

Cardinal Müller's revisionist view damages church and denies victims

Francis Sullivan 15 March 2016

Last week one of the most senior Cardinals in the Vatican and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Müller made comments in an interview with one of Germany's major dailies that the clerical perpetrators of child sexual abuse must take the responsibility for their crimes and not 'innocent men' who were close to them professionally.

This is something I thought I would never hear again, that old and tired and deceitful idea that clerical child sexual abuse was the fault of a 'few bad apples' and that there is no requirement on the Church as a whole to share in the blame and as a consequence take responsibility for the devastating results.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is the final tribunal for priestly sexual abuse cases – it is where, within Church structures, abusive priests are judged and decisions made about their future.

The Congregation is an extremely important part of the Vatican, particularly at a time when abuse survivors and the community are weighing up every word from every Church leader, be they a parish priest or the Pope, to see if they really 'do get it'.

When the leader of this Congregation seems to have made a judgment that the responsibility for decades of child sexual abuse should rest solely with the perpetrators then we have a big problem.

What has now become clear, and what seems to be broadly accepted by many, if not most people both in and outside the Church, is that a cultural failing within the Church allowed for the cover up of crimes and monsters dressed as priests to be moved from one parish to another, from one state to another and sometimes from one country to another.

In many cases when offending priests were moved, someone in the church hierarchy knew they were abusing kids and yet they allowed the move to take place, with the result that the offending priest continued to prey on and hurt children.

The senior leaders who made these decisions were not child abusers, but let's be clear, their decisions led directly to children continuing to be abused in our Church.

There are no ifs or buts – this has been demonstratively proven. This is a tragedy that the entire Church needs to acknowledge and address.

This isn't about a few bad apples, it is about collusion and cover up, it's about reputation before transparency, it's about abandoning the very bedrock of Christ's teaching to protect an institution.

If we allow the old defensive thinking that minimises and blame-shifts to reassert itself then the Church and the survivors of clerical sexual abuse will continue to be mired in this crisis for decades to come.