## Bishops' Conference "Towards Healing and Renewal" Rome, February 6 to 9, 2012

## A dialogue between religion, society and culture Fr. Edenio Valle, SVD / Brazil

#### Introduction

1. The inclusion of the theme "A dialogue between religion, society and culture" in the programme of this conference shows that the organisers knew from the start that it was necessary to situate the internal crisis affecting the Church in the wider context of today's contemporary society and culture. An explicit, albeit brief, reference to the historical and social situation is fundamental in order to adequately place the more specific subject of sexual abuse by priests of our Church. It enables us to direct the *healing and renewal* which the Holy Father rightly insists in asking of us so as to more objectively and lucidly discern the negative and positive elements which affect the experience of sexuality in the modern world.

Therefore my presentation has two main objectives. One is to put the most immediate subject of the Conference into a social and cultural context. The other is to awaken our awareness that this question goes beyond the frontiers of the Church (es) and religion(s) but challenges it (them) in an especially new way.

These two objectives are interconnected. Together they enable us to see that only by giving a convincing response to its internal problem will the Church be in a position and have the credibility to carry out its responsibilities in creating an atmosphere in which distortions in sexuality can be treated, both within and outside of the Church. The establishment of a respectful and honest *dialogue* between these two objectives is a condition for enabling political ethico-philosophical, political, legal, medical, socio-pedagogical and religious measures for us to set a limit to the violence and distortions which the modern consumer and mass societies impose on people and human groups, not exempting the clergy.

2. I will start by outlining a brief picture of the present situation in Brazil, a multicultural country undergoing rapid transformation in every field, including those of the religions and of sexual concepts and behaviours. What is observed in relation to the problem of the sexual abuse<sup>1</sup> of children by ministers of religion and other helping professions comes into this context.

Secondly, I will complete the panorama with some remarks about the sociological and cultural conditions historically affecting these forms of abuse in countries like Brazil, where

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The expression "sexual abuse" will be used here to indicate the direct or indirect use of power and moral ascendancy which the father possesses, in order to draw sexual benefit from people (children in this case) whom he should, by duty of his office, defend, protect and help to grow. In general it also implies "sexual harassment" which may or may not involve various forms of coaction. With the word "harassment" I refer to the captious way in which the abuser makes his approach to his victim. Harassment almost always takes place in concomitance with the abuse itself. In modern societies and modern legal codes the two behaviours are liable to punishment, maximum for paedophilia. I add two other concepts, both also referring to sexual behaviours incompatible with that proposed by the Church for its ministers in placing celibacy as a condition for ordination to the presbytery. The term "inappropriate sexual conduct" is more generic. I will reserve it more for relationships between adults, as it may imply a certain degree of consent between the parties. Two other terms are apparently antithetic: that of "seduction", a behaviour which is not unusual in the paedophile's approach to his victim and that of "violence" which may arise from a pathological defect.

millions of families live in conditions of fragmentation, poverty and abandonment, making children even easier victims of sexually immature individuals.

To conclude I will attempt to summarise some essential points as guidance for what the Catholic Church must do in order to have a positive influence in the formulation of laws, public policies and socio-educational work to protect children and adolescents, carrying out first and foremost its principal task, the *healing and renewal* of hearts and minds, in line with evangelical values.

3. My presentation will refer preferentially to the dimension of psychological healing, as I see it through my many decades of practice as a psychotherapist and spiritual director of priests and clergy – including some paedophiles – who were in need of specialised psychological therapy.

#### I The underlying socio-cultural and religious problem

- 1. The structural transformations created by the globalised and secularised model dominant today all over the world carry serious mismatches between certain cultural configurations which were useful in the past and others emerging from a new social situation, for the questioning of which the Church must give convincing answers. Scandals like those exhibited for the abusive sexual behaviour of a part of the clergy made public opinion and the media take a rather sudden interest in the sexual life and sexual behaviour of priests, a subject which causes many difficulties for the Church, being a socially controversial question. The sociologist Lúcia Ribeiro believes that there is absolutely no need to "demonstrate that the ways of living one's sexuality always socially conditioned undergo profound changes" which Ribeiro (2004, p. 65-66) lists as follows, referring to authors such as Giddens (1992), Arilha and Calazans (1998); Bozon (1998) and Fuller (1999):
  - sexuality comes to be appreciated for itself;
  - scientific knowledge about human sexuality has become greater and it is relatively easy for anyone to disseminate information;
  - this gives a unilateral and exaggerated visibility to a fundamental dimension of human fulfilment but focuses on it in a way that does not favour a person's overall maturity;
  - in gaining such visibility, sexuality is transformed from a private question into a theme for public debate, leaving it up to the media and to the market to orchestrate the discussion and point to the criteria;
  - simultaneously there is a gradual liberalization of standards of behaviour, starting with the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and despite being questioned, this revolution marks a turning point, signalling significant changes;
  - there is also more acceptance of sexual diversity which leads to the assertion and greater cultural visibility of alternative forms of sexual preference which are no longer seen as a disease or perversion;
  - in this same direction, the concept of sexual rights, though controversial, starts to gain legitimacy, becoming an important political banner;
  - political movements in defence of LGBT cases are organised in the major western countries:
  - this leads to a tendency towards greater tolerance and a certain relaxation in the moral area, once the rules become more flexible and an ethic of desire is confirmed;
  - all these transformations particularly affect women, previously subjected to stricter standards of control. As a result, male standards of sexual behaviour also fluctuate. Theologians, sociologists and psychologists quite rightly begin to speak of a "new masculinity".

2. To introduce the dimension of *pluralism* and *secularisation* I will refer to what the Brazilian newspapers report of how Pope Benedict XVI stood before the wave of public protests which arose when he visited his home country; I was struck by the emphasis he placed on secularization as one of the factors which explained the areligious attitude of many of his German countrymen. More than his theoretical explanation, I think that his way of speaking can serve us as an inspiration and guide for how to behave in the face of the sexual abuse of minors, whether in society or in the Church.

In his forceful speech at Freiburg the Pope said that the Church needed "an inner purification, together with the despoilment of its earthly wealth and its political power". It should respect the secularising tendency that permeates the history of the past centuries, but which has acquired new forms of expression in more recent times. Leaving aside simply apologetic concerns, the Pope recognised that these complex cultural processes were a good thing for the Church in the end "since the different periods have strongly contributed to its purification and internal reform (helping the church to) "experience more freely its call to the ministry of the worship of God and the service of other people".

Going further and referring to the demonstrations against his visit to Germany – in Potsdam Platz and in the Bundestag², aware that these demonstrations were led predominantly by groups hostile to the Church's conceptions of sexuality and to the fact that the Pope is the head of a religious state, Benedict XVI saw this behaviour as the expression of the secularised nature of modern German society, so different from what he knew as an adolescent and later as a professor of theology and as a bishop. The Pope declared that for him it was "normal that in a secularised society there should be people opposed to a papal visit". His serene and open attitude towards the charges of very active anti-religious currents in German society must have been more valuable than long explanatory and defensive discourses.

3. Fr. Alberto Antoniazzi (cf. Valle: 2003, p. 127), one of the sharpest observers of the evolution experienced by the Brazilian clergy, felt the need to associate the behavioural change of the fathers with the changes that he saw happening in living the faith, both among the Catholic people, and also among the priests. In countries like Brazil, where Catholic Christianity which lasted three centuries was replaced in a short lapse of time by another which the Church historiographers give the name of Romanised Catholicism the Church conquered ample spaces in Brazilian society. Today, however, it is almost commonplace to say that the colonial model which predominated in the Brazilian religious scenario, sociologically and culturally speaking, had fragile roots since it did not recognise the cultural plurality that existed in our country. The new Romanised model continued to ignore this conflictual situation, but its implantation had an outcome, succeeding in modernising and disciplining the life style, conformation and work of the Church. At the end of the pontificate of Pius XII the visibility, the organization and the social and cultural influence of the Catholic Church had reached its height. Vatican Council II, in the midst of discussions that were more European than ours, upset this model as well. In Europe too the post-Council period brought with it changes which deeply affected the life and mission of the churches known for the solidity of their respective clergies (cf. Bressan, 2002; Zulehner & Hennersperger, 2001) but without totally coinciding with what happened in Brazil.

Meanwhile, the remarks made by Danielle Hervieu-Léger (1999) apply also to Brazil as regards the changes suffered by the Catholic faith in countries like Christian France or Spain, where from a regime of "institutional validation" of the faith the Catholic people passed to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In Potsdam Platz the demonstration counted on the participation and leadership of groups which were aggressively hostile to the principles defended by the Church as regards human sexuality and the rights of sexual minorities. In the Bundestag the behaviour revealed the political non-conformity of the deputies who abandoned the enclosure over the privileges that the German state continues to grant to the Holy See and to the Pope.

another in which legitimation was given in communities. The ordinary Catholic began to give more value to what his communities of reference presented to him as certain, putting in second place what was taught by the authority established and/or proposed by tradition. But, concomitantly, especially in the socially ascending classes, there was a considerable increase in "individualism". People started to decide on their own. Their adherence to groups did not completely disappear, but became weaker. This tendency to subjectivise experience, mainly religious and affective and sexual experience, however, for the majority of people, is not absolute. People continue to maintain ties of solidarity among themselves. As Hervieu-Léger says, there still remains a certain "mutuality". In Brazil where the urbanization process was extremely rapid, there are observers who speak of a *massification* (even of a fundamentalist type) of the experience of faith and of sexuality. Urban masses whose religiosity conserves elements of its ancient traditions and beliefs, seek an answer to their afflictions in the North American slant of Pentecostalism crossed with Popular Catholic elements.

- 4. Also the Catholic groups who accept these models bring together huge multitudes. Their priests, almost all media attractions, enjoy enormous popularity and attract lay, religious and priestly vocations. Such vocations are more and more of a truly "popular" origin. Young people who were not socialised in colleges, parishes or Catholic organizations come knocking on the doors of seminaries. There is a sharp decrease in vocations coming from the old middle classes and at the same time an increase in the so-called "popular vocations". The latter originate from the new movements, but also conserve much of their oldest roots, customs and traditions. Today in the training institutions and Catholic seminaries we have a remarkable number of seminarists. Many of the younger fathers come from the same origin. Research conducted by the CERIS in Rio de Janeiro presented the cultural and religious profile of the Brazilian clergy in the year 2003 (CNBB-CERIS, 2004), a profile that is certainly very different from that existing in the clergy of 30 or 40 years ago<sup>3</sup>.
- 5. On a more general level, I see that a theologian of the calibre of Fr. Mário França Miranda, a former member of the International Theological Commission of the Holy See, in his book "Church and Society", dedicated to the dialogue that the Church, on the basis of its faith, must be able to establish with living society, postulates the need for a greater openness to dialogue on the part of the Church in relation to changes, always safeguarding what is essential to its evangelising mission:

If the Church does not talk to society to fulfil itself in its mission and its structures, as in the intuition of John XXIII, it loses its significance for its countrymen. In short, it fails in its mission of salvation, which is after all its reason for existing. But the same reflection applies within the Church itself. The truth of the faith, in order to be experienced, needs the corresponding institutional structures. Without them, although correct and true, these truths cannot form and structure the lives of Christians. We are today in a critical period for the Church (...) which is feeling the mismatch between the predominant configuration of the past and the challenging situation of the present" (Miranda, 2009, p.6).

Starting from these considerations, two questions may be asked: a) can the above be applied to the group of fathers who sexually abuse their priestly power? b) does the same apply for other priests who adopt affective/sexual behaviours incompatible with what the Church proposes in relation to the chastity of celibacy in the cause of the Kingdom? I would tend to say that my answer to the two questions is affirmative, i.e. they are quite plausible hypotheses

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Unfortunately we do not have data to make a sure comparison between the priests of today and, for example, those who were ordained immediately after Vatican Council II (which I studied in my doctoral thesis in the early 1970s.).

which require better and more careful investigation (see part II of the text) in order to be asserted with confidence<sup>4</sup>.

6. To make a connection between what is stated in the five paragraphs above and the subject of sexual abuse, I will refer to a second text written by another important Brazilian theologian, Frei Antônio Moser. This Franciscan moralist mentions *three sociological axes* useful for an understanding of the cultural atmosphere which propitiates the shocking appearance and possible increase of paedophilia among Catholic fathers:

"the context of a world dominated by sex is certainly what today most directly affects everyone's behaviour. In one way or another, everyone ends up by being contaminated by the polluted air that we breathe. However, remaining on this level would mean sticking to the evidence and leaving aside other equally important aspects. There is no doubt that paedophilia is an aberration. But nor is there any doubt that there are many other factors which constitute propitious conditions for sexual aberrations to flourish. There are at least three main axes<sup>5</sup> that nourish this very atmosphere and by the way, they are three axes firmly planted precisely in the cultures in which the most shocking episodes of paedophilia or other paraphilias are found: the first is the trivialization of all that is most sacred; the second is the absence of sensitivity to the misery that reigns in the world; the third is the violence in all its forms, prevalent in our time (Moser, 2001, p.7).

The dense paragraph by Antônio Moser calls out attention to aspects which perhaps may not be remembered with such emphasis in countries in the northern hemisphere. I will sum them up, using a rather different language, to make clear what they wish to underline:

- the eroticization and banalization which subjects and corrupts the delicate dimension of human sexuality, with serious ethical and religious consequences for the population;
- insensitivity to the (economic, social, cultural and religious) marginalization of the portion of the Brazilian population which is probably the main victim of forms of abuse, one of which is sexual abuse;
- the multi-faceted violence which accompanies the daily lives of these same segments as a result of the vicious historical process of our nationality (slavery existed until 1888 in Brazil), now subjected to the pressures of a cultural model that ignores and massacres the many authentic values which have always existed in our culture and religiosity.
- 7. Cultural sociologists and philosophers are inventing new expressions<sup>6</sup> to translate what seems to be happening. Z. Bauman, departing from a French tendency which is fairly popular in Brazil, explored with a sharp sense of reality the metaphor of "liquid modernity" to speak of the ruptures responsible for the "malaise" typical of our era. He demonstrated in various essays that late-modernity and consumer societies are "liquefying themselves", with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> It is not possible here to tackle with any rigour the complex socio-cultural and theological-pastoral issues which Fr. França Miranda's enunciation involves. In quoting him my intention is to highlight that this question has to do with the subject that most concerns us in this Conference.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Moser analyses and situates each of these three axes in the Brazilian context. There is no way of summing up in a few words his wise comments which in one of his books explain the *sphinx* that sexuality continues to be for the modern man and woman. Cf. Moser (2002 a).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Here are some examples: Castells (1999) speaks of a "networking society"; Beck (1992) of a "society at risk"; Lipovetsky, of "hyper-modernity"; Giddens (1997) of a "reflective society"; Lyotard (1979) of "society without great narratives", etc.

direct repercussions on the "identity" and "life" of individuals (Bauman, 2007, p. 25). Feeling only like a "participatory consumer" (1998, p. 160 and 172) with some access to the supply market, the individual undergoes a sort of return to interiority and to intimacy. The crisis that modernity is suffering paradoxically leads almost to the necessity for individuals to be critically reflective, although living in a massifying and alienated culture. In a certain sense people who live in post-modern societies have no option than to personally redefine their biographical options, since they are options which will help them to define who or what they are.

8. But there is another side to the coin, a typical problem of our time which appears to be repeating itself for a considerable number of fathers in Brazil and round the world, leading them to question the priestly way of life and to abandon the priesthood. Reginaldo Prandi, a scholar of the religious transit between the popular religions in Brazil, describes this phenomenon in terms that *mutatis mutandis* may be applied also to the fathers who, in attempting to redirect their lives, judge that they can allow themselves individualistic behaviours which slide off quite easily into the field of more or less serious abuse, also as regards sexuality. Prandi writes:

There was a time when changing religion was seen as a social and cultural rupture, as well as a rupture with one's own biography (...) it was a personal and family drama that marked a drastic life change. (Today) the change seems not to upset anyone, as though changing religion were already a liquid and sure right of the person who was transformed into a kind of religious consumer ( ...) today's religion is the religion ( ...) of small allegiances, of a disposable compromise (Prandi 2001, p. 52).

The 10th National Meeting of Presbyters (CNP-CNBB, 2004, p. 37) described a type of detraditionalization and rupture of the socio-behavioural standards of the past which could be observed in the clergy at the beginning of the 21st century that I observe also in the subjective living of a fair number of priests who seek me for psychological help. They experience this same "small loyalty" that the sociologist Prandi denounced among the faithful in general. I do not judge this tendency to be only negative. Detraditionalization brings with it also the possibility and, even almost the necessity which leads many individuals and groups affected by post-modernity to feel the need to reflectively take up their condition of individuals who are "free" and "responsible" for their actions, attitudes and choices. These individuals and groups do not allow themselves to be carried away by established traditions and customs; they feel the need to base their loyalty on options chosen according to their conscience. They are 'desirous' people not because they are programmed by the media or by pre-established laws and truths but because being more conscious of their desires and objectives, they are able to discern more freely and responsibly what they should or should not do. That is to say, they are able to become 'institutive 'and not simply 'established' individuals (CNP-CNBB, 2004, p. 37).

#### II. The situation of the problem of sexual abuse in Brazil

The general sociological picture presented in Part 1 of my talk serves to grasp and discern more properly the situation of the clergy in Brazil. In our country, lamentably, we do not have data and analyses as trustworthy as, for example those of the John Jay Report, by the North American Conference of Catholic Bishops, ordered from New York University. We also lack descriptive and analytical studies like those published by Steve Rossetti (1994; 1996) or by M. Aletti and P. Gálea (2011) in Italy. Our information as regards the general picture and the extent of the problem in Brazil is rather uncertain. In the clinical field we have more facts and

experience, though there is a shortage of good quality publications. What we are most lacking are the results of well-conducted research which could give us a reliable basis to understand how the question really stands. Meanwhile, the few investigations that we have, allow us to fairly safely say that the improper conduct and sexual abuse on the part of Brazilian clerics and clergy are probably similar to those which have been better detected, described and analysed in other countries with more resources. There are however certain cultural and social traits which give our situation an original bias that needs to be taken into consideration.

The differences start with the repercussion and reaction to the scandals in public opinion. The TV networks, magazines and daily newspapers in Brazil widely divulge the cases that have occurred to the outside world. These scandals reach us with details through the international information networks which control world and national news. Meanwhile, Brazilian public and even Catholic opinion has had only a moderate reaction to the episodes brought to the public attention. I suggest the hypothesis that this relative moderation in relation to the scandals of Catholic fathers is due to the fact that paedophilia and ephebophilia are behaviours that are culturally more tolerated in Brazil than in Europe and North America. Take into account the strong presence of child prostitution, especially female, and the extent of sexual tourism in some capitals and summer resorts which attract Europeans precisely because here it is easy for them to sexually exploit minors, pre-pubertal and adolescent children.

# 1. Actions of the State, society and the Church

The Brazilian authorities and the Church have not remained inactive in the face of a situation that demanded well-defined attitudes and policies. There were reactions and many initiatives were taken by the State and by the Churches, ecumenically, with the separate presence of the Catholic Church.

1.1. On the side of the action by the State and the National Congress, for example, some important measures have been taken in relation to child protection and to repression of the sexual abuse, both of children and on another level, of women. Three initiatives had the greatest impact and brought in new prospects for social practices. They are the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, of 2001, the Maria da Penha Law relating to women's protection and the establishment in the national Congress of a Board of Inquiry on paedophilia. Its beneficial effects can already be observed in every day life and in the actions of restraint and re-education. These led to more precise and vigorous legal measures as regards the crime of paedophilia and special bodies were created (State Secretariats, Police stations and even national Ministries) responsible for the implementation of these laws<sup>7</sup>. The Catholic Church had a significant role in supporting this and other initiatives<sup>8</sup>. More in the context of its direct pastoral action, the Church, especially after the country's redomocratisation (1985), had a role of active leadership. It is enough to mention some of its social pastorals: the Children's Pastoral, the Marginalised Women's Pastoral, the Mothers' Groups and the many NGOs of Catholic and ecumenical inspiration which are active in the defence of human rights, working in thousands of local organizations, called Tutelary Councils, elected by the people and legally recognised by the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> As an example of what happens in other countries, to which everything points, also in Brazil the consequences of the abusive behaviour of fathers (also those reported in relation to women) will be much heavier for the transgressors and will also involve the dioceses and religious congregations to which they belong.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Note however that on the part even of religious groups, there was an attempt to explore certain facts (generally true!) that had occurred involving catholic clerics – as in the famous case of Arapiraca – in conjunction with a campaign on the the good standing of the catholic clergy.

Government as being responsible for the primary protection of children and adolescents who are the victims of any form of violence or abuse.

- 1.2. Sometimes in an indirect way the painstaking work of these Pastorals and Organizations brings women and children a greater awareness of their rights of citizenship, collaborating on the psychological and cultural level towards raising the self-esteem of millions of families who live in poverty. Along these lines we should mention the persevering action of Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida in relation to the drafting and implementation of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and that by the hygienist doctor Dr. Zilda Arns, whose pastoral and medico-pedagogical work currently benefits around two million poor children and families in Brazil alone. The field work of the "Child's Pastoral" is performed today by approximately 150,00 volunteers especially trained for this. In its early years the action of this Pastoral concentrated more on fighting illnesses that decimated the infant population of poor families. Gradually the contact with the mothers and the families began to have socio-educational objectives and also those in connection with the affective and sexual development of children and of the whole family. This being so, it must be said in summary that the Catholic Church has an important role in fighting violence against children and adolescents and against their sexual exploitation. But the affliction of this evil goes much deeper. It has structural characteristics whose roots lie in the past and encounter in the economic model and the cultural matrix predominant today a strong point of reference and incentive.
- 1.3. As regards our most immediate problem, that of sexual abuse by priests, however, the Church of Brazil is making its first steps. There are no places of refuge, recuperation and care for the victims. In general they are just removed from the scene. For the transgressing priests the psychological and religious assistance, when provided, leaves much to be desired. The measures taken are generally improvised and palliative. There are no specialised call or refuge centres either for the priests or for their victims. Scarce attention is paid to the consequences that the behaviours of the abusers have on the community in which the abuses have been perpetrated. Recently, partly thanks to the insistence of the Holy See, attention to paedophilia has become more marked, although the measures seem to be restricted more to the application of canonical sanctions such as removal or suspension from the orders. The Dioceses which have had cases of priests sentenced to prison or who are *sub judice* better understand the seriousness of the moral, social, legal (and financial!) implications of the problem. Everything leads us to believe that also in Brazil the convictions will lead to serious financial consequences for the dioceses and religious congregations.

I am personally of the opinion that there is some perplexity on the part of the Bishops about what to do in concrete terms. There is no idea of what could or should be done. More severe critics believe that there is a lack of political will on the part of the clergy in general. Effective measures and procedures on the part of the Church, in the short, medium and long term, as far as I know, are not being planned. Underlying problems are not seriously debated. There are initiatives from people or groups and not a response consistently thought out and put into practice in Church terms.

- 2. The remarks in the above paragraph do not mean that the Church does not aim to find competent and urgent answers. A fundamental point is to know what is in fact happening. In this direction, I will initially present some research sponsored by the CNBB and then I will go on to mention others begun by Catholic professionals who felt called into question by the problem of sexual abuse.
- 2.1. The first of the descriptive investigations that we have (cf. Valle, 2003), originated in the National Presbyteral Council (CNP), an organism linked to the CNBB and whose task is to accompany the Priests' Pastoral activity at the national level. The main objective of this survey was to evaluate the degree of personal fulfilment of Brazilian priests. The sample

covered 360 priests from 209 different dioceses. Using a questionnaire it inquired into 15 aspects related to the personal satisfaction and integration of the respondents. The authors of the research were surprised by the positive way in which almost all the participants (around 90 to 95%) responded to the majority of the 16 questions posed. Using fairly simple statistical criteria the analysts of the results (a psychologist, a sociologist and a pastor) noted however that in four points<sup>9</sup> there were areas of palpable inconsistency which lacked a more careful accompaniment, and risked entailing serious consequences for the priestly life.

I will explain where these inconsistencies are most apparent. The respondents to the questionnaire, for comparison, were divided into 5 age groups. The two youngest groups of priests were the ones who were found to be the most fragile in relation to affective and sexual life. They were the fathers who that year had respectively between 1 and 5 years and between 5 and 6 years of experience in the ministry. A statistically significant percentage of these two age groups declared that they were "little" or "not at all" sure about their affective and sexual integration<sup>10</sup>. These same two segments were also those who confessed that they were insufficiently sure of their spiritual life<sup>11</sup>. Affectiveness and spirituality are without doubt two aspects which taken together may generate a state of mind propitious to seeking compensations outside what the Church proposes as the ideal model for living in priestly celibacy. The weakness in these areas means that the psycho-affective and spiritual maturation, especially of the younger priests, requires further care. It is appropriate to suppose that it has an influence on the "inappropriate sexual conduct" clearly detected in the Brazilian clergy by Nasini (2001, p.93-94). This does not justify however that it is valid to hypothesise an immediate link between these psychological inconsistencies and "abuse" or "harassment" in the strict sense of the word. Even less can it be held responsible for the paedophilic or ephebophilic behaviour, its different variations (L. Sperry, 2003, p. 117-127) and levels of gravity (L. Sperry, 2003, p. 146-167).

2.2. The second study was carried out by a team of researchers from the competent Centre for Religious Statistics and Social Investigations (CERIS) in Rio de Janeiro. The sample in this survey was collected with more technical accuracy. Of the 1,831 randomly selected fathers (from a total of 16,634 priests living in Brazil in 2002), 758 (i.e. 41%) responded to a questionnaire containing 33 questions.

In the analysis of the responses again spirituality and sexuality emerged as the two problematic items, confirming the results obtained in the CNP survey. Thus it has been ascertained that psycho-affective and spiritual integration is not to be taken for granted in the presbytery, but emerges firstly as "a daily search to keep a balance so as to achieve the integrity of one's personal identity (which in its turn) is a psycho-social construct, a reality in continuous formation" (CERIS, 2004, p. 15).

The CERIS inquiry offers other data worth considering. Asked whether the ministry as such gave them a meaningful experience, the majority of the priests (72%) said that for them it was "full of meaning" in almost every aspect, while for 21% it was fulfilling "in some senses", but for 5%, however, it is "considered difficult". Again these data confirm what the CNP inquiry had indicated.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> These four fragile points are as follows: affective and sexual integration; spirituality; uncertainty about the future and unsatisfactory relations with the respective Bishops.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Of the group ordained between 6 and 10 years (out of a total of 102 respondents) 14.6% declared that they were unsure in the affective sphere while 12.6% (out of a total of 95 priests) between 6 and 10 years of ordination felt equally insecure in relation to this same aspect.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Of the group with 1 to 5 years of ordination, 16% (out of 100 respondents) perceived themselves as little or not at all spiritually integrated, while 13.9% of the group who had between 6 and 10 years in the ministry said the same about their spiritual life.

Against the backdrop described up to now it is worth mentioning some of the responses about relationships with women, the area in which there are the majority of the "inappropriate sexual behaviours" of the priests. This is a delicate subject which according to the CERIS researchers (2004, p. 17) "the Church is tackling with some difficulty". There is a tendency to deal with it more in the inner forum of the confessionals and psychological consultation rooms, although the succession of scandals denounced by the world media is forcing the Church to review these types of stances. Personally I see that among the clergy in Brazil there is a desire to discuss these issues more openly.

Three other questions inquire into how priests relate to women. In one of them, no fewer than 90% of the respondents agreed that "companionship with women was in a mature and respectful form", whereas 10% considered this companionship as having been "difficult because of the risk of affective involvement". Another question asks what possibility do priests give to an affective involvement with women. The question received the following answers: 55% of fathers consider it remote, but for 35% it is not. The replies to a third, similar question aroused controversy as to the interpretation of its meaning. Here they are: while 50% of the respondents said "they had never been affectively involved with a woman in their condition as priests", 41% stated that they had had this type of experience at some time in their presbyter life and 16% declared that companionship with women had been "difficult because of affective involvement in the past".

2.3. I conclude this part repeating once again that I consider these data to be only indicative. They still lack further explanations and integrations especially with regard to their affective dynamics (aetiology, origin, development and possible integration and maturation). Still they deserve immediate consideration by the Church authorities. As a psychologist, on the basis of what I have been observing for many years in attending to priests sent for specialised treatments, my opinion is that these facts have received little attention from the ecclesiastic authorities. There is no doubt that a direct link cannot be made between these facts and sexual abuse, very specifically paedophilic and ephebophilic abuse. Nonetheless, priests frustrated in their affective, spiritual and ministerial realisation probably have a greater propensity for abusive sexual behaviour – not excluding paedophilic behaviour – than those who feel fulfilled in this fundamental field for people who have aspired (and still do aspire) to dedicate themselves to God and to their brothers as priests of the Church.

How is it then that there are overlappings? What happens is more a facilitation, reinforced by the extremely permissive and alluring erotic and sexual atmosphere which prevails and invades all cultural environments, even virtual ones. Seminarists and fathers no longer live shut away in an exclusively ecclesiastic world in clearly demarcated territories. They are exposed to the influences of the larger cultural environment. They even frequent environments totally distant from what the Church proposes to the common faithful. There has no doubt been a gradual secularisation of the life styles and roles of the fathers. Sexuality and sexual behaviour are among the most affected. There have been almost inevitable contaminations. In the end fathers are sons of the modernity which is present. It is up to everyone to tackle this situation in which human and affective, sexual and spiritual maturation must pass through the screen of his vocation and presbyteral mission.

- 3. Two surveys more directly related to the subject of sexual abuse
- 3.1. Two other surveys that provide more precise empirical data on abusive sexual behaviour deserve a rapid description. The more elucidative and far-reaching one is the product of a doctoral thesis defended by Gino Nasini (2001) in a North American university. It is a pity that owing to the huge difficulties he encountered in obtaining a statistically valid sample, the group of respondents cannot in any way be considered to be statistically representative. However, the facts that he reports give a detailed and well-documented picture of the subject

2%

that concerns us here. It is the best we have in Brazil<sup>12</sup>. It can serve us as a reference until further investigations are made. Nasini's many tables and commentaries provide us with a general picture that is probably very close to the truth.

Encountering serious difficulties in speaking directly to the priests, Nasini took the word of informative priests who were familiar with their priest colleagues' situation. He obtained the cooperation of the members of the CNPs (National Presbyters' Council) and through them, also of the regional councils. Nasini sent questionnaires to 435 of them. Unfortunately the response was poor. Only 62 out of those who received the questionnaire (i.e. 14%) responded. Of the 62 who responded, though, 77% replied that they personally knew of concrete cases of abuse and inappropriate sexual conduct on the part of priests in their respective dioceses. In total, they numbered 243 cases, in relation to improper behaviours of the following types. These are figures that make one think, although their statistical validity is highly questionable from the point of view of the survey.

Types of casesNumber of casesPercentageWith women12652%Homosexual with adults8535%Homosexual w/ adolescents2812%

4

With children

Table 01: Distribution of 243 cases of sexual abuse and improper conduct

Even at a glance it is easy to draw some conclusions of the above picture which can be completed by the disconcerting facts in the note below 13. The first conclusion regards the fact that the number of paedophiles in the strict sense is relatively small (2%). It is a percentage that comes within the levels for the general population, with individuals of the male sex who involve themselves in the helping professions. In the second, everything indicates that the sexual behaviour of the group investigated by Nasini is oriented strongly towards homosexual behaviour directed predominantly at adults (35%) and adolescents (12%) and not at children. Thirdly, it must be said that the most problematic picture from the point of view of celibacy concerns relationships with women (52%). Undoubtedly some of these cases are not by mutual consent, but in some cases there must be harassment and some use of the powers that priesthood confers.

From Nasini's data there is no way of knowing whether or not there was psychological or physical abuse by the priests in their relationships with the 126 women and 28 adolescents. In themselves moreover there are not sufficient facts to judge the abuse and seduction involved in these relationships. My pastoral and psychotherapeutic practice inclines me to judge that it would be totally naive to think that these did not happen, especially in the cases involving adolescents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> In the nine chapters of the book there is a discussion of auxiliary themes which are important to form an overall judgement of the problem. The discussions cover issues that require a better psychological reorganization such as that of celibacy and of the priesthood today, attention to the victims and their families, pedagogic activity in the community, the satisfaction to be given to society and to the means of communication, relations with the civic authorities and to the police, etc. The author relies largely on what he was able to learn and accompany in the Church in North America. The bibliography he used also has the same origin.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Nasini indicates three other facts that are important for making an overall judgment: 41 (23%) of the respondents later left the ministry while 35 (20%) changed their behaviour. But 56 (32%) continued (!) their improper behaviour up to the time of the survey. If data of this importance are confirmed it seems to me that the Church owes it to itself to adopt a position. The following question must be raised: what should be said about the rule of celibacy?

3.2. In the strictly clinical field<sup>14</sup> I know of only one Brazilian research (Silva, 2008) that gives information about the sexual troubles of priests. This research investigated the sexual prevalence present in 149 subjects<sup>15</sup> treated between the years 2001 and 2003 by eight psychotherapists from the 'Instituto de Terapia Acolher-ITA'<sup>16</sup>. The researcher observed that out of this total of 141 cases, 48 (aged between 25 and 60 years) occurred in categories that the DSM IV-TR and also the ICD-10 define as "sexual disorders" almost always associated with various kinds of "personality disorders". Table 02 shows the diagnostic distribution of the 48 cases:

Table 02: Classification of sexual prevalence in the 48 cases according to DSM-IV TR

DSM-IV classification	No. of cases	Percentage /48cases	Percentage/141 cases
F32	5 cases	10.4%	3.3%
F41	3 cases	6.3%	2.0%
F42	1 case	2.1%	0.6%
F60.8	1case: narcissist	2.1%	0.6%
F63.8	1 case	2.1%	0.6%
F65.4	4 cases	8.3%	2.6%
F65.8	1 case	2.8%	0.6%
F66	23 cases	47.9%	15.4%
Ephebos	7 cases	14.6%	4.7%
Epilepsy	2 cases	4.2 %	1.2%
Total	48 cases	100%	32,2%

This is not the place for a more detailed discussion of the results shown in the above table. I will briefly describe only the diagnostic categories of our immediate interest i.e. those which tend to be connected more directly with sexual abuse against minors and others. According to the DSM IV these categories are related to diagnostic Axis II (personality disorders) and Axis I ("sexual and gender identity disorders") which in their turn embrace a large number of meticulously catalogued symptomatic indicators. For ICD 10 and DSM-IV this is where paraphilias come in (F65.4 and F65.8) which are reported in Table 02. It is necessary to distinguish between these and the 23 cases registered under F66 of the table with regard to "psychological and behavioural disorders associated with sexual development and orientation" This is where homosexually oriented individuals generally fit in. Note that they altogether make up 62% of the priests and seminarists in psychotherapeutic care at the Acolher Therapeutic Institute. In comparison, paedophiles appear in much lower proportions: there are 5 and they correspond to 10.32 % of the subjects listed in Table 02.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> In the sociological field there are several other studies. One of them, among feminist positions also defended within the Catholic Church, there is a survey by the religious scientist Regina Jurkewicz (2005) on sexual abuse of women by Catholic priests. The author examined episodes published by the press between 1994 and 2003 and consulted nearly 100 organizations involved with human rights. She selected 21 cases "involving girls, adolescents and women", some aged under 15 or 16 years.

 $<sup>^{15}</sup>$  Not all of the 48 individuals in the table were already ordained fathers. 25 were priests (52%) and 23 (48%) were about to be ordained.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The Instituto Terapêutico Acolher (ITA) was founded in 2000. At the start it had the support of the Saint Luke Institute in the United States and of the Southdown Institute in Canada. On its permanent staff there are approximately 15 clinical psychologists or psychiatrists specialised in the systematic study of the specificities encountered in the psychotherapy of Catholic clergy. The work of Rosa Eliza da Silva is part of a group of six researches prepared with the aim of obtaining a Master's or Doctoral degree in the São Paulo Pontifical Catholic University Post-Graduate Studies programme, in the years between 2005 and 2011.

3.3. Sexual disorders must be considered in association with other troubles which may cause major dysfunctions in the way people relate to others, to their surrounding environment and to themselves. They are psychiatric categories that may up to a certain point be associated with separate diseases and with various personality disorders, among which there appears to be a higher incidence of narcissistic, avoidance, dependent and obsessive-compulsive type disorders. All these psycho-behavioural problems, as we shall state in the second part of the talk, must be understood in the light of normal daily life events, such as family or community tensions, the loss of loved ones, difficulties and conflicts at work, professional failure or, on a larger scale, the cultural influences that derive from behavioural models divulged by the media or forced from people by the groups to which they belong or refer or with which they are associated, not always of their own will. More radical situations of economic, social, cultural or religious change – such as those taking place in contemporary Brazil – may have an influence on the greater or lesser intensity of these psychological problems, giving them with increasing intensity a connotation with people's sexuality, identity and religious life. Two Brazilian theologians (Mendonça and Oliveira, 2011, p. 18) who write about the anthropology of the Catholic priest note that in societies such as the post-modern western society the rise of "peg communities" (expression of Z. Bauman, 2003, p. 49) is becoming fairly common, groups of a precarious duration, which adopt a *cool* and distanced way of living. In this style of living, what attracts individuals is not the relationships with others but rather fast and fleeting compromises in which there is not the creative and daring and therefore tense dynamic that usually prevails in healthy groups. For the aforementioned scholars this is now one of the great challenges faced "in training priests, called to be sacramental signs of Christ the Pastor who gives his life for people". It is a situation which makes fragile and "liquid" (in the sense coined by Z. Bauman, 2004) the community and affective life of many seminaries.

4. I will end this part, referring to the recent directions issued by the Brazilian Episcopal General Assembly in 2011. On this occasion the Bishops of Brazil approved a document with guidance and procedures in relation to the accusations of sexual abuse against minors (CNBB, 2011). Towards the end, the document takes up, with features relevant to Brazilian law, what the Holy See already explained in various documents. The text discusses psychological and juridical aspects of Canon Law and Brazilian Civil and Criminal Law (Azambuja, 2011). In the part concerning practical guidance the attention is concentrated on communication with public opinion and the media, and in a rather summary way, reference is made to the need for the pastoral accompanying of the cases, ending with recommendations about the selection and training of the clergy. As far as the psychological aspects are concerned, the document leaves much to be desired. The Bishops, principally those from many dioceses without resources, continue not knowing what to do.

As such, these directions from the CNBB are a step forward. Meanwhile one has the impression that the episcopacy seems to be more concerned about answering the media than about finding feasible solutions to problems which demand immediate responses. It is not indicated what the psychological pastoral care of the more serious cases should be; no indications are given to victims about assistance nor about what to do to help priests in danger; there is no mention of the efforts that Brazilian society is making with the aim of at least decreasing the incidence of the evil. There are distressing issues for which episcopacies like those in the United States have adopted courageous measures, which are barely mentioned in the Document. Those who know how dangerous are abusive personalities such as those of types IV, V and VI, described by Ken Sperry (2003, p. 207) wonder whether the indications in the Document will find realistic solutions for cases such as these. A concern which cannot be ignored any longer is that of helping Dioceses and congregations without resources, especially when the diagnosis points to illnesses. Are the canonical measures or pro forma treatments enough? And the innocent victims: who will take care of them? What can be done to create the conditions to provide qualified professional treatment? Does the Church of Brazil have the conditions and personnel able to generate a network of care centres capable of responding to the needs that a proper attention to these cases demands? Who will cover the cost of this treatment?

#### III. Concluding with some practical suggestions

This Conference has both theoretical and practical objectives. In my lecture, considering the subject entrusted to me ("A dialogue between religion, society and culture") I have tried to place the elements which seem to me to be the most useful in forming a more reliable opinion about a problem (sexual abuse in the Catholic clergy) for which there is not nor will there be an easy solution in the short term.

At the same time I have attempted to bring to the knowledge of the attendees at this Symposium the statistical data that we have in Brazil, since we must start from there in suggesting measures which are efficient and practical where there is abuse and bad conduct. From the presentation it clearly emerges that the situation is worrying at the least. There are indications which lead me to suspect that the real facts are not being taken into consideration, which leads to the hypothesis that there are silences and that certain truths are not being told. The solutions will only be found if there is a humble and courageous will on the part of the ecclesiastic authorities and the clergy itself.

The support of the communities which had the pain of directly suffering sexual scandals will certainly be indispensable for the measures taken to succeed in really *healing* the wounds through a *purification* of the Church, through the grace of God.

To conclude, I largely agree with Nasini (2001, p. 231-235) in his well validated study, and I will indicate some points that seem to me to be essential from the point of view of the subject I have attempted to present:

• The Church must adopt *a stance* towards sexual abuse:

The whole Church of Brazil, led by the Episcopacy, needs to adopt the same attitude of transparency and humble acknowledgment of the errors and omissions that are preventing the "healing" of the thorn in the flesh of the whole Church which is the abusive behaviour of the clergy, even if of a few of its members:

- "Ad intra Ecclesiae", the fundamental aspects which are de facto postponed or silenced must be discussed.
- Ad extra: the Church and all its pastorals must be aware that it is indispensable to progress towards a more systematic dialogue and cooperation of the Church with the living forces of the other Churches and religions and with the Civil Society and State organizations which militate in favour of the protection of all the rights of children and other victims of the multiple factors that make possible and easy any and every form of sexual abuse.
- Possible Guidance Committees
  - A special ad hoc Committee established by Bishops could take on the supervision of all the measures to be adopted. It would be responsible for mediation with the whole Episcopacy and already existing Church Organisms, guaranteeing the execution of *common measures* aimed at making effective the treatment and healing of the thorn in the flesh of the whole Church, which is sexual abuse by the clergy.
  - The experience of other countries shows that it would be important (sometimes even indispensable) to create a *Special Group* in charge of making a survey and a study of the real

situation concerning the problem, similar, for example, to the United States John Jay Commission.

- A *Permanent Commission* comprising specialists in various areas of knowledge (lay, religious and ordained ministers) could advise and accompany the procedures to be adopted, introduced and appraised as to their effects in line with the indications recently approved by the last National Conference of the Brazilian Episcopacy (cf. CNBB, 2011).
- The National Presbyteral Commission (CNP) could, in parallel, itself draw up a *Presbyteral Code of Ethics* of the Church in Brazil (not only concerning the question of sexual abuse), similar to what other professional categories have already introduced, such as the Brazilian doctors, lawyers and psychologists.
- These Committees would also have the incumbency of:
  - guaranteeing due support for the victims and their families, and also for the communities in which the scandals took place (parishes, colleges, various social centres, etc.) and for the abusing priests themselves and, if necessary, they should also suggest to the Bishop in charge the procedures to follow, including those relative to the due corrections and/or punishments envisaged by Canon Law (activation of the Ecclesiastical Courts) and by the criminal law in force in the country.

### 4. Medico-psychological attendance:

- In various parts of the country *Institutes intended to provide* specialised assistance to priests who need medico-psychiatric and psychotherapeutic assistance should be created.
- 5. The CNBB with the support of the institutions mentioned above, of the National Pastoral Institute and of the Faculties of Theology and Universities of the Church, should encourage the creation of a *Study Centre on Human Sexuality* which, bearing in mind the Christian anthropological focus and Brazil's social and cultural specificities, may provide an advisory committee for Church intervention in cultural and politically controversial matters and for the training of the clergy, of Consecrated life and of the Catholic lay community in general.

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