

CTSA Board Statement on Clerical Sexual Abuse

The Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) shares the pain of the whole community of faith. We stand in solidarity with the victims of abuse and their families, as we read the horrifying catalogue of clerical sexual abuse contained in the recent grand jury report on six Pennsylvania dioceses. The unimaginable and indelible suffering of the victims, the deeds of the abusers, and the crimes of church leaders who enabled the abuse move us deeply to action. We are a learned society of theologians. But first and foremost, we are people of faith who feel the pain of the entire community. We are moved to holy anger at the sinfulness of so many church leaders to which that community had lent its trust. We join all who are determined to do whatever it takes to bring clerical sexual abuse to an end.

As the principal association of Catholic theologians in North America and the largest professional society of theologians in the world, we believe that one of the primary tasks of this urgent moment is to craft theological responses to the horrors that have received renewed attention as a result of the Pennsylvania Report in order to prevent them from happening again. As theologians, we commit ourselves to this solidarity in our research and work. In particular, we pledge ourselves to a profound, rigorous study of the significant theological and ecclesial factors surrounding clerical abuse, including the lay/clergy split and clericalism's role in the misuse of power in the church. Our whole community of faith and especially the young deserves a better future. But words alone are not enough; good intentions and genuine grief at these kinds of sins will not bring abuse to an end nor lead to a new kind of understanding and practice of authority. We need the engagement of all the faithful and attention to structural reforms in order to prevent

church leaders repeating their predecessors' egregious and sinful patterns of simply 'circling the wagons' to protect 'their own.'

The CTSA will use its resources to press for whatever changes its inquiries conclude are necessary. In the coming weeks and months, we will be looking at a range of phenomena that may enable or exacerbate the sinful misuse of power detailed in the Pennsylvania report and possible responses to these, including calls for seminary education reform, questions surrounding statutes of limitation upon cases of sexual abuse, and a larger and more effective executive role for lay people in the administration and adjudication of accusations of sexual abuse or its cover-up. The Society will shortly name a special presidential commission charged to bring recommendations to the Board for these or similar actions.

This is a painful moment in the history of our church. What Pope Francis rightly names the wounds that "never disappear" suffered by survivors of abuse, and the grief of the rest of us who are horrified by what has been done in the name of the church must be honored, lived with, and responded to by our whole community of faith. Our task as theologians is to put our scholarly expertise to work to explore *why* what has happened in the church has happened, and to promote steps that must be taken to prevent these atrocities from recurring, or being tolerated or covered up, in the future. This will necessitate listening to and learning from all those affected, especially victims and their loved ones. It will also require looking carefully at clerical abuse of power in all its manifestations in order to discern ways to restore the trust of the people in the ministers of the church, the faithful majority of whom are also suffering in their own way from the fall-out of these latest revelations.

There are both personal and structural failures in our ecclesial life that must be recognized and eliminated, in the name of all that is holy. Our work begins now.