

The Sexual Abuse Scandal and a New Ethical Horizon: A Perspective from India

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Abstract

Despite recent signs of change, the Indian church was rather reluctant to acknowledge the clerical sexual abuse scandal as its own problem. In the Indian context, the scandal entails not only the abuse of minors, but also the abuse of women and other vulnerable adults by church personnel. The hierarchical structure of Indian society, gender relations based on patriarchy, and postcolonial attitudes provide a fertile ground for abuse. Clericalism, centralization of power in the church, and continuing negative attitudes to sexuality are further contributing factors. The clerical sexual abuse scandal calls for developing new ethical horizons based on a theology of a participatory church, and a reconsideration of the church's attitude to sexuality and gender relations.

Keywords

Catholic Church in India, celibacy, clericalism, gender, participatory church, protection of minors, seminary formation, sexuality, sex education, synodality

While Christians constitute a tiny minority in India, the Catholic Church there cannot be considered to be insignificant. The Catholic Church in India consists of 174 dioceses belonging to three rites—the Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, and Latin—and boasts a significant number of religious priests and religious women.¹ For example, the Indian Assistance of the Society of Jesus ranks

1. According to the 2011 census, Christians constitute 2.3% of the population, while Catholics account for 1.5% of the total population. See “Religion Census 2011,” *Census 2011*, Census

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first in numbers among all Jesuit assistancies worldwide, and there are many women religious congregations, with more than 5,000 members. Moreover, thousands of educational institutions and other institutions are run by the Catholic Church in India. Especially when considering the significant institutional presence of the church in India, the topic of clerical sexual abuse cannot be ignored.

Yet responses of the church in India to the sexual abuse crisis have been rather mixed. In spite of the seriousness of the crisis, it is doubtful whether the church in India has taken it seriously enough or has tried to understand it. Many continue to consider it a Western problem correlated with a loose sexual morality. In fact, this attitude can be seen in general in the Indian society, where Western culture, held responsible for changes in sexual morality, is said to be corrupting the age-old values of the Indian tradition. In addition, many Indian Catholics believe that the abuse scandal, to a great extent, is a media creation, or a planned and concerted attack on the Catholic Church.

This does not mean that the Indian church has completely ignored the issue of sexual abuse. Attitudes are changing slowly, especially due to some of the recent abuse scandals in which the clergy and religious were involved. In 2015 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) promulgated *The CBCI Child Protection Policy & Procedures*.² The document acknowledges that child abuse is widespread in India, and affirms the "Study on Child Abuse in India 2007" conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, which reported that 53.22% of children have suffered one or more forms of sexual abuse.³ The document offers guidelines for dioceses, provinces, institutions, and staff members; guidelines for parents and guardians; and details of the constitution of the Child Protection Committee for various institutions. The document also points out that in the case of sexual abuse of children, the criminal dimension of the abusive action must be considered and reporting must be conducted as required by the civil law.⁴ Moreover, it addresses the rehabilitation of victims and preventive

Organization of India, <https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>. The next census will be taken in 2021. Regarding the three rites: there was only one Oriental rite in India, that is, the rite of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, until the arrival of the Portuguese. The Syro-Malankara rite was formed in 1930 when a group from the St. Thomas Christian Church of Malabar, who had split from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in the sixteenth century, were reunited with the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *CBCI Child Protection Policy & Procedures* (New Delhi: CBCI Office for Education & Culture, September 25, 2015).
3. See Loveleen Kacker, Srinivas Varadan, and Pravesh Kumar, *Study on Child Abuse: India 2007* (New Delhi: Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007), <https://www.childlineindia.org.in/pdf/MWCD-Child-Abuse-Report.pdf>. Another study says that the prevalence of child sexual abuse could be between 18 and 50 percent. See David K. Carson, Jennifer M. Foster, and Aparajita Chowdhury, "Sexual Abuse of Children and Youth in India: An Anthropological Perspective," *The Oriental Anthropologist* 14 (2014): 149–70.
4. A recent case may be helpful in understanding the requirements of Indian law. Fr. Robin Vadakkumchery, who was found guilty of sexually abusing and impregnating a

measures. While it is a very helpful document on the whole, it does not directly address the abuse of minors by the clergy. However, on February 6, 2019 the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference (KCBC) promulgated guidelines for providing a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults and procedures to deal with sexual abuse.⁵ Following this measure, many bishops have issued circular letters to be read in their parishes, discussing in detail the issue of sexual abuse, and directly addressing sexual abuse by the clergy and church personnel.

In 2017 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) promulgated *CBCI Guidelines to Deal with Sexual Harassment at Workplace*.⁶ The main source for the *Guidelines* is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013,⁷ passed by both the Lok Sabha and Rajyasabha (the two houses of the Indian Parliament), which is now statutory law in India. Although the *CBCI Guidelines* is a commendable document aimed at defending people in church institutions against sexual harassment, one of its shortcomings is that it does not explicitly include bishops, priests, religious, and other church personnel in its purview.

While sexual abuse can be directed against both women and minors, in recent decades the abuse of minors has received greater attention, since a number of cases have

minor girl, was punished by the court with twenty years of imprisonment. The verdict is unique in that the victim or her family did not have any complaint against the perpetrator. Moreover, the victim told the court that their sexual relationship was consensual. She also claimed that she was not minor. But, since according to the documents she was a minor, the court did not accept her arguments and imposed a maximum term of imprisonment for Vadakkumchery. Additionally, cases were charged against the nuns who tended to the victim when she was admitted for delivery and against the directors of the orphanage where the newborn child was handed over, on the grounds that they did not comply with the demands of the law to report to the police such cases. See "Kottiyoor Rape Case," *Mathrubhumi*, February 19 2019, <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/kottiyoor-rape-case-fr-robin-vadakkumchery-gets-20-yrs-imprisonment-1.3575200>.

5. Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council, *Safe Environment Programme for Church Personnel* (February 6, 2019), http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/news_details.php?news=9762.
6. Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *CBCI Guidelines to Deal with Sexual Harassment at Workplace* (September 14, 2017), <https://www.cbci.in/Policies/Policy221153016794.pdf>. Here it is also worth mentioning a unique contribution on part of the Indian church toward gender justice, namely, the *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India* (GP). See Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India* (December 8, 2009), http://cbci.in/DownloadMat/Gender_Policy.pdf. This was the first of any such policies to be issued by a bishops' conference in the Catholic Church. However, as in many other cases, the gap between theory and practice is visible. In a 2014 study undertaken by Streevani Publications in Pune, it was found that almost 44% of church members/leaders never heard that such a policy existed. See *Gender Justice and Catholic Church: Beliefs and Behaviours; A Scientific Study* (Pune: Streevani Publications, 2014), 8.
7. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, Ministry of Law and Justice, Indian Parliament, April 23, 2013, <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Sexual-Harassment-at-Workplace-Act.pdf>.

been reported, and in many countries this has become the most serious problem that the church is facing. However, the sexual abuse of women by church personnel has also been gaining attention. There are reports that sexual abuse of women is rampant in the church, especially in some countries, including India.⁸ There are also reports of sexual abuse of nuns by the clergy.⁹ Although the present crisis in the church is focused on the sexual abuse of minors, when considering the Indian context, it is important to take into account both sexual abuse of minors and of women. They are interrelated. In both, abuse of power and patriarchal attitudes and structures are apparent.

One of the major difficulties encountered when addressing clerical sexual abuse in the Indian context is the availability of data. Although there are reports of sexual abuse by the clergy, and cases filed against them, we do not know the number of cases of sexual abuse of minors and women by the clergy, the number and percentage of clergy involved in such cases, or the details of the actions taken. Moreover, since the numbers may seem to some to be small, the response has not been serious or urgent. The pattern of responses from the church hierarchy seems similar to that in the West in the first decades of the abuse crisis, and the structures and concepts that facilitated such a response look similar. Hence, in spite of the lack of clear data, it is important to reflect on the ethical frameworks which fail to prevent such abuses even in the Indian context.

When we reflect on the ethical challenges posed by the sexual abuse scandal, we may directly or indirectly refer to the unethical behavior of those who are involved in this scandal. Without minimizing the personal responsibility of those who have committed this sin and crime, it is important to keep in mind that these crimes and their internal handling by church authorities and others have taken place within the context of a system and structures shaped and formed by a long tradition of customs and habits which have failed to ensure ethical behavior and responses. New ethical horizons are not easily created on an organizational level by people shaped through custom and habit.

8. See for example, Tessa Kendall, "Sexual Abuse of Women in the Church," *Tessera* (blog), March 12, 2010, <http://tessera2009.blogspot.com/2010/03/sexual-abuse-of-women-in-church.html>.

9. See for example, Lucetta Scaraffia, "Without any Touching: A Serious Wound," *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 1, 2019, <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/without-any-touching>. A recent case from India, which has been widely reported, is the alleged rape of a religious sister by Bishop Franco Mulakkal of the diocese of Jalandhar in Punjab. After a long period of public protests by some members of her congregation, supported by many Catholics, including some priests, religious women, and people from different religions, the police registered a case against the bishop, and subsequently he was arrested. See Suhasini Raj and Kai Schultz, "Bishop in India Charged with Raping Nun over a 2-Year Period," *New York Times*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/world/asia/india-bishop-nun-rape.html>; "In a 1st, Bishop Franco Mulakkal to Go on Trial in Nun Rape Case," *The Times of India*, April 9, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/chargesheet-filed-in-nun-rape-case/articleshow/68802284.cms>.

In this discussion, I shall try to identify some of the issues at stake in the formation of a new ethical horizon for the church in India. These include the nature and role of the priest and, relatedly, the formation of candidates for ordination; the need for a new participatory and democratic ecclesiology; and an honest reappraisal of understandings of human sexuality, including the value of programs of sex education.

Relevant Features of the Indian Context

Before proceeding to reflect on these three foci for a new ethical horizon, let me briefly mention some of the features of the Indian society which may be relevant for this discussion.

First, Indian society is hierarchical. India is a democratic republic and in principle every citizen is equal. But for centuries, Indian society was organized on the basis of caste. Although originally the caste was said to be a division of labor, soon it became hierarchical, with higher and lower castes. The rights and duties of a person depended upon the caste to which she or he belonged. In other words, not all had equal rights, and those who belonged to lower castes were supposed to be subservient to those of the higher castes. Violation of the caste system and structure would ensure severe punishments. When Indian independence was declared in 1947, the caste system was prohibited by the constitution and the practice of caste made a crime according to the law. However, in practice discrimination continued. In the last few years, with a right-wing Hindu government in power, attacks on lower castes by higher castes have dramatically increased. This hierarchical structure is deeply embedded in the Indian psyche.

Second, Indian society is patriarchal.¹⁰ Patriarchy is based on power relations that are hierarchical and unequal, where men control women's production, reproduction, and sexuality. In general, women are considered to be the property of men, and the meaning of women's existence is understood in terms of their usefulness for men. *Manusmriti*, the most authoritative moral code of Hinduism, written by Manu, is unequivocal on the inferior status of women: "A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently even in (her own) house. In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's, and when her husband is dead, under her sons'. She should not have independence."¹¹ Patriarchal imposition of Hindu women's identity such as *pativrata*—which means devoted, virtuous, faithful, uncomplaining wifehood—come mainly from *Manusmriti*. A woman is seen as the husband's property, donated to him at the time of marriage.

Although times have changed, such attitudes toward women continue to a great extent. Many ultra-conservative groups try to control the freedom of women in the

10. However, we cannot say that Indian society is uniform; instead, there is a wide cultural variety. There are some cultural groups or tribes in Northeast India which are matriarchal. In South India also we can find castes or groups which follow matriarchal structures.

11. Manu, *The Laws of Manu*, trans. Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000), 5.147–48, 115.

name of the Indian tradition by dictating what women should wear and how they should behave in public places. Islam, the second largest religion in India, also is basically patriarchal. Christians, who live within this general cultural and religious context with their own patriarchal traditions and structures, help reinforce patriarchy.

A study undertaken by International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) found that about 40 percent of Indian men had “rigid and discriminatory” gender views, and believed women to be inferior to men.¹² Moreover, in recent years, crimes against women have increased.¹³ The traditional village system that exists in some regions also imposes patriarchal norms even at the cost of violence. A number of cases of “honor killing” have been reported in recent years. While there was a strong effort to include marital rape as a criminal offense, supported by the Justice Verma Committee Report,¹⁴ which recommended that the exception to marital rape should be removed, politicians rejected this recommendation under the pretext of protecting the integrity of the Indian family.

Third, colonial rule and postcolonial approaches also are important for understanding Indian society. Colonial rule damaged indigenous cultures in different ways, resulting in identity confusion for many cultures. Although colonial rule provided some benefits in modernization, a sense of equality for all, and recognition of women’s dignity, following independence there were reactive moves against colonial values and perspectives. Although these reactions were quite varied, often with political ramifications, what may be more pertinent for this discussion are postcolonial perceptions of women and of gender. In this postcolonialist construct, patriarchal norms have been considered traditional and natural, and any change is criticized as a form of westernization.¹⁵ Although colonial rule was rejected, colonial power structures have indirectly influenced society, and have reinforced the hierarchical structures based on power.

12. Lubna Kably, “40% of Indian Men Are Hardcore Sexists: Study,” *The Times of India*, December 4, 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-04/india/44756151_1_indian-men-masculinity-five-men.

13. According to National Crime Records Bureau of India, in 2016, 3,380,954 crimes against women were reported. Of these, 1,100,378 were cruelty by husband or his relatives; 84,746 were assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty; 64,519 were kidnapping or abduction; and 38,947 were cases of rape. See National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2016: Statistics* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016), xix, <http://ncrb.gov.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2016/cii2016.html>. Even today only a small percentage of the crimes against women are reported.

14. On December 23, 2012 a three-member committee headed by Justice J. S. Verma, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was constituted to recommend amendments to the Criminal Law so as to provide guidelines for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women. The Committee submitted its report on January 23, 2013.

15. For example, “Women are often projected as cultural emblems of the Indian nation and society. Changes in her attire and demeanor are therefore hastily condemned as threats to culture and tradition.” Maitrayee Chaudhuri, “Indian ‘Modernity’ and ‘Tradition’: A Gender Perspective,” *Polish Sociological Review* 2 (2012): 281–93 at 281.

Fourth, in spite of modernization and globalization, religion is a very significant factor in the lives of the people of India. This is the case with all religions. In fact, there has been a religious revival in Hinduism since the 1980s. Church life, too, is thriving. Churches are full on Sundays; most of the faithful, including youth, participate in Sunday mass, even in the cosmopolitan cities. New ecclesial movements like the charismatic movement are very active in India. There are many charismatic retreat centers which have retreat programs throughout the year, attended by tens of thousands of people. Charismatic conventions in which hundreds of thousands of people participate also are frequently held. Laypeople undertake various ministries in such centers and conventions, but—and pertinent to this discussion—priests remain at the center. Priests are an essential part of most of ceremonies and participate in family and social functions. Priests are usually seen as having great spiritual powers as miracle workers and healers. All these contribute to mythical concepts of priesthood, and elevation of priests as superhuman beings (a point to which I shall return).

Finally, to a great extent, the Indian Catholic Church is institution-centered. In some regions (for example, Kerala, Mangalore, Goa, Northeast India) the number of Catholics is significant, while in other regions, Catholics are a small and sometimes very insignificant minority. However, all over India, the church owns a number of institutions like universities, arts and science colleges, engineering colleges, medical colleges, hospitals, and social work centers. For many religious congregations, their main ministry is running such institutions, since there is a sufficient number of diocesan priests to take care of pastoral ministry. Most of these institutions are very powerful and influential. These institutions are important for the church since they help the church to reach out to the society. Still, there are concerns that the church in India has become too institutionalized. Since they are very influential and powerful, these institutions sometimes distance priests from the community, and often too much power is focused on the priests who run these institutions. This leads to consideration of the role of the priest in the formation of a new ethic of responsibility for the church in relation to the sexual abuse crisis.

The Role of the Priest

The priest has an important role in the life of the Indian church. Following the church's official theology, the priest is called to exercise the triple functions of teaching, governing, and sanctifying in a special way, representing the bishop.¹⁶ Yet, in ordinary contexts and presuming this theology of priesthood, priests are also ministers, called to serve. However, priests often see themselves more as possessors of power than as servant ministers, and many of the faithful consider priests the same way. This conception of priesthood, shared by both priests and faithful, calls for serious reconsideration, as it constitutes a form of clericalism.

16. See Antony Chembakassery, *The Christ-Centred Priest: Papal Teaching on Priesthood* (Kochi: Karunika, 2009), 69–81.

Analyzing the sexual abuse scandal, many have pointed out that clericalism is a fertile ground for sexual abuse. In his latest apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis links sexual abuse of minors to clericalism:

Clericalism is a constant temptation on the part of priests who see “the ministry they have received as a power to be exercised, rather than a free and generous service to be offered. It makes us think that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or has anything to learn.” Doubtless, such clericalism can make consecrated persons lose respect for the sacred and inalienable worth of each person and of his or her freedom.¹⁷

Considering priesthood as a source of special power offering special privileges and superior status over others—a view which rests on a deficient theology of the ontological change given with ordination—is one sign of the clericalism of which the pope speaks. In some Indian understandings of this theology, the priest is considered as the representative of Christ, even physically, and the mediator between God and people; he is sometimes presented as greater than angels.¹⁸ Such views of priesthood often lead to arrogance, misuse of power, and insensitivity to the rights of others. “An unspoken presumed immunity associated with the priestly position in the church often emboldens inappropriate behavior in seeking physical or emotional love.”¹⁹ Given these sorts of perceptions of the priest, the theology of ontological difference brought about by the ordination also needs reconsideration.

Katarina Schuth has pointed out that priests who were ordained in the last few decades prefer the cultic model of priesthood to the ministerial model. The cultic model emphasizes the separation between the priest and the community whereas the ministerial model emphasizes servant-leadership of the priest and his link with the community.²⁰ Both models are valid and have their own advantages, yet too much emphasis

17. Francis, *Christus Vivit* (March 25, 2019), 98, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html, quoting Francis, address to the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment (Vatican City, October 3, 2018), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html.

18. For example, one of the hymns in the rite of priestly ordination in the Syro-Malabar rite reads: “O Priest, how lofty is the honorable status to which you have been raised today! Even angels marvel at it . . . Compared to the priests, even the status of angels is nothing!” Another hymn expresses a similar idea: “O priests, you deserve to be angels.” *Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Pontifical Kramam: Purohithapattakramam* [Syro-Malabar Pontifical Rite: Rite of Priestly Ordination] (Kakkanad: Secretariat, Commission for Liturgy, Major Archbishop Curia, 2014), 17, 22 (translation from the Malayalam my own).

19. Olinda Timms, “Human Formation of Seminarians: Perspectives of a Lay Person,” in *Human Formation in Major Seminaries*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, Viju P. Devassy, and Tomy Thomas Kattampally (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017), 236–246 at 241.

20. Katarina Schuth, “Who Pastors: The Priest, the Context, and the Ministry,” in *The Future of Catholicism in America*, ed. Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 153–85 at 156–58.

on the cultic model may lead to seeing priesthood as a source of power and may justify special priestly authority and privileges. Although Schuth's analysis addresses the context of US Catholicism, it seems to be true of the Indian context as well, though no surveys about this trend have been conducted in India. In the years following Vatican II, the focus in India was placed more on a servant-leadership model, but later, the cultic model was gradually emphasized more. Unfortunately, some of the new ecclesial movements tend toward glorifying the priesthood, elevating the priests to a super-human level. It is not rare that many priests, as well as those in higher levels of the hierarchy, directly or indirectly claim that they cannot be questioned since they are ordained, and many of the faithful also support such claims. Such claims and attitudes are noticed not only in cases of sexual abuse; they are raised more frequently when cases of financial misappropriation or other violations of norms occur.

Another aspect of the role and identity of the priest is that priests are often involved in administration and organizational work.²¹ In India, religious congregations of priests run educational institutions and usually priests are managers and administrators of these institutions. When the very concept of ordination is associated with power, the exercise of administrative and financial functions by priests results in too much concentration of power. In many institutions a single priest may be the sole authority—pastor, manager, administrator, and finance officer. This form of clericalism, combined with the hierarchical social structure and patriarchy entrenched in the Indian culture, is a fertile ground for abuse of power that can find expression in sexual abuse of minors.

These serious problems of clericalism and power evident in the Indian context call for a renewed theology of priesthood.

Seminary Formation and Ongoing Formation of Priests

Related to a renewed understanding of the priesthood is the formation of seminarians. A vocation “boom” continues in India. According to the system still followed, one can start the seminary studies at the age of fifteen or sixteen, that is, after the completion of high school. Seminary studies last ten to fifteen years, depending on the requirements of the particular religious congregation or diocese. These are formative years in the life of a young man. While in recent decades there has been an awareness that greater emphasis has to be given to the human formation of the seminarians, this remains an area that needs greater attention. As Pope John Paul II emphasized in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, “It is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ.”²² This same document speaks about the importance of educating

21. See Konrad Joseph Noronha, “Formative Perspectives on the Sexual Abuse Crises in the Church,” *Vinayasadhana: Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation* 10 (2019): 18–29 at 22–23.

22. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992), 43, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html (hereafter cited as *PDV*).

the candidates for priesthood “to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behavior” (*PDV* 43).

Moreover, they are to be inculcated in the capacity to relate with others, and to attain affective maturity, which involves an education in true and responsible love (*PDV* 43, 44). A document issued by the Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, also underscores the importance of the maturation of the personality of the priest, since the “divine call engages and involves the ‘concrete’ human person.”²³ These documents are pertinent to the arrival at any new ethical horizon for addressing sexual abuse.²⁴

More specifically, formation programs should impart a healthy view of sexuality and celibacy. As the Congregation for Catholic Education remarks, “Sexuality is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love. Therefore it is an integral part of the development of the personality and of its educative process.”²⁵ Celibacy should not be seen as a denial of sexuality, but as a call to live sexuality differently and meaningfully. Celibacy is also a call to intimacy, but without exercising the genital dimension of sexuality. The ability to relate with others with respect, empathy, and compassion, while keeping personal and professional boundaries, are some of the signs of the affective maturity of a celibate. While acknowledging that attaining affective maturity is a process, it is also necessary that aspirants to celibate life must be evaluated through screening programs.²⁶ It is also important to evaluate how priesthood candidates are able to accept the equal dignity of women, and to interact with them with composure and respect. “If young men grow up without a healthy respect for women who are not their mother or sisters, there can be misunderstanding and misinterpretation of [the] emotional need[s] of women who approach priests for help. There can even be exploitation of the trust reposed in the priest by vulnerable women and children.”²⁷ Involvement of laypeople, including women and families, in formation programs, can be helpful in this regard.

23. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (December 8, 2016), <http://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/Ratio%20Fundamentalis/The%20Gift%20of%20the%20Priestly%20Vocation.pdf>.

24. As Schuth observes, the “revelation of numerous instances of sexual abuse of children and youth by clergy was also a critical factor that led to expansive changes [in formation] in several countries.” Katarina Schuth, “Human Formation—Orientation Paper,” in Kochuthara, Devassy, and Kattampally, *Human Formation in Major Seminaries*, 53–78 at 55.

25. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education* (November 1, 1983), 4, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19831101_sexual-education_en.html.

26. See Noronha, “Formative Perspectives on the Sexual Abuse Crises,” 23–24.

27. Timms, “Human Formation of Seminarians,” 242.

Equally important is the ongoing formation of priests, since new problems and difficulties may be encountered when they engage in ministry. Since many priests work alone in parishes or institutions, it may be also helpful that occasions to meet other priests be arranged periodically for mutual sharing and discussion.

The Need for a More Participatory Church

Catholic theology underscores that all the faithful equally participate in the priestly function of Christ and all are called to the same perfection of holiness. This was emphasized by the Second Vatican Council,²⁸ and points out the need for a more participatory church. Everyone is responsible for discerning and understanding the faith and living it to its fullness, sharing the fruits of that faith with others. No one can evade this responsibility, nor can anyone be excluded from this responsibility and privilege.

This role of all the faithful cannot be limited merely to professing the same faith, but should be extended to participation in the visible structures of the church. This raises the issue of democracy within the church. It is often said that because the church was instituted by Christ and is guided by the Holy Spirit, it cannot be a democratic structure. But, if it is held that all the baptized share in the priestly function of Christ and all are given the same Spirit, by which all have the sense of faith, how can the vast majority be excluded from participating in democratic processes within the church?²⁹

By “democratic process” I do not mean party politics or a push for power. Democracy primarily concerns participation of all the members in decision-making and governance. The church, in fact, has adopted democratic processes in many places and forms. For example, the highest authority in the church is elected through voting; the decisions of the ecumenical councils are made—in general—through voting; the decisions of meetings of the synod of bishops are based on voting; the office bearers of the bishops’ conferences are elected through voting; in most religious congregations, the major superiors and councilors are elected through voting. In the first centuries, in many places, the bishops were selected through the participation of the faithful. In the Syro-Malabar Church, for more than sixteen centuries, the priests were ordained only with the consent of the parish committee (*palliyogam*);³⁰ only with the authorization letter from the parish council was the bishop authorized to ordain a priest. Moreover, in the precolonial period, the temporal administration of the Syro-Malabar Church was entrusted to the laity. Thus, in the church, democratic processes have a long tradition—a tradition which was ignored, sidelined, and rejected with the growth

28. See for example, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 10–12, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*).

29. Moreover, if it is held that ministerial priesthood is oriented not toward power, but toward service, why should power and authority in the church be reserved for the ministerial priesthood?

30. *The palliyogam* or the parish committee is the administrative body that includes one member from every family in the parish. It is the supreme authority in the administration of the parish. However, when the Kerala church came under the rule of Portuguese bishops during the colonial period, many of the powers of the *Palliyogam* were reduced.

of clericalism and the centralization and institutionalization of the church that gradually crept into the life of the church in India.

But the real point here is not democracy *per se*; it is *participation*. In reading “the signs of the times,” we can safely say that most people feel that they belong to a community or society only if they are actively involved and if they can participate as agents, which democratic processes help ensure. If people begin to abandon the church today, this is due not only to the abuse scandals, but also to the fact that they do not feel that they belong to a church where they cannot actively participate in all aspects of its life.

The Second Vatican Council envisaged new structures in order to facilitate a more participatory church: parish pastoral councils, diocesan synods, regional conferences of bishops, and the international synod of bishops. Many of these already existed in different churches in different forms, but some of them had become ineffective and obsolete in the course of time. At Vatican II we find stronger determination to ensure dialogue within the church and thus to make the church more participatory. However, a truthful self-evaluation will make us aware that many of these structures have been implemented in a half-hearted manner in many places. In the Latin Rite, the parish and diocesan councils are still “facultative,” and their establishment depends upon the discretion of bishops and pastors. Thus, they have been often neglected and the role of laypeople has languished.³¹ As Catherine Clifford has observed:

Few lay Catholics experience themselves as participating in any conversation that is of consequence for the life of their church today. Their gifts are largely un-received or are squandered when they are not adequately integrated into the common project of the ecclesial community. The synergetic sharing of their gifts remains unrealized. How much more might be accomplished if they were to be placed at the service of the church’s mission! (*LG*, 12).³²

While acknowledging that there has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the church, Pope Francis raises again the problem of clericalism in realizing greater participation of the laity in the life of the church:

A clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making.³³

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31. In the Eastern churches like Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara, parish council (*palliyogam*) is not facultative. Though the powers of the *palliyogam* are much limited compared to what it had in the past, it still exercises a decisive role.
 32. Catherine E. Clifford, “Vatican II and the Challenge of Ongoing Renewal in the 21st Century,” in *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, vol. 1, *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2014), 588–600 at 598–99, citing *LG* 12.
 33. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 102, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

A “participatory church” does not refer only to economic and temporal administration; it refers to the overall life of the church. An important area that calls for urgent address in India is the theological formation of the laity. Countries like India do not have many laypeople who are theologically trained. Many are interested in studying theology, but the structures of the church in India do not provide any room for lay theologians to work and earn the means of livelihood. Dioceses and religious congregations do not provide employment opportunities for laypeople who are theologically prepared. Often, lay ministers are supposed to offer unpaid services. However, if dioceses and institutions run by the religious were to reserve a certain percentage of jobs for laypeople who are qualified in theology, laity in many countries like India would undertake theological studies.

One important implication of being a participatory church is that the church become more transparent and ensure justice within the church. One of the salient features of today’s society is the desire for justice, evident also in the social teaching of the church. Ensuring the rights of all is an integral dimension of justice. It is not sufficient that justice be done; it is also necessary that justice be administered in a transparent manner. However, there is a growing skepticism about the church’s sincerity in ensuring justice. One of the criticisms raised against the church in the wake of the sexual abuse by the clergy regards the administration of justice within the church. It is pointed out that the church employs different norms distinguishing those who are in authority from others. Such disparity in meting out justice creates a negative image of the church’s commitment to justice and the Catholics who share this view prefer civil procedure in cases of abuse; they believe that the ecclesiastical system will not ensure justice.³⁴ One of the tasks of a participatory church will be to ensure justice and transparency in its own administration, especially in the church’s approach to clerical sexual abuse.³⁵

34. Aaron Milavec, “Reflections on the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests,” *Asian Horizons* 4 (2010): 179–91.

35. John Allen comments: “The 21st century could well create a ‘boom market’ for movements seeking to foster greater accountability, collaboration and transparency in the church, if activists and entrepreneurs understand how to make the pitch in a global key.” See John L. Allen, Jr., “A Global Case for Good Government in the Church,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 25, 2010, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/global-case-good-government-church>. An example from India for the importance the civil society gives to transparency and accountability is the Right to Information Act (RTI) which was passed in 2005. According to this law, any Indian citizen can inquire into the functioning of government offices and their policy decisions. RTI has brought dramatic changes, since a number of corruption cases have been made public by utilizing it. For details, see The Right to Information Act, Ministry of Law and Justice, Indian Parliament, June 21, 2005, <https://rti.gov.in/rti-act.pdf>. However, the present government has brought amendments to this Act, weakening it. See Prabhaskar K. Dutta, “What Makes RTI Amendment Bill So Controversial?,” *India Today*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/what-makes-rti-amendment-bill-so-controversial-1572596-2019-07-23>. Transparency and accountability, however, pertain not merely to cases of sexual abuse, but also to temporal administration of assets. such as land. See, e.g., “Syro Malabar Church Land Scam: Circula Slams Cardinal, Police,” *Mathrubhumi*, May 26, 2019, <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/syro-malabar-church-land-scam-circular-slams-cardinal-police-1.3823767>.

A possible path toward this kind of a participatory church is synodality. Pope Francis has been presenting synodality as a constitutive element of the church's regular life.³⁶ In the recent meeting on "The Protection of Minors in the Church," convened by Pope Francis, Cardinal Blase Cupich pointed out that "synodality represents the participation of all the baptized at every level—in parishes, dioceses, national and regional ecclesial bodies—in a discernment and reform that penetrates throughout the Church."³⁷ Another aspect of synodality is decentralization, which is pertinent in the context of sexual abuse. Although the present role given to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has its own advantages, as Cardinal Oswald Gracias pointed out in addressing the Vatican meeting, there are also doubts whether this amounts to too much centralism and whether more decentralization would ensure speedier justice. Synodality implies also taking into confidence the local church, without compromising the right and responsibility of the center to monitor procedures.³⁸

This right and responsibility applies, of course, to theological discourse in the church as an integral element in a participatory church. There is no doubt that theologians should respect the authority of the magisterium, since the teaching authority is the sign of unity of the church, and that the theologian should define his or her vocation and role within the ecclesial community.³⁹ However, lack of freedom to discuss matters, and to express with confidence and freedom one's discernment in faith can be noticed in the sexual abuse crisis. When such grave violations of the basic rights, dignity, and justice of thousands of innocent victims was going on for decades, there was no theologian until recently who was courageous enough to bring it to the public square and challenge the culture of silence and secrecy adopted by those in authority. Instead of addressing the issue, it seems that the hierarchy was more concerned about silencing priests, religious, and other faithful who brought these issues to light. For example, a circular letter was issued by Cardinal George Alencherry, the Major

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36. Francis, address commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops (Vatican City, October 17, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.
37. Blase Joseph Cupich, "Synodality: Jointly Responsible," lecture, meeting on "The Protection of Minors in the Church," Vatican City (February 22, 2019), 9, http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_card-cupich-protezioneminori_20190222_en.html.
38. Oswald Gracias, "Accountability in a Collegial and Synodal Church" lecture, meeting on "The Protection of Minors in the Church," Vatican City, February 22, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_card-gracias-protezioneminori_20190222_en.html.
39. Opinions on the relationship between the magisterium and theologians vary. The document from the International Theological Commission may be helpful in this regard: *The Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology* (1975), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1975_magistero-teologia_en.html. See also Kuncheria Pathil, "Sensus Fidei of the Entire Faithful as the Basis for Magisterium," *Asian Horizons* 12 (2018): 375–96.

Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, warning that the priests and religious who would publicly speak on such issues without permission would face punishment.⁴⁰

The sexual abuse crisis may be a moment to rediscover the collegial nature and communal dimensions of the church, which the Second Vatican Council elaborated. A significant factor in arriving at a new ethical horizon is a recovery of the council's vision for a more participatory church.

Sexuality

In India, sexuality is among the topics over which there prevails a culture of silence. Open discussions are not much encouraged. In civil society, this has been slowly changing in recent years. Court orders on LGBT rights and in particular on homosexuality,⁴¹ on premarital sex and cohabitation,⁴² and on adultery;⁴³ as well as parliamentary acts such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO),⁴⁴ the

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40. George Alencherry, Circular Letter, Prot. No. 0127/2019 (January 18, 2019), http://www.ernakulamarchdiocese.org/files/media/documents/b2d008304edba2244c14db93abecde19_MABP_18_January_2019.pdf. Unfortunately, the English-language version is not online. However, its contents are discussed in "Synod Set to Enforce Discipline within Syro-Malabar Church," *Matters India*, January 19, 2019, <http://mattersindia.com/2019/01/synod-set-to-enforce-discipline-within-syro-malabar-church/>.
41. On July 2, 2009, the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexual activity. See George Plathottam, "Homosexuality: Faulty, Flawed Debates," *Indian Currents*, July 13–19, 2009, 32–33. The Ministry of Law, though initially indicating the plan of legalizing homosexual unions, postponed the decision following protests from different religious authorities. Later, the Supreme Court, in a verdict on December 11, 2013 reversed the order of the Delhi High Court and recriminalized homosexual activity. However, the court observed that the Parliament should debate on the issue and decide it. On February 2, 2016 the Supreme Court agreed to reconsider its judgment, stating that it would refer petitions in this regard to a five-member constitutional bench. On September 6, 2018 the Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality. In addition to the significance of this ruling itself, all these decisions occasioned public discussion on human sexuality and its meaning.
42. There was a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that premarital sex and cohabitation are not offences. "Live-in Relationship, Pre-marital Sex not an Offence: SC," *The Times of India*, March 23, 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Live-in-relationship-pre-marital-sex-not-an-offence-SC/articleshow/5716545.cms>.
43. In a ruling given on September 27, 2018, the Supreme Court of India struck down the existing adultery law according to Indian Penal Code, section 497, on the ground that it did not respect the equality of the woman. The court held that it could not be considered a crime, but could be considered a valid ground for divorce. See A. Vaidyanathan, "Adultery Not a Crime, 'Husband Not Master of Wife,' Says Supreme Court," *NDTV*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/adultery-law-is-arbitrary-says-chief-justice-dents-the-individuality-of-women-1922922>. See also Kuwar Singh, "India's Supreme Court Strikes Down a Colonial-era Adultery Law," *Quartz India*, September 27, 2018, <https://qz.com/india/1404196/adultery-no-longer-crime-in-india-rules-supreme-court/>.
44. Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, Ministry of Law and Justice, Indian Parliament, June 20, 2012, <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/childprotection31072012.pdf>.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (see footnote 9) and others, have led to public discussions on sexuality. Some brutal cases of sexual violence such as the rape of “Nirbhaya” also have become occasions for discussions regarding sexuality.⁴⁵

In spite of all these advances, to a great extent sexuality continues to be a taboo topic within the church itself. As a result, the gap widens between the church’s views and those found within civil society.⁴⁶ It cannot be validly claimed that the church has to accept all the changes that are taking place, but lack of openness and willingness to dialogue with new perspectives has proved unhelpful. In fact, *Amoris Laetitia* has acknowledged the gap between the doctrine of the church on marriage, family, and sexuality and the actual life of the people.⁴⁷ And Indian attitudes toward sexuality are changing. In short, realistic self-criticism of the church’s attitude toward sexuality, which includes also a critical appraisal of the meaning of celibate sexuality and the norm of celibacy for priesthood, is necessary.⁴⁸

45. “Nirbhaya” is the nickname given to a girl who was raped by six men in a moving bus on December 16, 2012, and who died on December 28 from the injuries the perpetrators had inflicted on her. She was given the nickname “Nirbhaya” (the fearless, or the brave heart) denoting the courage she showed in fighting her perpetrators. This incident and the following public protests all over India were widely reported by the international media.

46. It cannot be said that the civil society in India holds a single view of sexuality. Traditional views continue to a great extent; right-wing and fundamentalist ideologies try to uphold traditional views of sexuality, man–woman relationships, marriage, and family. However, such views are challenged by the changing patterns of life in India. For example, from 2003 onward, *India Today*-AC Nielson-ORG-MARG conducted yearly sex surveys in the Indian cities. The report of these surveys were published in *India Today*. Although the objective value of the findings may be debated, some findings may be indicative of new attitudes. These include a 2007 survey on sex in marriage published in *India Today*. See the following issues: November 5, 2007, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/05-11-2007>; *India Today*, December 1, 2008, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/01-12-2008>; *India Today*, December 12, 2009, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/07-12-2009>; and the most recent results, *India Today*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/sex-survey>. These and subsequent surveys show that Indian attitudes toward sexuality, sexual pleasure, premarital sex, extramarital sex, pornography, contraception, and other issues are drastically changing.

47. See for example, Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), 37, 38, https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

48. I do not want to undertake a detailed discussion on the norm of celibacy for priesthood. However, I would like to point out that arguing for the “spiritual superiority” of celibate priesthood may not be considered “catholic” since most of the Oriental/Eastern Catholic Rites continue the practice of having married clergy. The two Oriental Rites in India long held to the practice of allowing for a married clergy, or making it optional for the (diocesan) clergy. This practice was discontinued in the sixteenth century due to arbitrary norms imposed by the Portuguese Archbishop, who claimed to have the authority of the Syro-Malabar Church. Today, the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Rites of Kerala have celibate clergy, but the synods of these churches can deliberate on this norm should they choose to do so. However, open discussion on sexuality and various issues pertaining to it is not encouraged, both because of the cultural context as well as the general Catholic attitude toward sexuality.

Relatedly, and as noted earlier, patriarchy does not merely concern male domination; it also concerns the control of the sexuality of women and considering women's sexuality only in terms of men's utility and pleasure. Yet patriarchal structures and attitudes toward sexuality may easily lead not only to the sexual abuse of women, but also of children. Patriarchy includes considering the weaker and vulnerable members, including children, as objects of men's pleasure, for which men have a "natural" right. This, too, must be included as part of any frank discussion of human sexuality in India undertaken by the church.

In the face of all these challenges, there are promising new approaches in the world of Catholic theological ethics. Among these are understanding sexuality primarily as a "relational capacity";⁴⁹ constructing an ethics of sexuality founded on the virtues of covenant fidelity and chastity;⁵⁰ or developing a sexual ethics based on the norm of justice in loving.⁵¹ These theological insights might well be factored in to the development of an ethics responsive to clerical sexual abuse.

Sex Education

Systematic sex education is not given in schools or colleges, nor in the catechetical programs of the church. If any sex education is offered, it is limited to anatomy and physiology and to the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. As a result, the internet, pornographic literature, and peer groups become the only sources of sex education for children, teenagers, and youth. In general, parents also do not engage discussion on sexuality with their children. This culture of silence on sexuality contributes to fertile ground for abuse, for when children are sexually abused, children may not even understand at the time what has been done to them or that they have been abused.

In recent years there has been much debate in India regarding sex education. Religions including Christianity seem to have apprehensions about the initiatives to introduce sex education in the school curriculum, pointing out that the government's main interest in imparting sex education is promoting "safe sex" and family planning, and not safeguarding necessary values. The church can be justified in opposing a program of sex education which is not in agreement with its values. But the question remains: "Has the church taken steps to impart systematic sex education?" Though catechism books and values education programs in Catholic institutions have begun to include topics on sexuality, many find them inadequate to prepare youth to face today's challenges.⁵²

49. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Women and Sexuality* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 56. See also James F. Keenan, "Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics," *Louvain Studies* 30 (2005): 180–97 at 181, <https://doi.org/10.2143/lis.30.3.2005019>.

50. J. S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

51. Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (2006; repr., New York: Continuum, 2010).

52. Shaji George Kochuthara, "Sexual and Family Ethics: Future Prospects," in *Indian Moral Theology: Historical Studies and Future Prospects*, ed. Mathew Illathuparampil (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017), 174–196 at 193–94; See also Saju Chackalackal, "Editorial," *Journal of Dharma* 34 (2009): 3–18 at 13–14.

The urgency of the situation demands determined efforts on the part of the church to impart sex education. But a sex education program that focuses only on “don’ts” will be rejected and will lead to antagonistic attitudes to church teaching.⁵³ As Indian theologian Felix Podimattam has noted, “Moral education must begin with enabling people to ascertain their personal self-worth through an awareness that their sexuality is the basis of their sharing in God’s creative love for the world in its goodness.”⁵⁴ Sex education should be designed in such a way as to facilitate the integration of sexuality, especially in the midst of the ideologies that lead to disintegration, and an educated awareness of what constitutes sexual abuse.

Concluding Remarks

The clerical sexual abuse scandal raises many questions for ethicists and demonstrates the clear need for a new ethical horizon within the global church. The church in India also is beginning to face the issues raised by the scandal of clerical sexual abuse of minors, but also of women, and women religious in particular. There are strong inter-connections among the theology and conceptualization of priesthood and power, the fundamental functioning of the church as a participatory body, and the church’s willingness to engage human sexuality at a level other than doctrinal and moralistic formulations. An ethical horizon sufficient to the task of addressing clerical sexual abuse will need to integrate all of these dimensions. And because in Indian society, as noted, these factors are shaped by structures of patriarchy and very strong cultural and religious traditions which impact the place of children and women in family, cultural, and religious structures, a critique of these factors must be operative in every dimension of this ethical horizon. Equally important, of course, are the specific forms that clericalism and clerical power assume in Indian contexts.

It will be important that the church in India acknowledge the scandal of clerical sexual abuse and learn from the experience of other countries as it tries to face this reality and overcome it with realism and commitment to Gospel values. This is necessary because it is only in this way that the church will be able to maintain its credibility, continue its mission, and hope for renewal and further growth.

In this process, the church can engage a mutually enriching dialogue with civil society. There is a more profound awareness about justice and equal dignity of all persons. It is noteworthy that long before the church introduced effective mechanisms to deal with sexual abuse, civil society had already done so. In fact, the church, to a certain extent, has been compelled to adopt such mechanisms since they were made obligatory according to the civil law. This can be seen in the Indian context as well. The church in India had to draft policies to ensure protection of minors especially

53. “Persistent resistance that we encounter in matters pertaining to sexuality when it comes to its instruction could be due to the negative approach that has been adopted.” Chackalackal, “Editorial,” 13.

54. Felix Podimattam, “Sexual Spirituality,” *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000): 550–560 at 559.

because these provisions were made obligatory by civil law. This is an area in which the church could learn from the civil society in ensuring justice. At the same time, a critical evaluation of its own systems and structures will help the church to become a credible agent in ensuring justice and the equal dignity of all human beings, especially of the most vulnerable.

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