

# Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

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March 29, 2010

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In the Liturgy of the Hours for Passion (Palm) Sunday, part of a Sermon by St. Andrew of Crete reads: *“Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives... In his humility Christ entered the dark regions of our fallen world...his love for humanity will never rest until he has restored our earthbound nature from glory to glory, and made it one with his own in heaven.”*

These are not easy times. Priests and people feel battered and scattered by the seemingly relentless media campaign about child sexual abuse in the Church. We too have entered into the dark regions of our fallen world. This is a painful, emptying and humbling experience.

Pope Benedict XVI in his Pastoral Letter to Catholics in Ireland has expressed his dismay at the sexual abuse of young people by Church representatives and the way this was addressed by local bishops and religious superiors. He speaks of his closeness in prayer to the whole Irish Catholic community at this painful time and he proposes a path of healing, renewal and reparation.

Addressing the victims of abuse first of all, he acknowledges the grievous betrayal they have suffered and he tells them how sorry he is over what they have endured. He recognizes that, in many cases, no one would listen when they found the courage to speak of what happened. The Pope urges victims to seek in the Church the opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ and to find healing and reconciliation by rediscovering the infinite love that Christ has for each one of them.

In his words to priests and religious who have abused young people, the Pope calls upon them to answer before God and before properly constituted tribunals for the sinful and criminal actions they have committed. They have betrayed a sacred trust and brought shame and dishonour upon their confreres. Great harm has been done, not only to the victims, but also to the public perception of the priesthood and religious life in Ireland.

The Pope encourages parents to persevere in the demanding task of bringing up children to know that they are loved and cherished, and to develop a healthy self-esteem. Parents have the primary responsibility for educating new generations in the moral principles that are essential for a civilized society. The Pope invites children and young people to find in the Church an opportunity for a life-giving encounter with Christ, and not to be deterred by the failings of some priests and religious. He looks to the younger generation to contribute to the renewal of the Church.

Addressing himself to the Irish bishops, the Pope notes the grave errors of judgment and failure of leadership on the part of many, because they did not correctly apply canonical procedures when responding to allegations of abuse. While it was often hard to know how to address complex situations, the fact remains that serious mistakes were made, and they have lost credibility as a result. The Pope urges them to continue their determined efforts to remedy past mistakes and to prevent any recurrence by fully implementing canon law and cooperating with civil authorities in their areas of competence.

A side bar to the Irish Pastoral Letter has been the attempts to personally embroil Benedict XVI in the sex abuse scandals. The *New York Times* on March 25, and parroted by other newspapers, accused Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, of intervening to prevent a Wisconsin priest, Father Lawrence Murphy, from facing penalties for cases of sexual abuse of minors. The story is not even supported by the evidence of the Times.

Cardinal Ratzinger does not appear in the record as taking any decision. His office, in the person of his deputy, Archbishop Bertone, agreed that there should be a full canonical trial. When it became apparent that Father Murphy was in failing health, Archbishop Bertone suggested more expeditious means of removing him from any ministry.

Furthermore, under canon law at the time, the principal responsibility for sexual-abuse cases lay with the local bishop. Archbishop Weakland had from 1977 onwards the responsibility of administering penalties to Father Murphy. He did nothing until 1996. It was at that point that Cardinal Ratzinger's office became involved, and it subsequently did nothing to impede the local process.

In August 1998 Archbishop Weakland writes that he has halted the canonical trial and penal process against Father Murphy and has immediately begun the process to remove him from ministry. That same month Father Murphy dies.

The New York Times flatly got the story wrong. Readers may want to speculate on why.

The sin and stigma of sexual abuse is not unique to Ireland, nor is it unique to the Catholic Church. It is a sin found in all societies and nations.

Sexual abuse of children, like the abuse of women, has deep historical roots. Hopefully, by serious investigations of the social, psychological and cultural root causes of this behaviour we can eliminate it as we have made encouraging progress in eliminating violence against women.

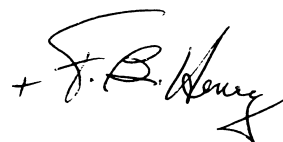
Let us pray together for the healing and reconciliation of the Irish Church, of the Church in Canada and the United States, and for the Church in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy and all those places where the Body of Christ has been deeply wounded by the sin of sexual abuse.

Together let us bind the wounds and be agents of healing, reconciliation and peace.

*"..... let us spread before his feet, not garment or soul-less olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him."*

Wishing you all the best, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "F. B. Henry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

✠ F. B. Henry

Bishop of Calgary