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Vatican and Sexual Abuse. Two Opposing Solutions, Both Wrong



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In dealing with incidents of sexual abuse imputed to sacred ministers, it sometimes happens that at various levels of the Church mistakes are made in opposite directions. Either through an excess of benevolence, or through extreme rigor.

Two recent cases are emblematic. One in Italy and another in Poland. Both involve the Vatican and the very person of the pope.

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The first case is the sudden appearance, in the June 19 edition of **"L'Osservatore Romano"**, of the byline of a priest, Giacomo Ruggeri, presented as a scholar of the "dynamics of social media and of the digital in the sphere of anthropology, theology, pastoral practice."

His contribution, the first in a series, is on page 4 of the official newspaper of the Holy See, under the column "Field Hospital," which - citing Pope Francis - sets out stories aimed at "caring for the wounds and warming the hearts of the faithful."

One of these wounds is, sure enough, entrusted to the care of Fr. Ruggeri, who describes it like this:

"In a time characterized by extreme care for the body, to be exhibited all over the place, every time I pick up a smartphone I am not accessing an object, but I am coming into contact with myself, through means that are unprecedented and not fully deliberate. It is what I call the "digital skin": it is reproduced continually in feeding my persona made viral in social media, in providing it abundant food to the tune of photos, videos, posts, and above all followers."

It is a turning inward upon oneself - Fr. Ruggeri diagnoses - that represents a genuine pathology, a digital bulimia that can be healed only "at a high price," with silence.

But who is the author of this article? **Giacomo Ruggeri** is a priest of the diocese of Pordenone who for a number of years carried out his ministry in another diocese, that of Fano, as parish priest and as spokesman for Bishop Armando Trasarti.

In 2012 he was arrested and the following year he was tried for sexual acts committed on a public beach with a 13-year-old girl, acts that he himself admitted were "out of place" even if they were moved by "sincere affection." Sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of confinement, his punishment was reduced on appeal in 2016 to 1 year, 11 months, and 10 days, and he was released on time served.

The bishop of Fano suspended Fr. Ruggeri from all pastoral duties, and in Rome too the congregation for the doctrine of the faith found him guilty, but without suspending him "a divinis" or reducing him to the lay state.

Now Fr. Ruggeri is back in Pordenone, with the bishop of which, Giuseppe Pellegrini, he had worked years ago in Rome in the national service for youth pastoral care. And he has taken to writing for the Catholic publisher "Il Pozzo di Giacobbe," where he edits - as "L'Osservatore Romano" recalls in presenting its new author - the series "Discernere hic et nunc" and "Capire il nuovo," which for now present only three of his own books, all dedicated to spiritual "discernment" in situations of crisis, including digital pathologies, with special attention to the "Exercises" of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus.

But now that Fr. Ruggeri is also writing for "L'Osservatore Romano," the supporters of "zero tolerance" will have grounds for protest.

Unless his kindly recruitment by the newspaper of the Holy See is to be understood as one of the "paths of penitence and of recovery for offenders" recommended by Pope Francis in the **"Points of reflection"** that he offered at the Vatican summit on sexual abuse last February.

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The second emblematic case, more serious, has its setting in Poland and had one of its key moments on February 20 of this year, right before the summit on abuse, when at the end of the Wednesday general audience Francis received two activists of the Polish radical left, Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus and Agata Diduszko-Zyglewska, and together with them the president of a support foundation for victims of pedophile priests, Marek Lisinski, whose hand the pope emphatically kissed (see photo) after receiving from him a dossier against the complicity of the bishops of Poland in those offenses.

Francis was not aware, however, of what two subsequent independent and "secular" investigations - one by the journalist Sebastian Karczewski and another by the liberal newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" - would unmask in irrefutable fashion, namely that Lisinski, presented to the pope as the victim of a pedophile priest, was in reality concealing a completely different story. He had borrowed money from a priest, Zdzisław Witkowski, and to avoid paying back the debt had accused the priest of having abused him thirty years before.

The details of the incident are reported in detail on ACI Stampa of June 19, in this correspondence from Warsaw by Włodzimierz Redzioch:

> **Polonia: colpire la Chiesa con le false accuse sulla questione degli abusi**

Suffice it to say that Lisinski sent his accusation in 2010 to Bishop Piotr Libera of the diocese of Plock in which Fr. Witkowski was incardinated. The initial investigation verified the priest's innocence, but a massive opinion campaign was unleashed against him that induced the bishop in 2013 to suspend him from priestly service for three years and to send to Rome, to the congregation for the doctrine of the faith, the very worst accusations against Fr. Witkowski. With the result that in 2017 the congregation confirmed the sanctions against the priest.

All of this turned Lisinski into a champion in the war against pedophilia in the Church, when in reality he was hatching his plots for the sake of purely material benefits.

"If these facts had been revealed before, probably there would not have been the famous meeting of Lisinski with Francis," Redzioch writes in his correspondence from Warsaw. And he adds:

"Unfortunately, the journalistic revelations have also cast a shadow over the activity of the curia of Plock and of Bishop Libera, who, uncritically applying the rule of 'zero tolerance,' did nothing to really understand the case and to defend a priest who was surely innocent. It is in this context that one must undoubtedly view Libera's decision to leave the management of the diocese for a period of penance and to retire, beginning July, to a Camaldolese monastery for six months and to retire and prayer for the Church in Poland and his diocese.' [...] Giving in to the politically correct, indulging the expectations of the media, hastening the judgment of guilt can only aggravate the situation and feed more and more the spiral of lies."

Condividi:



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giugno: 2019

L	M	M	G	V	S	D
					1	2
	4	5		7	8	9
	11	12		14	15	16
	18	19		21	22	23
	25			28	29	30

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