

Staring into the black hole of abuse in our Church - and attempting to *understand* it

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Introduction

- Focus will not be on casuistry ('one case a day keeps the press on the watch?'): neither the crimes of (sexual) abuse themselves nor the misdemeanors of cover up and its financial implications.
- The first part is a kind of diagnosis of the crisis in our Church by an review of various addresses given by Pope Francis: Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia 2013-2018, the letter to the bishops of Chile in April 2018, the Letter to the People of God in August 2018 and contributions to the February 2019 meeting in the Vatican on "The protection of minors in the Church".
- In the second part, an attempt will be presented to understand this crisis by employing the model of the 'triangle of ethics' by Paul Ricoeur and the role of 'significant others' by Charles Taylor.
- By way of conclusion: priority of baptism, resist & reject clericalism, practice *pharreisia*...

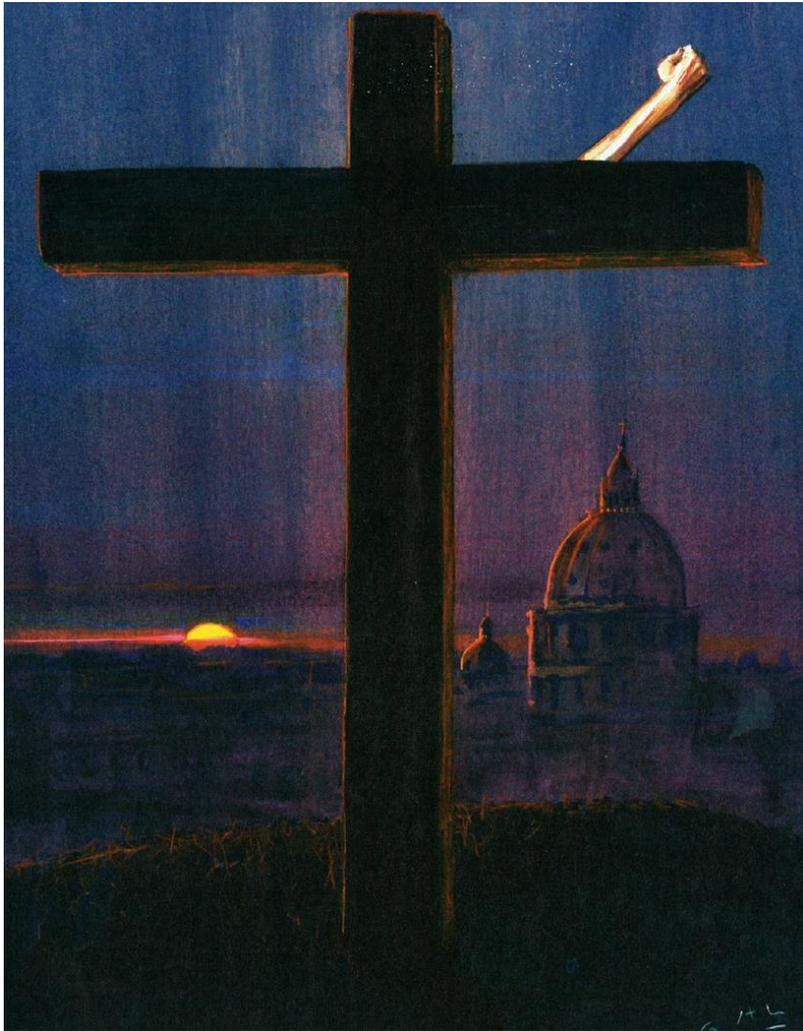
Election of Pope Francis: 13 March 2013



° Collegiality & subsidiarity in the governing of the barque of Peter and in proclaiming the God of Jesus as Good News

° Opening up and encouraging a space for discernment of the signs of the times => *aggiornamento* of 21st century!?

Aware of the bumpy road ahead... ?



- ° The crimes of sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience by clerics and consecrated persons
- ° The misdemeanors of covering up abuse and the moral and financial implications

Thesis: a toxic theological mix

- First ingredient: **clericalism** = “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.” (Quellet, 2016)
- Clericalism unpacked:
 - To be a cleric is to belong to an *élite group*, superior over against lay people
 - A cleric possesses spiritual power ~ *Alter Christus*
 - A cleric sits on a *pedestal*, but is also placed there by lay people...
 - Please note: most severe punishment when caught is ‘being laicised’ ~ reduced back to *just being lay*...

Thesis: a toxic theological mix

- Second ingredient: **theological masculinity** ~
1 Tim 2: 12 “For Adam was formed *first*, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”
- The curse of first = *primary* and second = *secondary*
 - Adam is created first which makes Eve secondary
 - Eve was the first to sin and Adam became sinner through her
- **The ‘mix’**: power tends to corrupt, and unchecked power ‘from on high’ risks to corrupts radically...
~ entitlement and impunity exactly as a cleric!

Two anecdotes 35 years apart

- 1964, Brasschaat (Belgium): sudden absolute prohibition by my mother to be any longer an altar boy for one of our assistant parish priests...
- 1999, near Liverpool (United Kingdom): 'exchange' between catholic theologians
 - 'they' = the English are behaving very badly but 'we' the Irish are not – and *vice versa*...
 - 'they' (fill out any order or congregation) are behaving very badly but 'we' (any other order or congregation) are not...

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

- Roman Curia 21 December 2013:
 - The need for conscientious objection to gossip which is an unwritten law of our surroundings
- Roman Curia 22 December 2014: a listing of “15 curial diseases”
 - 1° thinking we are immortal, immune, indispensable – loss of being self-critical, think of themselves as above others and not at their service, an effect of **pathology of power**, superiority complex, narcissism... 10° the disease of idolizing superiors, hoping of gaining their favour, victims of careerism and opportunism, of lethal selfishness but also the disease of superiors courting their collaborators in order to obtain submission, loyalty and psychological dependency ending in **complicity**

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

- Roman Curia 21 December 2015
 - Need to speak about “curial antibiotics” because disease and **scandal** became visible but reform will move forward: *Ecclesia semper reformanda*
- Roman Curia 22 December 2016
 - Sharing with you the framework of the reform of the Roman Curia guided by ecclesiology and worried by **blemishes**
- Roman Curia 21 December 2017
 - “Making reforms in Rome is like cleaning the Sphinx with a toothbrush”

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

- Roman Curia 21 December 2018

The barque of the Church continues to experience moments of difficulty and has been buffeted by strong winds and tempests.

We cannot overlook the **counter witness and the scandal** given by some sons and Ministers of the Church.

The Church **has for some time been firmly committed** to eliminating the evil of abuse but there are those who have no fear of God or his judgement but only of being found out and unmasked.

Even in any single case of abuse, the Church asks to bring it to light since the **greater scandal** in this matter is that of cloaking the truth.

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

Letter by the Holy Father to bishops of Chile, 8 April 2018

- Trust of many shattered by our **errors and sins**
- Remedy the **scandal** and re-establish justice
- **I** have made **serious errors** in the assessment and perception of the situation ~ lack of reliable and balanced information
- Resist temptation of empty verbosity

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God (~ Chile crisis): 20 August 2018

Sexual abuse, abuse of power, abuse of conscience (~ pressure to keep quiet): crimes of **clericalism**: “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people” (Quellet, 2016)

Condemn **atrocities** by clerics and consecrated persons => task to uproot this **culture of death**

Ref. Pope Benedict: how much **filth, pride, self-complacency** among those in the priesthood!

Falling victim to spiritual corruption, **culture of abuse** ↔ culture of care involving all of the Church's members

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the end of the Eucharistic celebration – 24 Feb 2019

The gravity of the **scourge** of the sexual abuse of minors is, and historically has been, widespread in all cultures and societies

Taboo: everyone knew of its presence yet no one spoke of it

This evil is in no way less monstrous when it takes place within the Church, **all the more grave and scandalous** in the Church for it is utterly **incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility**.

Consecrated persons become tools of **Satan**; no explanations suffice for these abuses involving children; we stand face to face with the mystery of evil

The echo of the silent cry who encountered tormentors will shake hearts dulled by **hypocrisy** and power; by **abuse of power**

Pope Francis 2013 - 2019

Empirical explanations are not enough, we need also understand the meaning of this criminal phenomenon: the spirit of evil – brazen, aggressive, destructive, arrogant, pride – **Satan**.

Change of mentality is needed to combat a defensive and reactive approach to protecting the institution

To improve the training imparted in seminaries

Self-accusation – not fall into the trap of blaming others

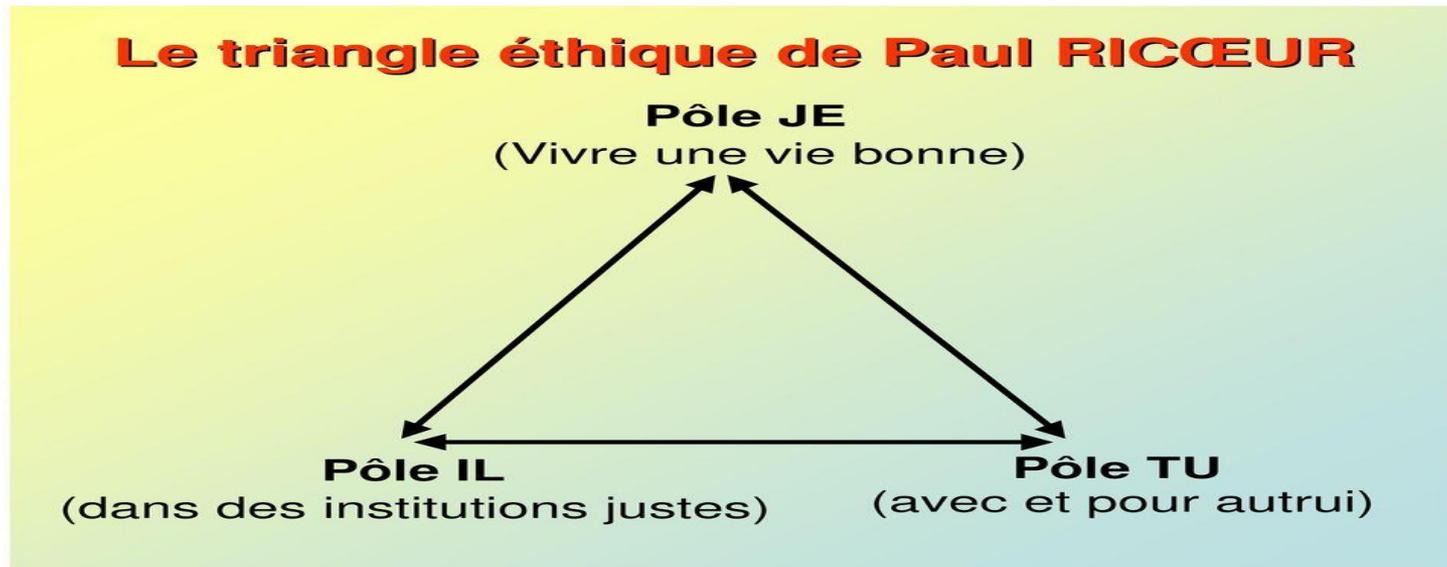
The holy and patient, faithful People of God, borne up and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, is the best face of the prophetic Church which puts her Lord at the centre in daily giving of herself. It will be precisely this holy People of God to **liberate us from the plague of clericalism, which is the fertile ground for all these disgraces**.

I make a heartfelt appeal for an **all-out battle against the abuse** of minors both sexually and in other areas, on the part of all authorities and individuals, for we are dealing with **abominable crimes** that must be erased from the face of the earth.

An attempt to *understand*

Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005)

- How to understand the collapse of institutions ~ French universities in '1968'?
- Traumatic experience as rector of Nanterre...
- Radical reflection on 'foundation of morality' =>



An attempt to *understand*



The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.

- Paul Ricoeur -

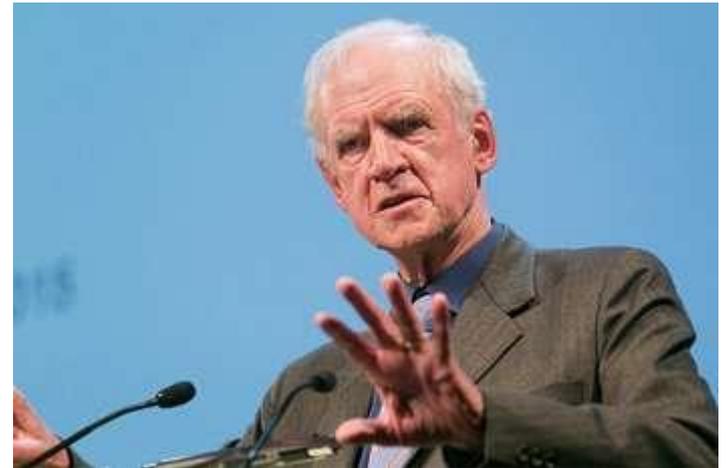
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An attempt to *understand*

“ We define our identity always in *dialogue* with, sometime in *struggle* against, the things [the virtues, the values, the norms...] our *significant others* want to see in us.

Even after we outgrow some of these others – our parents [educators and friends], for instance – and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them [role models...] continues within us as long as we live”

Charles Taylor (° 1931),
Multiculturalism, 1994.



An attempt to *understand*

The perversion of the *triangle of ethics*: decline of institutions from service to the common good towards bureaucracy => 'self-referential' and has to be protected and defended at any cost ~ toxic mix of clericalism and theological sexist (& misogynist) masculinity

The perversion of the *significant other*: the lived example of *vice* and its 'succes...' ('person without conscience' = hard work!)

An attempt to *understand*

Antidote against the toxic mix is the *radical* (= going to the root) priority of **baptism** over any other sacrament (please note: can be administered by anybody... and taken away by nobody) ~ Galatians 3, 28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for **all of you are one in Christ Jesus**”.

Resist clericalism ~ Fr Dennis C Ongansie CO in *The Southern Cross*, March 20-26, 2019, p. 6

Practice Parrhesia...

Questions...

