

Zeist, 16 December 2011

The Commission of Inquiry into sexual abuse of minors in the Roman Catholic Church between 1945 and 2010, known as the Deetman Commission, presented its final report today. The bishops and directors of the KNR (the Conference of Dutch Religious) are shocked by the sexual abuse of minors and the practices described in the final report. It fills us with shame and sorrow.

For us, religious and bishops, for the entire faith community, but also for society as a whole, it is painful to observe that a number of priests and religious failed when it came conscientious behaviour toward children and young people.

The perpetrators are not the only ones to blame. Church authorities who did not act correctly and did not give priority to the interests of and care for these victims also share in this blame. We deeply regret this abuse. Given the responsibility that we have assumed from our predecessors, we empathize with the victims and offer them our heartfelt apology.

We want to work to do justice to the victims, to restore their respect and to help them heal in so far as possible. The new Complaints Commission and the compensation scheme seek to do this. Yet, procedures and schemes alone are inadequate. Much can still be done to help victims and we want to contribute personally to this. We shall take measures to bring help to victims. When we can support professional care by speaking with victims, we will do so, most willingly.

The investigatory report notes that the church had a culture in which no one spoke about sexuality or about sexual abuse. Times nor circumstances can excuse the terrible suffering caused to children and their families. Violating the physical and mental integrity of any person, and especially of a child, is and shall always be reprehensible. This may certainly not happen in the Church. That is why we will work to make it easier to speak about sexual abuse. Unmistakable codes of behaviour are being drafted; preventive programmes will be given greater weight in preparation for the ministry.

The abuse of children in the period 1945 to 2010 is all the more wrenching because parents believed that they had entrusted their children to safe institutions and to honourable priests and religious. Beside what it did to the children, that breach of confidence also harmed their parents. To them, too, we offer our sincere apologies.

Once again, we forcefully condemn any kind of sexual abuse because it is diametrically opposed to dignity of the human person and to the Gospel. There is no place for such practices in our Church. Let there be no mistake about that. That is why we shall take all measures provided for under church and civil law when there is any suspicion of sexual abuse. The public prosecutor will be informed in accordance with Dutch law when there is any suspicion of a punishable offence. We undertake to act in this manner in all future cases.

We are pervaded by the awareness that we must care for and shoulder responsibility for providing help, restitution, openness and transparency for and toward the victims of sexual abuse and their families, now and in the future. The Bishops' Conference and the Conference of Dutch Religious will exert abiding effort to do all that is needed and to remain accountable.