

NATIONAL SURVEY

Italian bishops' report on abuse hides more than it clarifies

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What is the point of publicising a **report by the Italian Episcopal Conference** (CEI) stating that, in the two-year period from 2023 to 2024, there were '115 victims of alleged abuse' within the Church? What is the real purpose of a report that is, in fact, the 'Third Survey

on the Territorial Network for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults'? From the way it was communicated, one would expect a report on sexual abuse committed by priests, religious figures, and Catholic educators. This is how it was **reported in the press** creating a depressing impression of the Italian Church, given that, on average, at least one abuse is committed every week.

However, upon reading the report, it becomes clear that the survey, initiated in 2020 following the publication of the CEI's 2019 guidelines on behaviour in cases of abuse, is more focused on enhancing the Church's structures for handling complaints and supporting alleged victims than on addressing the abuse itself. It seems to be a self-referential report, in which the Italian Church wants to demonstrate how effective its measures are at preventing, recognising and remedying any abuse. The watchwords are training, listening, welcoming, transparency, and collaboration with civil authorities — all areas in which much has been done, but more investment is required.

From this point of view, the numbers are indeed impressive: in 2024 alone, 781 training and awareness-raising meetings were organised and attended by around 23,000 people. This equates to a national average of over two training meetings per day, each with an average of 30 participants. However, one gets the impression of an unbalanced mobilisation when comparing not only the number of reports, but also the resources committed to tackling this particular problem, however serious, with the commitment to proclaiming the Gospel and bringing Christ to the world, as Pope Leo XIV also urged in his first speeches as pontiff.

Proof of this is that, even when addressing the cultural issue of how to prevent and combat a climate of tolerance of abuse and concealment, the root of the problem is never addressed. As Pope Benedict XVI said, this is first and foremost a crisis of faith. However, leafing through the pages of this report, one might be led to believe that the crisis of faith, especially among priests, has nothing to do with the scourge of abuse, and that the solution is merely a matter of transparency and collaboration across all sectors of society.

This approach to the issue of abuse seems designed to present itself well to the world, even making it a partner. Yet this is the same hypocritical world that points the finger at the Church while remaining silent and complicit in the sea of sexual abuse committed in civil circles, especially against children, as the [Meter Association of Don Fortunato Di Noto](#) never ceases to document. It is sufficient to note that, according to data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, approximately 40,000 sexual offences against minors are committed in Italy every year.

This obviously does not justify any of the abuses committed within the Church, but it does give an idea of the scale of the phenomenon.

However, this is precisely where the CEI report ultimately falls short because the section on actual abuse data is incomplete. The 115 victims mentioned in the report are alleged victims, and it certainly does not clarify how many of these cases are genuine. The figures refer to reports, but how many of these have actually been verified? How many have been reported to and investigated by the civil authorities?

Little is known about what happens to the reports: only 42 are known to have been followed up in the canonical sphere. Sixteen investigations are ongoing, eleven restrictive measures have been taken at the end of investigations, six documents have been sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, five canonical trials are ongoing, three cases have been dismissed, and one conviction has been handed down. When we talk about abuse in the Church, we now tend to assume it is sexual. However, looking at the data provided in the report, we find that a significant proportion of reports concern spiritual and psychological abuse (31), while 36 reports concern 'inappropriate language' (insults, emotional and psychological blackmail, verbal harassment, psychological manipulation, seductive behaviour and emotional dependence).

Therefore, more than half are not strictly sexual abuses. Considering that most of the alleged perpetrators are clerics and religious figures, and that more than half of the alleged victims are male, it would be interesting to cross-reference these data, especially since the summary emphasises that 'the age group most affected among the alleged victims is 10–14 years (31.3%)', but omits the fact that the same percentage applies to those over 18. How many of these are male? How many cases of sexual abuse are there in this age group? In other words, what role does homosexuality play in the abuses committed?

These are all things that would be useful to know in order to analyse the

phenomenon of abuse in the Church effectively, but the CEI report glosses over this. This speaks volumes about how the intentions to address the issue of abuse are.