

Thoughts on Catholic Church Abuse Reports

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If anyone had the impression that the Catholic clergy abuse scandal, which erupted in Boston in 2002 and spread quickly throughout the United States, was limited only to this country, they were mistaken. There was clergy abuse elsewhere, of course, and scandals at other times, including here in Boston a decade earlier, in Ireland last year, and in Germany and other parts of Europe right now.

I admit I have not ever paid close attention to clergy abuse news. It has been just too personally triggering for me. I do not search out news on the clergy abuse websites (e.g., The SNAP Network and Bishop Accountability). In fact, I avoid them as best I can because it does not help me to know everything. I also am well aware that I was completely destabilized in 2002. The constant stream of news at the time triggered my second round of collapse and then recovery. As I have written before, my first round was in the early 1990s. While it was known then that there was institutional cover-up and deflection, its scale was not known. I felt a certain sense of peace that came from all of this not being too publicly prominent.

However, I now know that public awareness of child abuse leads to accountability and makes children more safe. The Catholic Church thrived on secrecy. Left to their own devices, I am convinced there would be no pressure to change. For an institution with Jesus Christ at the center and guiding influence, I find their behavior unconscionable. But I can understand it. All institutions—and governments—want to avoid scandals, many even at the cost of innocent lives.

It really is not the abuses that bother me the most. Data shows that there are more offenders, by percentage, in schools. And, percentage of abuse of children by males in the general population is also higher. What is most hurtful to me personally was the cover-up, lack of empathy, and treatment of child abuse victims, and their families, as "disposable." I told I was being abused in the 1980s as a high school student, and though I greatly minimized what happened, the situation was resolved by our family moving to another church and not talking about it. The place we called our spiritual home for four generations was taken away in the bat of an eye, and the pedophile priest who had only been there for a decade, and who was attacking children, remained.

Obviously, I did not know much about justice back then or how to find it.

In Boston, the church did make efforts in the early 1990s to "reach out" to victims through internal investigations. But that was a case of "too little, too late." For me, a decade of silence had gone by, and I was in the midst of a complete psychological collapse. I simply could not trust the church. And I had good reason not to. Even through these investigations, they did not move to isolate pedophile priests and protect

children. The only recourse for victims was to come forward and press criminal charges or file a civil lawsuit.

The focus of the church was always about its image. And since the church was "above the law," at least in practical terms, they had the upper hand. In many cases, there are voluminous records (see [Bishop Accountability](#)) clearly documenting abuse and acknowledgement by church officials that abuse occurred. However, this information was never disclosed to victims who came forward. The message from the church, through their lawyers, was never about validation and support, but about making the barriers to justice higher and higher.

Now, in 2010, the collective voice of survivors from all over the world is exposing the truth. We seek justice. We seek healing. But we also seek to stop abuse against children wherever it exists.