

SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – CONSULTATION

Convener: Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., Saint Mary's College
Moderator: Natalia Imperatori Lee, Manhattan College
Presenters: Megan K. McCabe, Gonzaga University
Michelle Wheatley, Gonzaga University
Jennifer Beste, College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

This consultation on the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church was convened by CTSA President Professor Christine Hinze to interrogate the multifaceted phenomenon of sexual abuse and cover up in the Catholic Church in the United States. The primary focus of this consultation is to examine the ways in which academic theologians can contribute constructively to better understand the historical phenomena of sexual abuse in the church (and within Catholic institutions more broadly, including institutions of higher education), analyze the past and contemporary impacts and implications, and offer responses to the ongoing dynamics related to the sexual abuse crisis. This year's session constituted the first panel convened in this consultation and specifically sought to address two case studies arising from institutional responses to sexual abuse: a Pacific Northwest Jesuit-sponsored university and a Midwest Catholic Archdiocese.

Megan McCabe and Michelle Wheatley opened the session with a case study titled, "Challenges Working on Clergy Sexual Abuse in the University." They opened their remarks by situating their experience working on a university commission within the context of the December 2018 public reports that "focused on the horrifying predatory abuse of Alaska Native girls and women by a Jesuit, James Poole, who was eventually sent to live on a safety plan in a Jesuit-owned retirement facility and infirmary" on the university campus. The following semester, the university president established the university commission to "help [the] community make sense of these various reactions, but also to build on work that members of our community had already undertaken. The goal of the Commission was to recommend a set of formal actions our university should undertake in light of Catholic sexual abuse as well as Gonzaga's institutional experience of it."

McCabe and Wheatley summarize the painstaking care and attention that went into clarifying the charge and scope of the commission, noting that the commission must center the experiences and voices of the victim-survivors. Additionally, given the context of the university, the commission especially centered those communities of Native Alaskans women and girls, communities of color and marked by poverty, and other Native communities in the local Spokane, WA area that had been affected by the twofold travesties of sexual abuse and the history of religiously sanctioned colonization. As a result of this effort, McCabe and Wheatley note that the commission found itself asking an important question: "What is appropriate for a university to do?" Furthermore, what significance does the Catholic and Jesuit identity and mission of the university have on the response such an institution of higher education ought to provide?

During the work of the commission, McCabe and Wheatley identified five key themes that surfaced as central: academics, memorials and liturgies, mission identity,

policies and procedures, and tribal relations. McCabe and Wheatley identified several particular and systemic challenges that arose in each area as the university commission proceeded in its work, including from members of the university's sponsoring religious congregation and from institutional structures (such as departments responsible for external public relations) designed to protect the university's image and reputation. In conclusion, McCabe and Wheatley pointed to the potential power and influence Catholic universities (and, by extension, theologians) have to contribute constructively to the sexual abuse crises including through the growing number of lay university administrators, while also noting the ongoing challenges and difficulties that beset such efforts within the academy.

Jennifer Beste provided the second case study, titled, "Lived Theology Through the Lens of St. Paul/Minneapolis Archdiocesan Priest-Perpetrator Files." Beste provided a summation of one case study from among several she is currently researching that arise from analysis of archival resources of priest-perpetrators in the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis.

Beste presents and analyzes the archival records, which bear witness to the systemic manner in which church leaders, religious communities, and the laity continue to support a convicted priest child sexual abuser, who regularly invoked his criminal and sinful actions in a manner to elicit sympathy and support from those to whom he sought to minister. Beste's case study brings to light the complexity of the phenomenon of clericalism, not only among those ordained ministers of the church but also among the lay faithful, while also surfacing important questions about the deployment of theological topoi, doctrines, and interpretations that are used in dangerous and manipulative contexts. This case study shines a light on the ways "lived theology" has and continues to prioritize many priest-perpetrators over victim-survivors and the communities harmed by such clerical predation, sin, and crime.

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