



PROJECT ON CLERICALISM AND SEXUALITY

1. The *Von Hügel Institute for Critical Catholic Inquiry* (Cambridge University, UK) is planning a 3-year interdisciplinary research project on *Clericalism and Sexuality*. The goal is a more adequate *description*, sufficient to focus attention on appropriate *concerns*, which is a condition for effective and humane *responses and engagements*.
2. CLERICALISM. Clericalism is a three-pronged phenomenon characterized by the *attitude of entitlement* claimed by people who hold positions of authority in the Church to avoid transparency and accountability, the *culture of secrecy* surrounding the sexuality of clergy, and the almost complete *absence of women* in positions of responsibility, discernment, teaching and safeguarding in the Church.
3. SEXUALITY. Catholics do not want to appear to be challenging the practice of clerical celibacy or its rationale; psychologically, they separate the sexual and religious lives of ministers; the faithful practice of celibacy is taken for granted and lacks proper emotional, psychological and spiritual support. The discrepancy between the large proportion of gay clergy and Church's moral teaching on homosexuality has led to a toxic mixture of *systemic denial* and *compartmentalization*.
4. ABUSE CRISIS. While these clerical patterns are not the cause of the sexual abuses on minors, the culture of systemic denial and compartmentalization allowed abuse to go unchecked and contributes to present failures to take appropriate action in response. This is why the focus of the project will be on clericalism rather than on the abuse crisis.
5. A CONCEPTUAL FAILURE, prominent in popular imagination, the media, and ecclesial rhetoric consists in the conflation of celibacy, homosexuality, and pedophilia. Such uncritical habits of description play a role in ongoing failures insofar as they direct attention away from the realities of the system that incubates and amplifies the crisis.
6. An adequate description of the relation between clericalism and sexuality requires INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION: theology of ordained ministry and ecclesiology; Canon Law and history, especially with regards to the discipline of compulsory celibacy; unbiased sociological and cultural analysis to illuminate the gap between the ideal and the reality of celibacy; psychological analyses of the practice of celibacy and of its difficulties and failures; a rich consideration of the spirituality of celibacy; moral theology, Catholic Social Teaching, and professional ethics; women's gender, sexuality and queer studies.
7. An adequate description requires A HEALTHY DEBATE which includes the larger possible variety of viewpoints and avoids the polarized posturing of so-called "liberal" and "traditional" positions. This polarization is overcome by committing to balanced, dispassionate, and objective dialogue. The VHI is the ideal platform for this debate thanks to its solid reputation for eschewing the ideological and confrontational pitfalls that dominate contemporary public discourse and for tackling sensitive issues in a way which is catholic, critical and transformative.
8. THE APPROACH. A 3-year interdisciplinary research project with the aim of collecting reliable data and analyzing it from the above viewpoints. The first step will be a **workshop from the 18th to the 20th of September 2019** in Cambridge (UK) which will gather the best scholars for an evaluation of the research already happening in these fields worldwide and lay the foundations of a three-year research project with as many as 3 *research fellowships* and 3 *visiting scholars*. The project will be conducted according to academic standards and result in a number of monographs and peer-reviewed articles. Researchers participating in the project will also have to commit to dissemination of the findings of this research for a large audience through talks, presence on the media and accessible articles and books.