

# Transcript of March 15, 2023 Presentation on Clerical Sexual Abuse

## Three Difficult Contemporary Questions Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI Lecture Series

We are looking at three topics, and they are all difficult.

The clergy sexual abuse crisis, the radically shifting sexual ethos, and suicide. Those of you who are old enough remember in the late sixties, there was a movie that came out called “Five Easy Pieces.” This series would be called “Three Difficult Pieces.” So tonight we’re going to look at clerical sexual abuse, and I’m going to read you a poem. You know, DH Lawrence is known more as a novelist who writes racy novels, but DH Lawrence is first a poet, and a very fine poet. And he wrote a poem called “Healing.”

*I am not a mechanism, an assembly of various sections.*

*And it is not because the mechanism is working wrongly, that I am ill.  
I am ill because of wounds to the soul, to the deep emotional self  
and the wounds to the soul take a long, long time, only time can help  
and patience, and a certain difficult repentance  
long, difficult repentance, realization of life’s mistake, and the freeing oneself  
from the endless repetition of the mistake  
which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.*

We come back to healing. I want to begin with what I call a “pre-apology”: that this is a very, very sensitive topic, the topic of clergy sexual abuse – well, the topic of sexual abuse, period. It’s pretty hard to do this topic without offending. I apologize in advance. I’ve given this topic at universities, I’ve given it to clergy groups, I’ve given it to seminars where there are a lot of victims of sexual abuse there.

I want to begin with six points of introduction, and then we’re going to talk about how we as a Church respond to the clergy sexual abuse. Okay, the six points of introduction.

First of all, when we talk about sexual abuse, we need to make a distinction, actually three distinctions. It’s not all in one piece, so you work in three categories. There’s the category “pedophilia”. Pedophilia is where somebody is assaulted sexually before they reach the age of puberty. So pedophilia, that’s a child, someone who has not reached puberty. Then you have what they call different words “ephebophilia” / “hebephilia”. That is when someone is assaulted right when they hit puberty. That’s a different disease. So pedophilia, before puberty. Ephebophilia, right at puberty. And then there is what we call “sexual irresponsibility” which is people sleeping with underage people and so on. Tonight, we are going to focus a lot on the first two. Clerical sexual abuse is not so much about priests having affairs and so on, it’s about being assaulted before puberty or right at puberty.

Secondly, the frequency of this in the culture. I’m not sure you want to hear this. Sexual abuse is a massive, massive thing in our culture, of which clergy are a small part. Today, as far as we have statistics on the western world, it is estimated that 1 woman in 4 is sexually assaulted, whether as a child or at puberty, and 1 man in 5 is assaulted. If you want to put it differently, in every fourth or fifth house in the western world, this is happening. It’s not to excuse when it happens in the rectory.

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Thirdly, its devastating effects. Sexual irresponsibility has its own effects, but for pedophilia and ephebophilia, the younger the person is, the more devastating the effects are for the person. Simply put, and it took me years to learn that. I had to work with sexual abuse victims until I got it, because initially I thought they were exaggerating, but oftentimes it simply destroys their personality and destroys their life. If you've ever been in court when the victim impact statements are read. When you're a little more naïve, you could say, "It can't be that bad." It's that bad. It simply shreds the psyche. Outside of murder, and maybe worse than murder, the worst thing you can do to a person is this. Just a little story. Some years ago, I remember Makenzie Phillips, who's the daughter of one of the Mamas and the Papas. When her dad died, she went public when she said my father sexually assaulted me as a child. But she was not the most psychically stable person on the planet, and I remember driving with my brother and sister-in-law and this was on the radio. And my sister-in-law says, "I don't believe her, she's a basket case." I said, "that's why I believe her." That's exactly why I believe her, you know. That's what it does to a human psyche. It can't be underestimated. There's no such thing as minor sexual abuse, "it wasn't that bad," "it wasn't a big deal", or "there wasn't intercourse", or "this didn't happen". There is no minor, it's always major. And it's always mortal sin.

I think at the beginning – I'll talk about the "fault line" of 1990, some of the Church's bishops and provincials made serious mistakes because they didn't understand that. They thought "it's not that big a deal" – it's a big, big deal. In fact, it's the biggest deal of all. Like I said, outside of murder, there is nothing you can do to a person. I think that some of the victims would have preferred to have been murdered than that. Now, I want to talk a little about the nature of the disease, and afterward, we are going to have a question period, feel free to ask about this. Now, notice I say it's a disease, particularly pedophilia. Same with ephebophilia, but they are slightly different. Pedophilia is a sickness, it's a disease. It's also sadly a disease for which there is no cure. Clinicians agree, and it's taken them years to learn that, that if someone's a pedophile, they can't be cured. There is no therapy, there is no drug. And again, that's where a lot of dioceses and religious orders made mistakes. They sent people to clinics. It was prior to 1990, and the clinic would say, "he's dealt with it." No, they haven't dealt with it. Today they say, "take him out of ministry and watch him 24 hours a day, he can't be cured." Now, part of the nature of the disease is part of the dispute. When I first started studying this stuff, I became a provincial in 1991, and I knew very little about this. But I had a very sharp provincial council. I was inaugurated, installed, and they sent me away for one month to different universities, different psychologists. They said, "Learn about this. We don't want to make a bunch of mistakes." That was one of the \_\_\_\_\_ months of my life. But at that time, I visited clinics and a number of clinicians would tell me – today some might dispute this, but my mentors would say, "Every abuser was first abused, and that's where they get the disease. It is not normal for anybody to be attracted sexually to a pre pubic child." They said the nature of the disease is that they were violated as a child, and oftentimes don't even remember it, but that caused the sickness. I want to double back on this and talk about how we also have to have some kind of sympathy for the abusers – bad as it is. These people were themselves abused. Partly, that is the way they get the sickness, and it is a sickness. And what happens is that with sexual abuse, the denial mechanisms are so great, it's so traumatic. First of all, there's shock in the body. I worked with the clinic

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in Edmonton, the doctor who worked with sexual abuse victims, he would start them with physiotherapy, with massage therapy for weeks. He said, "That shock is still in their body." But oftentimes the denial is so strong, and that's why they have such strong denial mechanisms. We had a priest, I lived with him for 4 years, he was on the formation staff. He was a serial pedophile. There was no indication whatsoever. He's the last person you would've suspected. I remember going through his trial, and the lawyer was just peppering me, "Father, how could you live with this guy for four years – a pedophile – and not know it?" I said, "Easy, because he didn't know it. He still doesn't know it." You know, when he was arrested, he immediately passed two lie detector tests in a row. They brought in one of the victims, he started crying. He said, "Yeah, I did it." A day later, "I didn't do this." It's part of the nature of the disease. He himself obviously was violated as a child. In another case, a woman friend of mine, she's sixty now. This happened thirty years ago in her thirties. She was a teacher and she was pretty vivacious, a wonderful person, but she said, "there's something wrong with me. I can never get married, there's just something wrong with me." She went through therapy and the psychologist hunched what it was, and did something that may have been unethical, he hypnotized her. He brought her back to one incident when she was eleven years old, which she couldn't remember. You know what happened? When he led her back to that moment, her heart stopped, she was clinically dead for a few seconds. He had to call 911. That's how traumatic the recovery was. I'm telling you these stories to say that this is a sickness. First of all, the person who abused, almost one hundred percent sure they were abused. They've buried that. And that's how the sickness is in them. Ephebophilia is a little different. Ephebophilia is sexual arrestment, and it's something different. It can be handled in clinics. Clinics can cure, treat someone with ephebophilia but they can't do anything with pedophilia.

Fifthly, what do the victims want? Again, I've been on both sides of this. I've sat in court with priests being accused, I've sent people to sue the Church, I've sat with people whose lives had fallen apart because of sexual abuse. When I give these talks, I phone these people and ask them, what should I tell them (the presentation audience)? They'll always say four things.

"We don't want money." Sometimes lawyers want money. "We want someone to hear our story and acknowledge it. Just that. We need someone to hear us, looking in our face, and to hear our story, including Church authorities. We need to be heard." Those of you who were here this past summer, you heard Donna Freitas. She stood at this podium, and she told her story of being sexually abused. One of the local bishops was in the room, and she said, "You can't believe what that means to me. You're the first bishop who ever heard my story. I don't need anything else. I just need to be heard." Because they haven't been heard. And sadly, that's often true with women in general with sexual violence and assault. They need to be heard. They need to be believed. This is true.

Secondly, they say, "Don't run away from our anger." Anger scares a lot of people. The victims of sexual abuse carry a lot of anger, and it scares people and that's oftentimes why they don't listen to their story. They just run away, they say I don't need to hear this. "We need to be heard. We need for people to hear, to not run away from our anger. Listen to my anger." Like Donna Freitas: "You're the first bishop who sat and listened to my story. You can't believe what that means to me."

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Thirdly, to acknowledge the depth of their pain. This is more than just to acknowledge “well, you were a kid”, “these things happen”, “moving forward”, “get on with life”, and so on. It doesn’t work like that. You need to acknowledge what it did to them.

Lastly, they want an explicit apology from the top. They need the Pope, the bishops, the parish priests, and the bishop’s conference and so on, did not want to hear this. You know, this was back in the 90s, or the late 80s, when I was living back in Edmonton. There was a big scandal in Ottawa with the Christian Brothers in one of their schools, and all these revelations came out. Bishop Marcel Gervais, Archbishop of Ottawa, had a public Mass, and he made an explicit apology to these victims. It was interesting. I was watching this on television, and while he was saying the Mass and making the apologies, the people were shouting at him. They were saying, “We don’t want to hear it from you. We want to hear it from these dogs, these horrible people who violated us.” But he went through with it. You know something? Afterwards, every person there, came up to him individually and thanked him. They said, “We needed to hear this. You’re the Archbishop. We needed to hear it from the Archbishop.”

“You need to hear us. You need to acknowledge that this happened. Don’t run away from the anger.” Notice Archbishop Gervais, he didn’t run away from the anger. When they started shouting, he didn’t say, “Well, I don’t have to put up with this.” He heard them, acknowledged their hurt, and then made explicit apologies. We’re sorry.

I want to talk about what I call the fault line – 1990. Prior to 1990, nobody understood this. Psychologists didn’t, bishops didn’t, provincials didn’t, and so on. And so a lot of mistakes were made. First of all, they didn’t understand the nature of this disease, the seriousness. I was named provincial in 1991 and I am glad I wasn’t made it earlier – I would’ve made some of these mistakes. Before, they just used to move priests from parish to parish, and the priests would say, “I’m never going to do this again.” I should talk about the nature of the disease. It also turns people into clinical, pathological liars. They are so convinced that they pass lie detector tests. A personal experience: an Oblate confrere of mine, and he had already twice been in prison. He was released and I went down to an Oblate retreat center and had dinner with him. I know this guy. He says, “I was a sick man. I’m glad I got caught. And all the terrible things I did.” You know something? Three months later, he was arrested again. It’s a sickness. But also, the lying, they can be so convincing. “This never happened.” Or “It happened once. It will never happen again.” Prior to 1990, we tended to believe the lies. So we have to make some allowances for before 1990. But then after 1990, it’s the reverse. After 1990, there’s no more excuses. No excuses. Today, a diocese or the Boy Scouts or any bishop or provincial – if they don’t know better, they should know better. It’s irresponsible. Prior to 1990, some serious mistakes were made. After 1990, there’s no further excuse. I want to say one last thing about this. And Pope Francis just pointed it out again, but it heard it long before from the mothers. One of the difficulties with this is that we didn’t have women in the chancery offices. And the reason being, women are mothers, and they would have thought first about the kids. Celibate men thought about the Church and how do you protect the institution. Today, bishops are wiser. We need women there. A lot of the cover up would never have happened. The disease would’ve happened, but the cover up would never have happened. It wouldn’t have been there.

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Incidentally, I forgot to say this earlier, when I talked about the frequency of this – 1 of 4 women, 1 of 5 men. But it's interesting, if you saw the movie *Spotlight*, which did something interesting, though it wasn't quite a fair movie. Richard Sipes was a consultant but he slanted this. It gave the impression that it's higher within the clerical ranks because of celibacy. That's wrong. In fact, it's slightly lower, statistically, in clerical ranks in the population at large. Crassly put, your kid is safer in the rectory than in the home. Not by much. But so you see, it's not a celibate disease. It's not like priests don't have sex and brothers don't have sex, so they hit on kids. This is a sickness that is in the population at large.

How do we respond individually and as a Church. We need to carry this scandal biblically. How do you do that? If you are so inclined, I have an article on my website which is actually 25 years old. It's called "Carrying the Scandal Biblically". Two preliminary remarks...

First of all, in the United States, this is not true in Europe... In the United States, in the Roman Catholic Church, this is a crisis of credibility. Notice it is not a crisis of faith. It is a crisis of credibility for a young Church. I'll tell you what I mean by a young Church. The Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Canada is relatively a young Church. Also, it came in a kind of wonderful way, Roman Catholicism came to the United States and Canada through the immigrants, and it came up from the bottom. It always had this great respect that came up for the poor. This was its first major crisis. The Church is 1,000 years old in different places or 2,000 years old in Europe. That's a little different. Those are old churches. Relatively speaking, the Church in the United States is a very young Church. The Church I grew up in Canada is a very young Church which had great credibility because of how it came out through the immigrants. So this is its first major crisis and what's the crisis?

I want to give you an image, a biblical image. It's the Book of Tobit. Those early books of Genesis – they are not historical, they are archetypal, which means they happened to everybody, they're happening all the time. This is the Book of Tobit. "I Tobit, have a great reputation for honesty and holiness in my city. One day, I am sitting down to eat. Just as I'm getting ready to eat, my son comes in and says there is a dead body in the market square." Now for Jews, if you touched a dead body, you were contaminated, so people would stay away from it. So he said, no, "I got up. I didn't finish my meal. I went to the town square. I washed the body. I dressed it, and I buried it. Then I came back home, but now I'm contaminated" so he couldn't finish his meal. He says, "I went outside to do a siesta under a tree. As I'm trying to sleep, some bird droppings came down into my eyes." This is not glamorous – bird shit. He says, "the bird dropping came down into my eyes and began to sting my eyes, and the more I tried to rub it out, the more I rubbed it in. Then I went to see doctors and I went blind. I spent all my money on doctors, but it only made it worse. Then finally, I went completely blind. And now I'm blind. My wife was a weaver. She used to support us by making one piece of cloth, and one day she wove a beautiful piece of cloth and gave it to a man. He gave her her wages but in addition to her wages, he gave her a young goat – a kid – as a bonus. She brings the young goat into the house. I'm blind, and I hear this young goat, and I say to my wife, where did you get this goat from? You stole it, did you? She said, 'no, I got it in addition to my wages.' I don't believe you. You stole it, take it back. Then my wife's anger flared at me. She said, 'you hypocrite. If you think you're holy, you're a huge, huge hypocrite.' So then, hearing this

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from the mouth of my wife, I went outside and I began to weep and I began to pray.” You can’t write a story to fit the sexual abuse crisis like this. You have a young Catholic Church, with a great reputation for holiness, partly deserved, and then we get bird shit in our eye. When mystics write about the dark night of the soul, it always hits you in the one place you don’t want to be hit. Any place but there...So the Roman Catholic Church – our views on sexuality, our views of chastity, clerical celibacy – the last place, the very last place we want to be hit, that’s where we’re going to be hit. Sometimes you watch an Olympic athlete in the Olympics. They fall down and get hurt. They’ve got \$2,000 of spandex on, they’re glorious, and they look wonderful. That’s glamorous. When you trip over your tea kettle and fall into some bird shit, that’s not glamorous. And notice what he tries to do. He tries to rub it out. But the more he tried to rub it out, the more he rubbed it in. What was the initial response of the Church? We’re going to bury it. We’re trying to rub it out. So then he spent his money on doctors – we spent our money on lawyers, and it made it worse and eventually it all collapsed. But then the story had a happy ending, “then I went out into the garden, and I began to weep and I began to pray.” That’s the beginning of the recovery of Tobit. And that’s what we need to do. What does the Church need to do right now? We need to begin to weep and we need to begin to pray. To be restored.

Okay. Now, I’ll do these quickly; what I call Guidelines for the Long Haul. And I begin with a quote from Lamentations; it’s one of my favorite quotes in Scripture which you need at hard times in your life. The harder the funeral I have to preach at, the more I’d be likely to use this text. The Book of Lamentations says this: “Sometimes all you can do is to put your mouth to the dust and wait!” That’s good advice. It says sometimes there isn’t any answer, there are no words of consolation. There isn’t some thing you can do to make the person feel better. A lot of times at funeral someone will say, “He’s in a better place” or “She’s in a better place.” You can’t say that then; you can say it three years later. Sometimes there’s nothing to say; there’s nothing you can do. You put your mouth to the dust and wait. Or you can ponder as Mary pondered.

Now let me go through the 10 quickly.

First of all: To name the issue and all that it implies with honesty. The church needs to name this, as I tried to do tonight. You can’t sugar coat it; this just needs to be named.

And secondly: To make the first and primary concern the victim. And healing, and not self-protection. See, it’s so easy to fall into self-protection. Using apologies or whatever and protect the church. It doesn’t matter what it means for the church. It only matters for this victim.

And thirdly: Listen to the stories of the victims and accept the depth of their pain, and accept their necessary anger. She is angry; why don’t you just get over it. No, listen to the stories. Like Donna Freitas says, “You’re the first bishop to stand in a room and heard me tell the story. That’s all I need; I don’t need money from the church.”

Number 4: Accept that the carrying of this crisis is not a distraction to the real work of the church. It IS the real work of the church. I think it was Henri Nouwen who coined this line. Henri Nouwen says, “ I

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used to always worry that my distractions were taking away from my real work. Until one day I realized the distractions ARE my real work.” You know, this has been a 30-year distraction to the church. And it’s becoming a distraction now for other churches, and Boy Scouts and Hollywood, and so on. But this isn’t a distraction; this is the most important work the church has to do right now. We’re spending money and energy, and all of this while we’re trying to do real ministry. This is the real ministry, and it’s not a distraction. That’s the real work.

Number 5: Then--Accept this painful humiliation as a grace-opportunity. Tobit: we need it, we need for us to purify and clean up, and become better people. This is an opportunity. We shouldn’t be resentful and say now why did this have to happen to us? No. This is a privileged, privileged opportunity for growth. Now, it’s conscripted, it’s forced; but it’s an opportunity.

Then, Number 6: very important. Don’t distance yourself personally from this issue. Let me tell you a story: When I was Provincial, one of our young priests (a good young priest, bless him), he wasn’t having a good Sunday when he did this. He went up to the pulpit one Sunday and said you know this sexual abuse crisis is terrible, it’s just terrible, and it’s terrible for me. I walk in an airport and people look at me with a collar and say you might be a pedophile. I can’t hug your kids anymore and people are suspicious of me. I feel terrible about this.

Is that a good homily? No. That’s a pretty self-serving homily. Don’t look at me; I didn’t do this. A bunch of terrible people did this and we’re all paying the price. No, that’s not the way the cross works. You know when Jesus died on the cross, there wasn’t just one cross there; there were three crosses there. Two were guilty and one was innocent. But notice Jesus wasn’t on the cross saying, “Don’t get me mixed up with these other two guys. I’m innocent, and they’re guilty. I’m the innocent one here.” No. That’s what the cross means, and that’s what it means to be a member of the church.

You know we carry the graced history of this church, which is incredible. The history of the martyrs, beginning with Jesus, the history of the martyrs and saints, and all this graced history. We get to walk in that light. We also have to take our share of carrying the darkness. We can’t say, “well I wasn’t there.” And that isn’t true just with sexual abuse; it’s true with everything. Let me give you an example: I was at an international conference on Henri Nouwen three years ago. So, I give this talk on Henri Nouwen. And it was just after the revelations came out about the gravesites found in Kamloops, the residential schools. The first question a man says, “How can you stay in the church? How do you stay in the Congregation that did this to native people?” Well, I tried to answer from metanoia, and not paranoia. We weren’t above our time. We brought colonialism; we didn’t know any better. But notice, I didn’t say, “Well, I wasn’t there. Doesn’t have nothing to do with me. That happened hundreds of years ago. Doesn’t have nothing to do with me.” Right away, I wanted to be cruel and say to this guy, “Well how do you stay in a country called the United States that killed natives - genocide - who had slavery? How do you stay in this country and sing *America The Beautiful*? He’d say, “Well, I wasn’t there; I didn’t do it.” No; see, we may not do this. We have to own this; we have to own it. You weren’t there when slavery happened. You weren’t there when natives were being genocided; I wasn’t there when natives died in

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those residential schools. But we have to own this. Christ, innocent as he was. You die between two guilty crosses.

You know when I was Provincial, we had a French-Canadian Oblate, a wonderful man, and he had been 50 years ordained. And he was accused of sexual assault, and falsely. But it took almost a year before this all went to trial, and he was cleared. But during this time he was living at our provincial house, and he was always suicidal; it just destroyed his life. In fact, one day he came and said, "You know, Father, I lived up north where it was dangerous and I had a gun. Take my gun; it's not safe for me to have this gun." But then one day he told me this: you know I've been 50 years ordained, and I've done good work. I've tried to be an honest priest, and now even if I'm acquitted I'll still be tainted. People will say he got off; he had good lawyers. He said I'm gonna die tainted. But so did Jesus. Jesus also died tainted. He died as a crucified criminal. They weren't making him out: well he's Jesus, he's innocent now. He died as a crucified criminal.

And incidentally, even for the early church, it took them years to process that, to get their minds around it. That's why the cross was this huge scandal. How could he have died like this? See the temptation is to say "I wasn't there" or "I haven't done it." Like this young priest: 'Don't look at me; I have to pay the price. People look at me and say he's a pedophile. I can't hug your kids.' No, that's what we're asked to carry. That's what it means to carry something. And not distance yourself from it.

And then, the next one...Number 7: "Sing a new song!" You ever wonder with that beautiful song where it begins, "Sing to the Lord a new song!" You ever wonder what the old song is? We're supposed to sing something new? What's the old song? Well, the old song of compassion is this: that we feel compassion for good people. But we don't feel compassion for criminals, for victimizers. So what Jesus says on the Sermon of the Mount. Jesus says, "Be compassionate the way your heavenly Father is compassionate." Because your Heavenly Father lets the sun; the sun in the sky shines equally on the good and the bad, the righteous and the unrighteous. The sun just shines, and it shines equally on vegetables and weeds. So, Jesus says that's the way we have to love. Our love has to go out to the good and the bad. It's interesting John really plays this motif off with the woman caught in adultery. John says one day they brought this woman, and they said we caught her in the very act of committing adultery. And Jesus rescues her. The parallel story in the Book of Daniel is Suzanna. She's innocent, and she's rescued. And the parable says it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether you're guilty or innocent. God loves the guilty and God loves the innocent. And that's where we're really stretched with compassion. And remember every one of those: every pedophile was himself violated. They were once a child. And their childhood was stolen from them. Our compassion can't be selective. That's why the Church has finally said no capital punishment. Jesus says forgiveness.

You know John Paul...I give him credit for this ... he was the first pope in 2,000 years who said we shouldn't do capital punishment. Now Francis came along and said it's wrong. John Paul said it isn't wrong; capital punishment is not wrong. It's biblically mandated, except Jesus said don't do it. I'm calling you to something higher. I'm saying forgive murderers. That's the ultimate stretch. That's the new song.



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Jesus says anybody can love those who love you, just as anybody can hate those who hate you. Anybody can feel for a victim. But can you feel for the victimizer? That's a stretch.

Then, 8: Ponder as Mary did. You know when they say Mary pondered these things, we misunderstand that because we take it in the Greek sense. The software we think of in English, Spanish, French and Western languages – it's Greek. I call it Windows 400. Augustine wrote Windows 400, and we're still using that with some upgrades. But it's Greek thought: Aristotle, Plato, and so on; and it's dualistic. So, for us, to ponder means to try to think deep thoughts. You do an Ignatian Retreat and you're making lists, and you're trying to sort something out. You're pondering. That's not what it meant for a Hebrew. For a Hebrew it meant: to carry the tension. You put your mouth to the dust and wait. This is an image of Mary pondering: they said when Jesus was dying, Mary stood under the cross. Just that. Now, what was Mary doing under the Cross? She was spoken to, but she doesn't speak. First of all, it's in the verb: You know sometimes artists don't do Mary a favor; they have Mary prostrate under the cross. Prostration is a sign of collapse; it's a sign of hysteria. Mary stood under the cross; she was strong. So, it's a strength. What was Mary doing under the cross? The only thing she could do at that moment. Jesus said sometimes darkness just has its hour. And there's nothing you can do about it. And Mary's under the cross; she says you know something? Today I can't stop the crucifixion; nobody can. But you know what I can do? I can absorb some of the hatred, the bitterness, the anger, all the pain that causes crucifixion by absorbing it in my body and not giving it back. Now how different if Mary had been under the cross shouting, "You're all a bunch of murderers, you're terrible people, my Son is innocent; they're all guilty." She would have replicated the very energy that causes crucifixions. She's absorbing it. We don't know what she said, but they would have been words of compassion, and so on. She was carrying that.

And then...Number 9: Reaffirm our faith in God. And reaffirm our faith in the church. You know, the Roman Catholic Church or the church period...we've been around for 2,000 years, and we're going to have a long, long go of it. We're gonna emerge from this more purified; we're gonna emerge a holier church. And also, hopefully, because initially all the cannons were trained on the church. Today they're trained on the Boy Scouts, and all kinds of other groups. The way we handle this, we can help society handle a societal problem. The Church will go on.

You know I always have to resist being sarcastic; one of my nieces-in-law has a fair amount of attitude about church. So, they were building a new church in this one town and the slogan was, 'we're building for the future.' She said, "well I hope you build small." If I wanted to be crude, I said I hope they build sturdy because that church is going to be around a long time after you and I are gone. And so, we affirm our faith in church and God.

[Number 10]...And to wait patiently in the pain. We can't speed this up; healing takes time. My brother-in-law is a doctor. He says today you know we are so impatient. People break a leg and they'll set the cast and say you have to wear this for 8 weeks or so. 8 weeks? Well, can't we get some electric shocks, and can't we get this going, and better in 3 or 4 days? No, healing takes that long. And psychic healing

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and social healing — it takes time. There's no way they can just wave a wand and make this go away. It's here. And, I'll say one last thing.

You know in Scripture everything has to go 40 days or 40 years. The Israelites had to be 40 years in the desert. Jesus had to be 40 days in the desert. The word 40— as you know in Scripture that's a pure image. We don't know what that means. Except it means this: it means the length of time that's needed. For what? Until we get it. See the Israelites had to be in the desert for 40 years until they learned the lesson they needed to go into the Promised Land. Jesus had to be 40 days in the desert; then he learned the lesson he needed to go into his ministry. How long will we have the sexual abuse crisis? 40 years. Whatever that means; until we get it. This is a dark night; it's meant to teach us something. And it won't go away until we learn it. Bishops can't make it go away; lawyers can't make it go away. Nobody can make it go away. This is meant to teach us something profound. When we get the lesson, it will go away. And we come out of the desert into a new land.

We have a half hour here for questions and comments. I'm sorry that the online people ...

And this is uncensored; feel free to ask me anything. I have a back door to escape here if necessary. I know routes out of here that I don't have to go through that front door.

Host: I just ask folks to come to the microphone if you would just so we can all hear. I'll turn the other mic on and we'll be set. Just tilt it, and it'll adjust to your height.

**Question:** Thank you, Fr. Ron. This was very informative, very needed, very thoughtful. I appreciate it very much, thank you. You mentioned the young church in America. And it arose a question in my mind: I don't know if there are any statistics about the sexual abuse world-wide. Was it more American or North American, or industrialized nations over underdeveloped nations? Is there any type statistics like that which you are aware of?

**Fr. Ron:** A very good question. Let me try to answer it. We don't know because it's being tracked more in North America than elsewhere until recently. Let me take it from personal experience: I was Provincial in 1992, and then I was on our Oblate General Council from 1998 until I came here in 2005. And this would come up in our general chapter. The American provincials would bring up sexual abuse, and the rest of the world they frowned on that. They said no that's an American problem because their loose sexual ethics; don't try to lay your problem on us. Talk about naivete. Today every one of those places has all exactly the same problems. This is not a North American problem. This is not something that we're struggling with — you know the sexual revolution of 1968. This has been around for a long time, and, in fact, in some countries like Belgium it's really bad. That's a good question. The American and Canadian provincials — we took a lot of heat in our chapters. They said you're trying to lay your problem on us; clean up your own act. We don't want to hear about it. And then, even in our General Council, sometimes we had to block places in the world where they voted to name somebody a provincial who was a pedophile. And they'd say, he's gotten therapy; he's over it. And we'd say, no, this guy's not going to become Provincial on our watch. He should be taken out of ministry. They were behind. They were

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behind, but today it's happening all over. It just broke in a big way, for instance, in Poland which was this ultra-Catholic country. And all of a sudden, bang; it's front and center today. 20 years ago, Poland would say, not in Poland. Today, it's all over. Thanks for the question.

**Question:** Fr. Ron, thank you for the lecture. You mentioned that 1 in 4 women are victims of sexual abuse or sexual assault. Those people actually go out and form relationships, get married, and have children. And so, I don't think you can limit it to 1 in 4. I think you have to go down that ripple effect and see how many people it affects. You also said the victims don't want money. But there's an actual cost to this. There's a financial cost, there's an economic cost, loss of income. There's a social cost; there's an emotional cost. And it's hard to say they're not entitled to something.

**Fr. Ron:** Ok, thanks. Let me just answer — first of all, the statistic 1 in 4 and how it ricochets. And it's generational. Like abuse of all kinds, it's generational. It affects the kids, it affects the family, it affects marriages, and so on. And then in some small way it can affect their kids.

Let me give you an even scarier statistic. A couple of years ago when I was still President, I was sitting in my office and I was reading *America* magazine. And they said they had done a survey where they estimated that in the United States 80 percent of women say they have had sexual harassment. So, that sounded high. So, I went across and I had a secretary who is a woman, and there happened to be 2 other women there, 2 women professors. So, I asked them, "how does this number strike you: 80 percent of women have been sexually harassed?" They said, "it's a 100 percent!" No woman has not been sexually harassed. Now they haven't all been sexually assaulted. So that we really have to look, and I'll talk next week about our sexual ethos. We really need to look at that. That is not just a minor thing. But now, the second part, I'd agree. They're not asking for money. But money should be given because you said there is a cost: therapy, healing. If you're paying \$80 an hour to see a therapist, you need someone to help you pay for that. I guess what I mean when they say they don't want money: they don't want to sue and earn another \$2 million and buy a home in Florida. And the same back home with indigenous people in residential schools: they don't want money. They want money for healing. And there should be. The Church should be paying; everybody should be paying. And so, you make a good point. So, when I say they don't want money, I meant that in the best sense. They're not trying to use this to get rich. But I need money for healing. Thanks for the question.

**Question:** It seems that you were giving the pre-1990 Church the benefit of the doubt. The pre-1990 Church almost universally slandered the victim or discredited them, not understanding the sickness of the perpetrator's side – that behavior alone was sinful. The church had a responsibility to their sheep no matter what.

**Fr. Ron:** Well, I agree, and yet at the same time I want to stand by what I said. To judge people from where we're standing today where they're standing. It's the same; like for instance, a lot of mistakes were made. And sometimes people were with ill will or I pointed out the church thought too much about protecting itself rather than about the victims, and so on. That's true. I don't know what to say - what's excusable and what's not excusable? It isn't always fair to take today's knowledge and go back.

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The same as for instance today. It's taken us a couple hundred years to understand colonialism and what colonialism did. You had saints - great saints - who came to the Americas and they were colonial and they were exporting European culture and they were doing violence to people in Jesus' name, and they didn't know better. How much is excusable? But we can't exactly judge by today's standards. Very concretely: imagine I'm a bishop in the mid-80's and there's a priest accused of pedophilia. So, he comes in, and first of all, he's lying beyond lying, that it never happened, and this is all false. Give me 3 lie detector tests; and he knows this priest. Dangerous and he might believe the priest, but even if he doesn't believe him he says, 'Look, you are gonna go to Jemez Springs and you're gonna go to Silver Springs, and you're gonna go for 6 months of therapy.' So, they send him there to JS or SS, places where priests go. And he there's and after 6 months the psychologists say he's good, he's dealt with his issues. You can put him back in ministry. He puts him back in ministry. Of course, he's going to be an offender. Now how guilty is that bishop or that provincial? After 1990, they're guilty. Before 1990 ... It's a hard question: what is excusable? For instance, with the residential schools, I know some priests and sisters who literally gave their life and their blood for that, and died and realized this was all a mistake. This was violating the culture and so on. Those are hard questions. We have to call it and say that was wrong. But the case I gave you, it's a real case; multiply it by 50 times. Also, sometimes the bishops or provincials are simply trying to protect the church. So, we don't want this publicly exposed and they weren't talking to victims then even after 1990. A lot of times, sadly, the bishops and the church listen to their lawyers. The lawyer said don't talk to the victim, don't talk to the victim. Big, big mistake! The bishops should have sat with the victim, listened to their tears, turned and said we need some healing. Instead of our lawyer is gonna go against your lawyer in court. A lot of mistakes were made. I love the question - what's excusable and what's inexcusable? But, I do draw a fault line, and I'm using my own self. If I had become provincial in the 80's I wouldn't have known this stuff. And I was also lucky when I became provincial in 1991 and we had some sharp people on our provincial council. They installed me and they said the first month - the very first month - you're going to Ottawa, you're going to Rome, you're going to Chicago, and you're gonna talk to all these people and find out what this is so that we don't make some stupid mistakes. And it was a great learning experience for me. I didn't know this stuff. When I became provincial I couldn't spell the word, honestly. And then even early on and prior to that, sometimes when I'd hear victim impact statements, I'd think they're exaggerating. One incident couldn't destroy your life like that. I realized yes it can, yes it can. And it does. So hopefully I successfully dodged that question.

Other questions: feel free. It's a sensitive topic. There's a lot of hurt so we may as well speak about it.

**Question:** Father, you say that pedophilia has no cure. Is there a way to diagnose it before it's acted on?

**Fr. Ron:** Good question. Pedophilia has no cure. Can it be prior diagnosed? We're trying. We are trying. For instance, when people apply in seminaries today they put them through a battery of tests. It usually doesn't show up. Because precisely part of the nature of the disease it's so hidden. I wasn't just kidding when I said I lived with a pedophile for 4 years. I didn't know he was a pedophile; he didn't know he was a pedophile. That's part of the nature of the disease. Or this friend of mine in Ottawa she had this sexual

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abuse; she didn't know that. It was deeply buried. And see, I hope they find tests but it's hard. The denial mechanism is so powerful which goes back to the nature. The child is violated and it's so traumatic that you hide the memory. But the memory stays inside of you. The memory stays inside of your body, and it stays inside of your psyche and starts shredding you apart. The cure would be if for instance ... I should say this ... the clinical axiom I was taught was: every abuser was first abused. But not every abused person becomes an abuser. Only a very small number. That example I gave you with the woman in Ottawa. Her heart stopped. She was clinically dead for a few seconds. If she had been an abuser, she would have probably been cured. It would take that kind of radical, radical therapy. See before that happens there is something inside that you can't get out. And it's like addictive behavior. And they can lie - O God. I've heard stories; you can write a book. Never happened, never happened. Never happened. And usually, a lot of people who knew them well won't believe it. They'll say it never happened. This guy that I lived with for four years and I lived with him from '80 to '84. Then, I never saw him again. In 1989, I was flying back from Ottawa to Edmonton and one of our scholastics picked me up at the airport, and it was front page news. He showed me this thing about Eric's been arrested. I thought he had made this up as a joke. I thought this scholastic had a strange sense of humor. Honestly, I just couldn't believe it. It's that much out of the blue. So, I hope they can find tests. But pedophiles don't have \_\_\_\_\_. And that's also true of families, and so on.

**Question:** Thank you, Father. This singular tsunami that swept over our church affected a lot of seniors, senior citizens who have spent their life in church, who have spent their life in faith communities, who didn't or don't still quite understand what happened. And it seems that it's kind of disappointing when you think about. What you're saying is the church was deeply affected by secular issues and not able to function on its own. Is that correct?

**Fr. Ron:** Say that last part again. I'm not sure I'm getting the sharpness of your question.

**Question:** I'm trying to understand what confusion I may have as a senior citizen who is in the twilight of my life, or trying to justify or reconcile my faith with the actions of the church. Is there something that suggests to me that there is hope? Or that I've been misguided?

**Fr. Ron:** Maybe the best thing that I can do is give you the quote I gave you from Chesterton which I didn't read. Chesterton said, "the church is justified not because her children don't sin, but because they do." The church from the beginning of time has had a dark side. It's got a great side, but a dark side. I can quote one of my favorite authors, Carlo Carretto, the old monk in the desert. He once wrote an ode to the church; he said: "The church is the most false, and the most compromised organization on this planet. It's also the holiest one, and the purest one." They go together; that's the great paradox. This is a church of great sinners; it's a church of great grace. I can see why people get the solution, and it's easy to get the solution and say well if this happened to the church, the priest did this - why do I believe? We need a wide enough ecclesiology that understands the complexity of human nature, the complexity of sin, the complexity of grace, and the complexity of Christ's redemption.

**Question:** We seek forgiveness. And we can expect it.

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**Fr. Ron:** And when I say that thing about “sing a new song”, which means we can’t distance ourselves; I didn’t do this. These few bad apples did all this; we’re good apples. That’s singing the old song. I’m innocent; he’s guilty. And it’s not that I say we’re all guilty. No, we all help carry that. You have a loving family with a dysfunctional member, they help carry that. He’s part of the family. We’ve got one weird uncle; he shouldn’t be coming to Thanksgiving anymore. But if he comes, he’s our uncle. The family deals with that. You know I’ve seen tears on both sides of this. I’ve sat with people who are shaking that the room shakes in terms of the pain they’re going through. I’ve sat with perpetrators who also shed tears, sincere tears. They say I’m sick, I’m sick; it’s awful, I’m sick. And then three months later they do it again.

**Question:** We should have the courage to forgive. That’s hard to do.

**Fr. Ron:** But I don’t want to quickly lay that on to victims. Let me say something about that. You know forgiveness - forgiveness is not a simple thing. Today I think psychology sometimes doesn’t do us a favor because they make it sound as if you just forgive. It doesn’t work like that. Let me begin again biblically. The biblical theology of the sabbath / the spirituality of sabbath which we don’t live anymore and we don’t even understand anymore is this. If you go to orthodox Judaism they still have this. They say God created ... there’s supposed to be a rhythm of time, there’s supposed to be a rhythm of forgiveness. The rhythm of time works this way: you work for 6 days, you have 1 day of sabbath, a holiday. Then you work for 7 years, then you have 1 year of holiday called a sabbatical. Then you work for 7 x 7 years, 49, and then you’re supposed to have a mega sabbatical. It’s completely celebrated. Then you work for a lifetime and you go for an eternity of sabbatical. See, sabbath is a symbol of heaven.

And that’s also the rhythm for forgiveness. This is the way forgiveness works. You can hold a minor grudge for 6 days. Somebody ticks you off at a meeting, you may pout for 6 days. Then you have to let it go. You can hold a major grudge for 7 years and that’s where the statute of limitations comes from. And that’s biblically based. Then you have to give it up. You can hold a soul searing grudge that tore your life apart for 49 years, then you have to let it go. And you can hold something that destroyed your life until your deathbed, then you have to let it go. See, so oftentimes with victims 7 years isn’t going to do it. Maybe 49 years will do it. And if not, it goes to the deathbed. So, this is a chance to forgive. Just let it go; let’s move forward. You know companies and stuff, that’s in their PR: ‘moving forward, moving forward.’ A trail of dead bodies back there, but we’re moving forward. The church in the United States, we can’t move forward. And some people need 7 years, some need 49 years, and some need a lifetime. Before they can say I can let this go, I can let this go. And some will have to have some help from God in eternity to be embraced and go ahead and move forward.

**Question:** What would compassion for the victimizer look like?

**Fr. Ron:** What would compassion for the victimizer look like? That’s a very good question. It’s not an abstract question. It’s not an abstract thing. So, first of all, you don’t treat them like a leper which is in fact what they are. You know the new lepers in our culture are these people. You need to phone them and talk to them, and stay in contact with them. They’re deeply, deeply wounded people. And put up

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with their lying, and work with their dysfunction. You know that today it's the ultimate; we are gonna look at suicide which is the other one. There are two things that put a permanent asterisk by your name, and that becomes a prism through which you see the whole person's life and everything through them. One of them is pedophilia; the other one is suicide. The pictures come down; you never talk about this person; you pretend you don't know the person. We do that with suicide victims - pull their pictures off the wall. With pedophiles - take their pictures off the wall. See, that's not compassion; these are still people. They gotta be treated like people; to stay in contact. That man who I lived with who is a pedophile has been in prison three times, and he's in prison right now. I write to him; he writes to me. We exchange emails. He's my brother. What can you do?

Well, thank you. Again, I apologized at the beginning; I apologize at the end. This is a not an easy topic. When I was walking over tonight, I thought, "Why in the hell am I doing this?" I'd sooner be baptizing kids or at a youth rally tonight, but it's important this get talked about. Ok, thank you.