

Redemption or punishment?



By Guillermo Alvarado

Deep stupefaction exists in France after the publication of a report, described as overwhelming by its authors, where it is revealed that around 330,000 children, that's more than a quarter of a million young people, suffered cruel humiliations in Catholic institutions in the period from 1950 to 1990.

The Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church, created after multiple reports of pederasty and other degrading acts, said that this was a systemic behavior maintained in the face of a cruel indifference towards the victims.

The president of the investigative team, Jean-Marc Sauvé, explained that of the total number of cases -- at least 316,000 -- were committed by French Catholic priests and clerics, and the rest by lay people working in education centers, catechesis or youth movements.

Most of the abused were between 10 and 13 years old and although the bulk of the cases occurred between the 1950s and 1990s, the evil has not been eradicated and continues to this day, warned Sauvé.

The president of the French Episcopal Conference, Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, expressed "his shame" and his horror at the revelation.

This is not the only major scandal in which this religious institution is involved. This year it became known that in Canada it was linked to a "cultural genocide" committed against indigenous children, who were taken from their families and placed in schools to "westernize" them.

The drama took on macabre overtones when in three of these places clandestine graves were discovered with more than a thousand bodies of these children, who died as a result of the abuse and mistreatment they received.

The Canadian Catholic Church acknowledged its responsibility for these acts, committed in decades between the 19th and 20th centuries, which included physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural and sexual abuse.

In France, as in Canada, the ecclesiastical authorities ask for forgiveness and promise to compensate the victims, which is not wrong, but given the systemic way in which these crimes were committed, it is necessary to go much further.

We are not talking about faults or mistakes, but about serious crimes with permanent consequences for those who suffered them.

A profound transformation of the church is also necessary, which must eliminate obsolete practices, such as the secrecy of confession that "cleans" the perpetrator who narrates his acts and at the same time forces silence, that is, complicity, on those who listen to him and absolve him, regardless of the legal gravity of the matter.

The redemption of sins is something proper to religious beliefs, but the punishment of crimes is a matter of justice and social tranquility.

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