

Chapter 11

Beyond the Catholic Church: Child Sexual Abuse in Selected Other Religious Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1980s, allegations of the sexual abuse of children by members of the clergy and other representatives of religious organizations have been reported in the media with alarming frequency. In North America, the majority of reports highlight the Catholic Church. Many of these allegations refer to incidents, which took place many years previously. This chapter explores three specific examples of other religious groups, that are not the Catholic Church, involved with the sexual abuse of children. These include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Moravians, and Orthodox Judaism (Haredi).

INTRODUCTION

.....whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18:5, AV)

The above scripture is a reminder of how precious children are to God and to society. Yet, since the early 1980s, allegations of the sexual abuse of children by members of the clergy and other representatives of religious organizations have been reported in the media with alarming frequency. In North America,

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Beyond the Catholic Church

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It is important to be very clear as to what constitutes child sexual abuse. However, definitions vary by country or organization. For example, the World Health Organization defines child sexual abuse as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person” (Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, 1999, pp. 13-17).

According to the United Kingdom (UK) Government’s official guidelines, child sexual abuse can be defined as follows: “Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males (Myths and Facts about Male Sexual Abuse and Assault, n.d.). Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

In the United States (U.S.), the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines sexual abuse in the following manner: “the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children” (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p.31).

The commonality in each of these three definitions is abusing children for sexual purposes. A child cannot consent to sexual activity. In most countries, this is enshrined in law, though the “legal age” of consent varies from one jurisdiction to another (Sexual Consent, 2018). Whatever form it takes, any sexual activity involving a child is coercive in nature and is initiated by an adult or an older child. In the majority of cases the perpetrator is known to the victim (Statistics on Victims of Child Sexual Abuse, 2012). The child usually trusts his or her abuser, who may be an authority figure whom the child has been taught to respect and obey. In religious communities, priests, deacons, teachers or other prominent church leaders are usually held in high esteem and are assumed to be upright and virtuous people. Parents trust them. Children frequently may see them as representatives of the Almighty, formidable, wise and all-powerful personages and are unlikely to resist inappropriate behavior on the part of this type of abuser. These factors are emphasized in the Australian Government’s Commission on sexual abuse report: “The power and authority exercised by people in religious ministry gave them access to children and created opportunities for abuse. Children and adults within religious communities frequently saw people in religious ministry as figures who could not be challenged and, equally, as individuals in whom they could place their trust” (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017,

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