

Nonprofit Ethics Case: #NunsToo Movement
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Vow of Silence No More: Catholic Patriarchy's Abuse of Nuns

Summary

In the wake of the Catholic clergy sexual abuse crisis, the women religious who have journeyed alongside and behind the patriarchal Church through the centuries are no longer keeping their silence. The sexual abuse of nuns by priests and bishops is now a worldwide #NunsToo movement. The Catholic San Francisco reports that in the fall of 2018, the International Union of Superior Generals (I.U.S.G.), representing over 500,000 nuns, advocated to their fellow nuns to come forward and tell their stories of abuse. Nuns from Asia, India, Africa, Mexico, South America, and the U.S. are sharing their stories of sexual and spiritual abuse: as well as gender discrimination and labor inequalities.

In early February 2019, the Pope openly acknowledged that the nuns were sexually abused by priests and bishops. Reports expose that complaints and allegations from nuns to their superiors, pastors, bishops, and the Pope began in the early 1990s. Narratives reveal these claims were mostly ignored, blamed on the nuns, and, if reviewed, the allegations were internally investigated but kept undisclosed. This means that there was zero oversight by outside entities. Understanding that the Church is its own governing nation may help the public comprehend key ethical areas of weakness to enable transformational change within the Church.

Applications

This case is helpful to examine the Church's ethical practices within its own infrastructure. At the highest level, the Church was aware of the allegations brought forth by nuns for decades and nothing was done to end the abuse; the complaints and investigations, if any, were kept secret. On a global spectrum, the allegations expose the unethical treatment of women which violates the trust women place in the hands of their employers and spiritual mentors. The Church failed to lead their followers and did not exhibit humanitarian practices within its own walls.

The study also reviews the multiple levels of hierarchy that facilitates cover-ups and allows plausible deniability. These issues challenge the Church to speak of its lack of transparency and accountability. The priests answer to the bishops and the Pope, all of who are male and entitled. The situation posits that the lack of people management and appropriate oversight fosters a culture of mistreatment and illegal behavior. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Church is its own governing body. Finally, the organizational culture of the Church instills an acceptance that discriminating against women is acceptable and warranted.

This Catholic Church scandal also brings to light ethical leadership issues of complacency, power distance, and globalization, which aggravate worldwide pervasive gender inequality. Researching the impact of these systemic problems within the Church will hopefully open discussion on how Pope Francis will lead his followers and the Holy See out of the sexual abuse scandals. “One of the gravest most deeply rooted challenges to ethical leadership is complacency. Silence conquers courage when faced with unethical choices especially in the gender and cultural issues” (Tavanti and Werhane, 2013).

Outcomes

From this analysis, the Church needs to actively change its patriarchal infrastructure at the highest level to be inclusive of women; including allowing the women to vote and have an equal influence on most important issues. Articles referenced teach us women are not currently treated fairly in this respect on a global level. Pope Francis can implement a systemic change model, such as Collective Impact, to tackle the large-scale change needed within the global Church. Thereby, making systemic changes that will flow from the Pope, to the bishops, to the priests, to the parishes, and finally, to the followers and congregation. The Church has the means and the resources to take on such a strategic systemic-altering plan. As noted by Kania, J. and Kramer, M., “It is commonplace to bemoan the insufficiency of resources and solutions needed to address the world’s most challenging problems. As successful collective impact efforts around the world are discovering, however, the problem is not necessarily a lack of resources and solutions, but our inability to accurately see the resources and solutions that best fit our situation” (2013).

Those clergy members accused of sexual abuse, discrimination, employment labor infractions, and mental abuse should be publicly held accountable. These investigations should not be conducted internally without appropriate oversight from outside legal and professional entities, which is what has been happening for years. By putting these basic structures into place, the Catholic Church can begin to positively transform its institution and proactively help change the world’s view of women.

Video

Included in this analysis are two videos and a podcast to support the narratives from the nuns about sexual abuse, the corruptness of the Catholic patriarchy, and moving forward to change this gender issue within the Church.

[Abuse Documentary](#): The Shame of the Catholic Church | Retro Report | The New York Times | Published on Mar 31, 2014

[Nuns come forward with abuse allegations against Catholic priests](#): CBS Evening News |
Published on Feb 22, 2019

'[I Just Froze](#)': Former Nun Talks About Experiences Of Sexual And Spiritual Abuse: February 9,
2019 5:07 PM ET | Heard on All Things Considered

Description

The Catholic Church is the oldest institution in the western world at about 2000 years old. It teaches that it is the one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic church founded by Jesus Christ. The Church is setup so that its bishops are the successors of Christ's 12 disciples, and that the pope is the successor to Saint Peter, who's importance was decided by Jesus Christ. Through the years, the Church has practiced the original Christian faith passed down by sacred tradition.

As an organization with such a long history and strict traditions, the Catholic Church has run into many issues in today's changing world. Their culture of secrecy and confidentiality with addressing internal problems has proven to be nearly impervious however; in recent months, nuns have been coming forward with their tragic experiences. For many, many years there has been a terrible secret kept about the sexual abuse of holy women by men in power.

Most incidents of abuse stem from a culture of impenetrable patriarchal dominance. The Chicago Tribune states, "some priests have demanded sex in return for favors from nuns under their charge. In some instances, priests are said to have impregnated nuns and then forced them to have abortions" (Hedges, 2001). With an internal culture as toxic as this, one can wonder, how could the organization have taken more responsibility while this was, and possibly still is, going on to detect, prevent, or correct, the issue?

The Chicago Tribune article also mentions, "Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls issued a statement saying the problem was being addressed by church authorities and confined to "a limited geographical area." "A few negative situations cannot make one forget the often heroic faith of the great majority of monks, nuns and priests," he said" (Hedges, 2001). Here we see a man of power within the organization who is downplaying the situation by saying it only exists in one small area and that we must remember the other amazing things the Church has done for society. The organization is clearly looking to protect itself and while admitting a small amount of responsibility, will not make serious change.

In just the last month, the Pope finally acknowledged "the sexual abuse of nuns by priests and bishops, including a case in which some clergy used women as sex slaves. He said that he is committed to ending the problem in the Roman Catholic Church" (Gonzales, 2019). Although it

is good to hear the issue is recognized at the highest level, there unfortunately is still no plan to ensure there is a solid end to the years of abuse. “The Vatican declined to comment on what measures, if any, it has taken to assess the scope of the problem globally, what it has done to punish offenders and care for the victims” (Gonzales, 2019). In response to the Pope’s statement acknowledging the issue Zuzanna Flisowska, the general manager of Voices of Faith, a group advocating for more participation by women in lay leadership positions inside the church, states “I was wondering when he said they were dealing with the problem for a long time, because we just don’t know what those actions are” (Horowitz, 2019). This emphasizes the issue of secrecy within the Church, especially the problem with not letting the public know any serious plan in place for a solution.

While considering how to end a long cycle of an ongoing scandal, Renz and Herman bring up an important unethical assumption to recognize. They draw attention to organizations that “while they admit the importance of ethical questions and issues, believe these questions and issues may be dealt with as discrete concerns in professional practice, isolated from others” (Renz, D., Herman R., 2016). The Catholic Church regularly employs this unethical technique by attempting to solve their issues internally before providing the public with information about the solution they will follow. This is extremely problematic around the sexual abuse of Nuns because although regular churchgoers are offended by the nature of the crimes, they are not directly affected. This allows the Church to solve their issue internally, however they please without the judgement of public officials.

Looking to the future, there is hope for justice surrounding this upsetting issue. The public acknowledgement of sexual abuse of Nuns ingrained into the culture of the Catholic Church by the Pope is long awaited and uncommon of the organization. Although just acknowledging an issue does not seem like a big step, considering the history of secrecy of the organization, this is indeed movement in the right direction.

Discussion Questions: Spurring Critical Thinking

1. How can the Pope, as the sole leader of the Catholic Church, manage the dichotomy of the good the Church accomplishes in the light of all the sexual abuse scandals that have plagued it through the centuries? With the violation of the rights and dignity of women coming to light, where does the Pope draw the line and lift the institution to a higher standard in the public’s eye?
2. Nuns are an integral part of the Church with 72% of U.S. Christian women say religion is “very important” in their lives, what should the Pope do in order to maintain the integrity of the Church and to uphold the values of the Church?



3. Can there be internal reform within a fully established religious organization that is considered a nonprofit, but does not answer to the same national and international nonprofit sector guidelines?
4. The Church leads from positional power using coercive, reward, and legitimate power bases to lead its congregation. These inherent power bases erode the mission of the Church and threatens the dignity, and mental and physical health, of its followers. Can a case be made that the Church uses the teleology as its approach to ethics? In other words, how does its positional power feed into the theory that the end always justifies the means to get the results the Church wants?
5. Regardless of the world learning about the nuns sexual abuse by clergy, the Catholic Church is a nation of its own. What can the public do to make the Church accountable? Can the Church, with all its protection from the age old edict of separation between church and state, be held accountable?
6. Given that the Church acts as its own government. What means are available to create an international set of guidelines that can serve as oversight to issues of sexual abuse with the Church?
7. The Action Center Leadership model says a leader only achieves success when three elements are balanced perfectly. These three elements include accomplishing the task, building the team, and empowering the individual. Where does the Pope have opportunities for improvement when considering this model?
8. While looking at French & Raven's Five Forms of Power, we learn about Legitimate (Title) power. Many leadership positions in the Church are seen this way. How do you think this affects overall culture?

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