
Sexual abuse in the Church: 216,000 victims in France since 1950. Bishops and clergy: "There is still a long way to go before we can hope to deserve their forgiveness"



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[An estimated 216,000 children were victims of sexual violence by between 2,900 to 3,200 priests, men and women religious in France over the past 70 years. However, when the victims of attacks by "lay people working in Catholic Church institutions" were included, the figure rose to 330,000. These shocking "figures" were released on Tuesday, October 5, in Paris in a Report presented by Jean-Marc Sauvé, president of the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuses in the Church \(CISAE\), to Monsignor Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, president of the Bishops' Conference of France \(CEF\), and to Sister Véronique Margron, president of the Conference of Men and Women Religious in France \(CORREF\).](#)



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, founder of 'La Parole Liberée', spoke in very strong terms. "You ventured into the most sinister corners of man, the most vicious meanderings." The abuses that took place "were betrayals of trust, of morale, of children. They constituted the betrayal of innocence, of your people, of the Gospel, a betrayal of everything." The Report reveals a system based on "concealment, hypocrisy and lies." "You are a disgrace!", he exclaimed, repeating it twice: "You must pay for all these crimes" In his remarks during the Conference, **Jean-Marc Sauvé**, President of the Independent Commission, assured: "Our intention was to give the victims a central role in our approach." The victims agreed to "speak out and voice their suffering, isolation, shame and, in many cases, even guilt." "Without their word, the Church would have been left in ignorance and denial."



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Sauvé said that it was an "opportunity effect" for priests, namely, given their closer and more direct contact with children. The Report also found that while most cases of abuse are committed within families, the Catholic Church comes next in line, followed by school and sports environments. The Report presents 45 specific Recommendations. Sauvé did not list them all, but he stressed the need to "acknowledge the responsibility of the Church" for what has occurred in the past. "There have been mistakes," he recognised. Often, complaints were not properly handled, "thus exposing children to being victims of attacks." There was a systematic cover-up. In brief, "the Church failed to see, to listen to and detect signs of weakness." For the future, Sauvé called on the Church to pay reparations to all survivors of sexual violence. "Compensation for the harm done must be paid", and it should not be considered as "a gift" but as something "owed" by the Church.



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so that the refusal to see, the refusal to hear, the desire to hide or mask the facts, the reluctance to denounce them publicly, disappear from the attitudes of the ecclesial authorities, of priests and pastoral workers, of all the faithful. Believe me, I am speaking on behalf of the bishops." "Ladies and Gentlemen, survivors who are amongst us today, you, whose name and surname I know, with whom I have worked and other bishops have worked with in the past years, my heartfelt wish today is to ask your forgiveness. Forgiveness to each and every one of you. I know that you represent thousands of others who could not and will never be able to speak. We bishops assure those who one day will speak, whoever they may be, that they will be heard, welcomed, taken seriously and that their words will not go unheeded."



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