthquake proportions. A visit to “The Boston Globe” internet site (www.boston.com) will prove educational.

Reluctance

The Vatican has been reluctant to talk about the crisis in the United States. The pope's spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, has repeatedly refused to talk about the situation in Boston, and to date his only comment has been to suggest that seminaries need to rethink the admission of “gay” candidates for the priesthood.

Rome

In Rome, Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos of Colombia, who heads the Congregation for the Clergy, declined to answer questions about sexual abuse by priests, but asserted that “The church has never neglected the problem of sexual abuse.”