



Pope Francis' Worst Blunder

Karadima

Ovide Bastien

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I Apologize for my Blunder; I Was Misinformed

Exactly forty eight years ago, that is one week after the Washington supported coup of September 11, 1973 that overthrew the government of Salvador Allende, I denounced, in the diary¹ I was writing in my apartment on the corner of Monjitas and Miraflores in downtown Santiago, the hypocrisy of the leader of the Chilean Catholic Church, who, in a televised ceremony broadcast throughout the country, was praying with a military junta that was in the throes of imprisoning, torturing, and executing sympathizers of the Popular Unity government, and even offering it the Church's "entire and disinterested

¹ I reproduced this diary at the end of this book. See *Epilogue: Diary of September 19, 1973*.

collaboration".² A diary I had to constantly hide - I would remove the pipe supporting the sink in the bathroom, insert my diary in it, and reinstall the pipe under the sink - given the danger all were facing in Chile if caught, after the coup, with anything critical of the military.

This hypocrisy continues today, even under the leadership of a surprisingly progressive and environmentalist pope. Though proclaiming to prioritize love for the most exploited and marginalized, the Catholic Church basically keeps intact the clericalism underlying the clergy sexual abuse scandal that has caused such traumatic suffering to dozens of thousands of victims throughout the world. Thanks to the courageous coming forward of ever more survivors and the resulting international backlash in the media, this institution is now experiencing its worst crisis since the Protestant Reformation.³

The very popular and influential Chilean priest Fernando Karadima died at the age of 90 on July 25, 2021. A great formator of dozens of priests, five of whom became

² I was then living in Santiago, Chile, just a few blocks from La Moneda, where Allende was at the moment of the coup. This diary entry was followed by many more. After a few months of research I published a scathing critique of the complicity of the Catholic Church in the coup: Ovide Bastien, *Chili : le coup divin*, Éditions du Jour, Montreal, 1974. Also see the English version, which includes an update, Epilogue 2017, *Chile: The Divine Coup*, self-published, 2017. The coup and the following military dictatorship resulted in more than 3,000 casualties. Hundreds disappeared, dozens of thousands were imprisoned, many of them tortured, and a significant proportion of the population fled abroad as refugees.

³ Clericalism is only one of the roots of clergy sexual abuse. For a more thorough analysis see Ovide Bastien, *Why? Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse*, self-published, 2020. A few documentary films and public inquiries on clergy abuse: [Deliver Us from Evil](#), [Ryan Report](#), [Secrets of the Vatican](#), [Spotlight](#), [Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report](#), [Religieuses abusées, l'autre scandale de l'Église](#), [Tell No One](#).

bishops, and considered by many to be a saint, he enjoyed very close ties with the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, the economic elite, and the Apostolic Nuncio Ángela Sodano (nuncio to Chile from 1977 to 1988). Like the latter and the Catholics of the El Bosque parish located in Providencia, the wealthy neighborhood of Santiago where he served for a long time, Karadima systematically closed his eyes to the abuses committed by the dictatorship - thousands of people tortured, summary executions, disappearances, concentration camps, media censorship, etc. - and perceived the military as the heroes who had freed Chile from “totalitarian atheistic communism”.

A notorious sexual abuser of young men and dozens of minors, over whom he exercised an unhealthy psychological hold for years through spiritual direction, Karadima was at the heart of what is arguably the worst blunder made by Pope Francis during his pontificate.

During his three-day visit to Chile in January 2018, the pope not only refused to meet with Karadima's victims but even went as far as allowing himself to have by his side, in all his public appearances, the one who represented the very symbol of their suffering: Bishop Juan Barros. And when the reporter Nicole Martinez suggested to the pope, at the time of his departure from Chile, that it was perhaps inappropriate for him to appear in public with the one who, according to victims, not only had been working for several years, like many others in the Chilean hierarchy, to cover up Karadima's sexual abuse and discredit his victims, but was even often present in the room witnessing the abuse as it was taking place, the pope retorted in a dry and reproachful tone:

“The day that evidence is presented to me against Bishop Barros, then I will speak. There is not a

single piece of evidence against him; it is only slander. Is that clear?"⁴

It is well known that the papal visit to Chile was an utter failure. On the one hand, because few people from this traditionally Catholic country came to welcome the pope, and on the other hand, because the pope's big blunder - calling the victims' allegations about Bishop Barros mere slander - immediately made headlines around the world. "It's not clear!" scathingly editorialized the New York Times the next day.⁵ And, in a rare move, even Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and of the Committee of Nine Cardinals chosen by the pope to advise him, joined the outcry by publicly rebuking the pope:

"Words that convey the message 'if you cannot prove your claims, then you will not be believed' abandon those who have suffered reprehensible criminal violations of their human dignity and relegate survivors to discredited exile."⁶

Within days of his return to Rome, the pope made a spectacular U-turn. He sent Archbishop Charles Jude Scicluna and Bishop Jordi Bertomeu to investigate in Chile and, after reviewing their damning 2,300-page report,⁷

⁴ José Manuel Morán Faúndes, [La visita papal a Chile: los límites del "fenómeno Francisco"](#), *Sexuality Policy Watch*, March 9, 2018. Retrieved September 28, 2019.

⁵ [Pope's Defense of Chilean Bishop in Sex Abuse Scandal Causes Outrage](#), January 19, 2018. Retrieved August 16, 2021.

⁶ Even Allen, [Cardinal O'Malley speaks out against pope's comment to sex abuse victims in Chile](#), *Boston Globe*, le 20 janvier 2018. Retrieved August 16, 2021.

⁷ Here is the long commentary that Pope Francis made on this report. It was meant to be confidential, but a Chilean media outlet was able to

invited three of Karadima's victims - Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, and José Andrés Murillo - and their lawyer Juan Pablo Hermosilla, to spend a few days with him at his Santa Marta residence in Rome. He gave them a royal welcome - all expenses paid,⁸ guided tour of the Vatican archives, incredibly warm welcome by the members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, etc. - and listened to their testimony with great empathy and affection. Then he sincerely apologized for his blunder, which he recognized could only increase their suffering, and told them it originated from his being misinformed.⁹ Finally, he summoned all the Chilean bishops to Rome and invited them to submit their collective resignation!¹⁰

Many interpreted this U-turn as a sign that the pope had indeed been misinformed - some would say manipulated - by the Chilean hierarchy, and that he was now

obtain it thanks to a leak: [Segunda carta del Papa Francisco a los obispos chilenos](#), *Humanitas*, Pontificia universidad católica de Chile, May 17, 2018. Retrieved October 7, 2010.

⁸ Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), *Debate*, 2020. These three victims of Father Karadima describe in this book the details of their stay in Rome, their meetings with the pope, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, their guided tours, etc. Interestingly enough, their lawyer, Juan Pablo Hermosilla, also invited by the Pope to his residence in Rome, refused the pope's offer to cover all his expenses.

⁹ Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), *Debate*, 2020.

¹⁰ Harriet Sherwood and agencies, [All Chilean bishops offer their resignation over sexual abuse cover-up](#), *The Guardian*, May 18, 2019. Retrieved 6 septembre 2021.

courageously scolding them for having led him to make such a big blunder.¹¹

In what follows, I will list the elements that make me question this interpretation. The pope's blunder in Chile stemmed, in my opinion, above all from his own clericalism, which was very similar to that of the Chilean bishops, and which caused him to ignore and systematically minimize over a three-year period the incredibly powerful and disturbing testimony of Father Karadima's victims about Bishop Barros. And the well-publicized U-turn he made after his return to Rome was first and foremost, I believe, an attempt to restore his credibility, which had always been very impressive throughout the world since the beginning of his pontificate,¹² but had suddenly been blown to pieces.

By placing virtually all the blame on the Chilean bishops and making the historic gesture of asking for their resignation, the pope was, for all intents and purposes, making them his atoning sheep: he was shifting public opinion away from his own non-evangelical attitude

¹¹ This is even the opinion of one of Karadima's victims, Juan Carlos Cruz, who was invited by Pope Francis to spend a few days with him in his Santa Marta residence in Rome. In the book [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), (Debate, 2020) Juan Carlos, who remains a practicing Catholic despite the trauma of the abuse he suffered, puts all the blame on the Chilean bishops. This is not the opinion of the other victims of Karadima, although they appreciate the pope's compassion and apology.

¹² More than three and a half years after his election, Pope Francis remained very popular around the world. While he was admired almost unanimously by the left, polls showed "84% support among Europeans (Catholic or not), 78% in the United States and 72% in South America. See Julien Théry-Astruc, [Dans la peau du pape François : l'Église catholique face à la menace de son extinction](#), *Revue du crieur*, 5, October 2016, p. 4-19. Retrieved August 21, 2021.

towards victims and focusing it squarely on that of the Chilean hierarchy.

In other words, yes, I made a big gaffe and I apologize to the victims, the pope was saying, but I am not responsible for it because I was misinformed. And to make that ultra-clear, I am publicly and courageously reprimanding those truly responsible for it...

But let's revisit and examine some of the information the pope had received but simply chose, in a spirit of blatant clericalism, to ignore. Then let's look at the pope's typically clericalist and protective behavior toward abusive priests in his native Argentina when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires. Finally, let's look at the clericalist attitude that Pope Francis adopted in 2020 in the face of the dramatic case of his long-time right-hand man at the Vatican, Australian Cardinal George Pell.

Appointment of Barros as Bishop of Osorno despite Massive Opposition

When Pope Francis named Juan Barros bishop of Osorno in 2015, it sparked national protests in Chile, especially in Osorno itself, a city in southern Chile with a Catholic population of about 125,000. Opponents of the appointment included not only hundreds of parishioners, but also 51 members of parliament, 30 of the 35 priests of Osorno, and several Chilean bishops.¹³

According to the victims' testimonies, not only did Bishop Barros cover up and protect Father Karadima, destroying incriminating documents to do so. Also, and quite

¹³ Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), *Debate*, 2020, p. 139.

appallingly, as noted above, he often witnessed the abuse as it was taking place!

Although the judge who had investigated Father Karadima's case for an entire year was forced to drop the criminal charges against him due to the statute of limitations, she made it clear that the victims' testimonies were, in her opinion, "true and reliable". And Father Karadima was found guilty by the Vatican's own trial in 2011 and sentenced to a life of 'penance and prayer'.

Despite this very dark cloud hanging over Barros' head, and despite the impressive protests and petitions that this cloud sparked, Pope Francis nevertheless decided to appoint him bishop of Osorno.

And when Barros twice offered to resign, the pope refused to accept his resignation.

The first time, he told Barros: "No, you must not proceed in this way, because it would be tantamount to admitting guilt in advance. Each case ... is investigated."

The second time, he told Barros that he could not condemn him because he did not have the evidence of his guilt. And he added: "Moreover, I am convinced that you are innocent."¹⁴

A year after Barros was named bishop of Osorno, a group of protesters occupied the cathedral in that city. Inés San Martín describes the event:

[In a video](#) making the rounds on social media, filmed during a Mass before the occupation of the cathedral on Saturday, a woman is seen asking the bishop to resign.

¹⁴ Joshua J. McElwee, [Francis again cries 'calumny' defending bishop accused of abuse cover-up](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, January 22, 2018. Retrieved September 29, 2019.

Appointment of Barros as Bishop of Osorno despite Massive
Opposition

“Please go away, make no more damage, so that this church can finally be united,” a woman who approached Barros during communion tells him. “God bless you,” was his response, to which she says, “Yes, but you leave Osorno.”

“In the background, a second person, presumably the one holding the camera, keeps asking, “Juan Carlos Cruz, do you remember the name Juan Carlos Cruz?”

“Cruz is one of Karadima’s victims, and together with James Hamilton and Fernando Batlle, is currently battling the Chilean Church in court, asking for \$700,000 in compensation. (...)

“Barros was installed in the diocese last March, in a ceremony that had to be cut short because of protests. While the bishop was celebrating the Mass, many in attendance screamed “pedophile” and “get out!” at Barros.”¹⁵

In that same article Inés San Martín also refers to a [video](#) that was released in October 2015 “but filmed in St. Peter’s Square five months earlier”. A video that shows Pope Francis’s growing irritation at the ongoing protests in Osorno:

“Osorno suffers, yes, because it is stupid, asserts Pope Francis, because it doesn’t open its heart to what God says and gets carried away by the nonsense that all these people are uttering!”¹⁶

¹⁵ [Protesters occupy cathedral of Chilean bishop charged with covering up abuse](#), *Cruz*, January 10, 2016. Retrieved October 2, 2019.

¹⁶ This quote of the pope’s words does not come from Inés San Martín but from Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), Debate, 2020.

“With no prompting, he tells Jaime Coiro, a former spokesman of the Chilean bishops, that the local Church in Chile has ‘lost its head,’ allowing a group of politicians to judge a bishop ‘with no proof whatsoever.’

“Think with the head, don’t be led around by the nose by these leftists who are the ones who put this [opposition] together,’ the pope is heard saying.

“The ‘leftists’ to whom Francis referred are presumably 51 members of Chile’s Congress, most from the Socialist government of President Michelle Bachelet, who signed a petition opposing Barros’s nomination.

“Regarding the accusations against the four bishops, the pontiff said in the video that they were ‘dismissed by the judicial courts.’

“I am the first one to judge and punish someone who’s being accused of these things, but in this case, there’s no proof. On the contrary,’ Francis said in the video. ‘From the heart, I tell you. Let’s see if you help me with this, but don’t be led by the nose by those who are trying to create a havoc, that are looking for calumny.”

p. 143. When Pope Francis says that Osorno suffers “because it is stupid, because it does not open its heart to what God says” he is implying that HIS decision to appoint Barros bishop of Osorno reflects God's decision. Isn't this mindset the heart of the very clericalism that he himself spends his time denouncing?

Open letter of victim James Hamilton to Pope Francis

On January 11, 2018, exactly one week before Pope Francis arrived in Chile, one of Father Karadima's victims, James Hamilton, wrote him a very moving open letter that was published in the Chilean online newspaper, *The Clinic*.

It is very unlikely, if not impossible, that the first Latin American pope in history, an Argentinean who knows his neighboring country Chile very well, did not become aware of this heartfelt cry in which Hamilton not only expresses the depth of his pain but also denounces the silence, indifference, denial and inability to listen to and believe the victims that characterize clericalism, as well as its systematic tendency to protect abusive priests and cover up their crimes.

“A few days ago, a respected left-wing priest commented to me that he did not feel in a position to denounce, not even to his bishop, another abuser or perverse priest, writes Hamilton. The argument he put forward was that in civil justice the testimony of a spouse, sibling or direct relative was not considered valid, and given that for him the person involved was more than a blood brother, he would not be able to testify against him.

“For a moment I had a flashback to when Fernando Karadima would explain priestly dignity to "his" priests and bishops, when he would tell them they became brothers of Jesus Christ and that this made them enter the community of the elect.

“I never imagined at the time just how prophetic those words were, pursues Hamilton. But over time I discovered a solid, unbreakable ecclesial structure, forged in infinite pacts of silence through which they protect themselves, while shedding millenary blood on the bodies of defenseless, innocent, and kind children who are left in their care. And I understood why they establish an airtight protection among themselves and why they consider child abuse as a "weakness" and not a crime of extreme gravity, which leaves lifelong sequels and generational epigenetic consequences.

Perhaps this left-wing priest is giving us the key to the conception of the family bond promoted by priests, one that is based on human ties, corporeality, intimate zones, biology, and human psyche that disrupts morality, ethics and at the same time relativizes crimes and their penalties. This generates a new code different from the Gospel and ordinary law, where a "good news" is rewritten only for this

brotherhood modeled according to their needs and perversions.

“Perhaps today I understand these priests better, I understand the magic that stupefies them, the promise by which they castrate themselves. Clearly their law is not of this world, nor are their fellow men.

“Although to generalize would be unjust, I still do not understand how we, the thousands of victims of abuse, were not protected by our pastors and priests, who were mute witnesses of what was happening to us, pursues Hamilton.

“With your coming, Pope Francis, I cannot help but wonder what is happening with the ecclesiastical and religious authorities. With the bishop of each diocese whose territorial limits and powers have been designated by you and your predecessors, what happens in the eyes of that merciful God when a child, youth or adolescent is not only physically or psychologically abused, but also has his or her faith taken from him or her?

“Why are they not moved? Why is it that when faced with the loyal and trusting denunciation of victims already weakened by suffering and age, the response, through the channels established by the Church, has almost invariably been the same: denial, indifference, silence, and coldness?

“Why are these clerics allowed to be silently transferred to other parishes and even other countries or continents, where thousands of minors and adolescents continue to be exposed to these predators?

“Why were numerous priests already identified as pedophiles and abusers left in charge of home schools for minors?

“Why was it never explained to us, during confession, that we were the real victims instead of letting us blame ourselves for having committed a very serious sin that finally induced a priest to sin?

“And why, after a heartbreaking process that allowed us to come to terms with the ordeal that we had gone through and face those responsible for it, are we simply called snakes and wolves? Or fools and lefties?

“Pope Francis, asserts Hamilton, why are you not accepting to meet with us?

“Why do you not believe us?

“And why, even though you may believe us, do you always allow clerical solidarity to prevail?”¹⁷

¹⁷ [Carta abierta de James Hamilton a Francisco](#), *The Clinic*, January 8, 2018. Retrieved August 16, 2021.

Letter of victim Juan Carlos Cruz to Pope Francis

When Barros was appointed bishop of Osorno in 2015, another of Father Karadima's victims, Juan Carlos Cruz, was so incensed that he stated on Twitter:

“Juan Barros was next to Karadima when he was abusing us. Then the two of them would hug. Today he has been appointed Bishop of Osorno. The luxury of a bishop!”¹⁸

And a few weeks later, he sent an eight-page letter to Pope Francis, a letter that never received a reply.

¹⁸ Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), *Debate*, 2020, p. 139.

The letter was mentioned in the media only three years later:

“The Associated Press reported on Monday, February 5, 2018, that the head of the Catholic Church had in his hands since 2015 the letter of a victim of Father Fernando Karadima, Juan Carlos Cruz, testifying to the sexual assaults committed by this Santiago priest, declared guilty by the Church after a canonical trial in 2011.

“The victim, Juan Carlos Cruz, says in his letter that Bishop Juan Barros, at the time one of Fernando Karadima's protégés, had witnessed these assaults on numerous occasions without ever having tried to oppose them. (...)

“In 2015, Juan Carlos Cruz wrote this 8-page letter and asked members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors to send it to the Vatican. Four members of this commission, created by Pope Francis in 2014, reportedly traveled to Rome in April 2015 to entrust it to their president, American Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston. The latter would have assured them afterwards that he had passed it on to the pope. Cardinal O'Malley also reportedly confirmed to Juan Carlos Cruz, after the pope's visit to Philadelphia in September 2015, that he had personally delivered the letter to the pope.”¹⁹

The excerpt from this letter that I am reproducing below clearly shows that the pope, already in 2015, possessed an

¹⁹ Cécile Chambraud, [Pédophilie au Chili : une lettre met en doute les affirmations du pape](#), *Le Monde*, February 6, 2018. Retrieved October 1, 2019.

impressive amount of information about the clericalist attitude of the Chilean hierarchy towards victims. Since this information came from the victims, however, he obviously chose to ignore it, thus demonstrating his own clericalism.

“We all counted on you and your zero-tolerance policy, writes Juan Carlos. We wanted to believe that you were not informed, but everyone tells us that you were fully informed. I still hope that you will do something for the many victims of abuse in Chile and around the world.

“This is not solved by a simple pardon.

“Nuncio Scapolo insults us by referring to us a 'rowdy minority' and the bishops sneer at us [...] he continues.

“The situation of the Chilean Church is no longer acceptable. The latest polls show that almost 80% of Chileans have little or no confidence in the Church. Nobody wants that.

“Dear Holy Father, I am not the kind of person to tell you who you should appoint to this or that position. However, the appointment of Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz to your Commission of Nine Cardinals chosen to advise you was a blow to many of us victims, and indeed to many Chileans.

“Cardinal Errázuriz stopped the investigations, ignored the accusations, took advice from Karadima's followers and believed them. Instead of showing us compassion, he made our lives impossible, even lying to us and ignoring us. We begged the cardinal to meet with us, and this in the

most respectful way possible, but he never agreed to do so.

When you appointed him to your commission, the reporters reminded him of the criticism he was receiving from victims, Juan Carlos continued. Surprisingly enough, he simply replied, with a sarcastic laugh:

I don't care what they're saying. Apparently, that's not what the pope thinks.

“These words were unimaginably cruel and frustrating for us!

“And with Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati it’s more of the same. He was a key player in our case when he was auxiliary bishop of Santiago. José Andrés Murillo (another of Karadima's victims) gave him a signed letter in 2003 and, although he assured him that he would do something about our situation, he never did. José Andrés met with him, and a few fine Jesuit priests also spoke with him. His inaction, which he now denies, allowed Karadima to continue abusing [...]

“Nothing you request, Holy Father, is being done in Chile. Your policy of "zero tolerance against abuse" is not being implemented in Chile.”²⁰

The circumstances in which Juan Carlos' letter to the pope was made public at the beginning of February 2018 are very revealing. The victims of Father Karadima and of his

²⁰ Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), *Debate*, 2020, p. 172-173.

protégé Bishop Juan Barros had been struggling for years to be heard and to obtain justice. In this unsuccessful struggle, they had learned to distrust a hierarchy that used every possible means to defend itself - silence, denial, refusal to meet with them, lies, attempts to discredit them, etc. And a hierarchy that also received the support, in this maneuver, of the financial elite and even of the Chilean courts, with which it enjoyed close ties.

Pope Francis himself had dealt several blows to the victims. First, by naming Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz as his close advisor. Then, by naming Barros bishop of Osorno. And finally, during his visit to Chile in January 2018, by calling their allegations against Bishop Barros mere slander.

So, while they were pleased that the pope, after realizing the enormity of his blunder in Chile because of the devastating worldwide negative media coverage it had sparked, had decided to send two episcopal investigators to Chile, the victims did not yet dare to cry victory. On the contrary, they remained considerably fearful and skeptical.

How many times, in previous years, had they not seen their hopes being suddenly dashed because of dirty diplomatic maneuvers carried out by the Chilean hierarchy? How many times had they not suffered bitter defeats?

So, to avoid yet another bitter failure they thus decided to go on the attack. To increase the pressure on the Church. To throw yet another log into the anti-Pope Francis media fire that was burning all over the planet....

They contacted the Associated Press and gave it the letter that Juan Carlos had written to the pope in 2015.

A leak that had the effect of a bomb! Within a matter of hours, media outlets around the world were reporting that Pope Francis, who claimed, during his three-day visit to Chile, that he had no evidence whatsoever against Bishop Barros, did in fact have such evidence, and this for a full three years!

The credibility of the Supreme Pontiff, already substantially jeopardized, received yet another quasi-fatal blow!

And to increase the pressure even more, Juan Carlos decided to give a press conference, whose timing was perfect. He had just received a phone call from the two episcopal investigators, who, bending over backwards to be friendly and kind with him, had announced that, before going to Chile, they would pay him a personal visit in New York where he had been living for several years.

“We have been giving our testimonies for years, Juan Carlos told the numerous reporters who had rushed to hear what he had to say in his press conference. (...) The pope says that he needs proof. But he has had such proof for a long time!”²¹

²¹ Juan Carlos Cruz, James Hamilton, José Andrés Murillo, [Abuso y poder : nuestra lucha contra la Iglesia católica](#), *Debate*, 2020, p. 17.

Pope Francis and Clergy Sexual Abuse in Argentina

Another element that makes me doubt very much that the blunder committed by Pope Francis in Chile was only due to the fact that he was misinformed: his behavior with regard to clergy sexual abuse while he was exercising his ministry in Argentina.

The website BishopAccountability.org, whose mission is to disseminate all available information regarding the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, claims that Pope Francis, while serving as Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires (1992-1997), Archbishop of Buenos Aires (1998 to 2013), and President of the Argentine Bishops' Conference (2005 to 2011), maintained an astonishing silence regarding clergy

abuse in his country.²² While Church leaders in the United States and Europe, as well as Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, were commenting on the crisis, Jorge Bergoglio, appointed cardinal in 2001, was silent about it in Argentina: no names or counts of accused priests, no policies for dealing with abuse, no apologies to victims.

If he often attacked in his homilies²³ wealth inequality, human sex trafficking, government corruption, etc., Cardinal Bergoglio never mentioned clergy sexual abuse of youth in Argentina.

In [Sobre el cielo y la tierra](#), a book published in 2010 that reproduces a conversation between Argentine rabbi Abraham Skorka and Cardinal Bergoglio, the latter states:

“Celibacy does not lead to pedophilia. More than seventy percent of pedophilia cases occur in the family and neighborhood: grandparents, uncles, in-laws, neighbors. The problem is not related to celibacy. If a priest is a pedophile, he was one before he became a priest. Now, when it happens, we must never turn a blind eye. You can't be in a position of power and destroy another person's life. This has never happened to me in my diocese, but a bishop once called me asking what to do in such a situation and I told him to take away his priestly licenses, not to allow him to exercise the priesthood anymore and to start a canonical process in the tribunal of that diocese.” (p. 58)

²³ These homilies can be found on the website of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires:

<https://www.arzbaires.org.ar/inicio/homiliasbergoglio.html>

According to BishopAccountability.org, Bergoglio's statement, "This has never happened to me in my diocese," is not at all credible:

"Dozens of priests have been publicly accused of abusing children in Argentina over the years, says BishopAccountability.org, and these cases have been widely covered by the media. Courageous survivors have come forward and even asked to meet with Bergoglio but have been denied."

BishopAccountability.org refers specifically, among others, to the case of [Father Julio Grassi](#), accused in October 2002 of sexually abusing minors. This priest was very influential in Argentina. A major fundraiser with strong support from the Catholic elite, he was the founder of Fundación Felices Niños, which was responsible for 17 residences for street children throughout the country

A few days after the media reported the accusations, the Executive Committee of the Argentine Episcopal Conference issued a communiqué stating that the Church was the victim of a smear campaign aimed at making it lose "people's trust". Without making a single reference to the Grassi affair, the communiqué recalled that one must avoid prejudging individuals and institutions and must wait for justice to be done.

When interviewed by the magazine *Veintitres* in 2006, Cardinal Bergoglio, a great admirer of the work of Father Grassi, some of whose children's residences were in his archdiocese of Buenos Aires, asserted that "even if there is an ongoing media campaign to harm Grassi, justice will declare his innocence".

On June 9, 2009, following a lengthy nine-month trial during which the court heard from 130 witnesses, Grassi

was freed of some charges but found guilty of sexually abusing Gabriel, then a teenager, and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He was, however, allowed to remain free until he exhausted his right to appeal.

Shortly after the conviction, Cardinal Bergoglio, then president of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, secretly commissioned Marcelo Sancinetti, a prestigious lawyer, to investigate the case. His report - a four-volume, 2,000-page book - states flatly that Grassi is innocent, that the victims are lying, and that the case should never have gone to trial.

The fact that the report - according to the victims and their lawyer, a report filled with falsehoods - was distributed to the magistrates, who were soon to rule on Grassi's appeal motions,²⁴ deeply shocked and revolted the victims and their lawyer. They saw it as a crude attempt to influence the course of justice. And this shock and revolt only increased when, throughout his defense, Grassi affirmed that Jorge Bergoglio had always held his hand (*nunca me soltó la mano*)!²⁵

In September 2018, Gabriel met with the Associated Press:

“In tears, he testified that on two occasions in 1996, Father Grassi had groped him inappropriately and then performed oral sex on him in his office. (...)

“Gabriel said that two months after Francis was named the first Latin American pope, he and his

²⁴ [La Iglesia editó un libro en apoyo al cura Grassi](#), *Clarín*, December 17, 2011. Also see Luis Andrés Henao et Nicole Winfield, [Resurge papel de papa en caso de abuso sexual en Argentina](#), *Associated Press*, September 18, 2018 and Daniel Pliner, [Ojala no sea cierto](#), *La Nación*, December 20, 2011. Retrieved August 24, 2021.

²⁵ [Grassi: "Bergoglio jamás me soltó la mano"](#), *Infobae*, August 24, 2021. Retrieved the same day.

lawyer sent him a letter, which they delivered to the apostolic nunciature in Buenos Aires on May 8, 2013.

“In the letter, Gabriel identifies himself as a victim of Grassi's "aberrant crimes of repeated sexual abuse and corruption of minors." (...)

“I have suffered and continue to suffer, he wrote to the pope. I would like an audience with you. I sincerely beg you to give me your compassion and to help me regain my faith.”²⁶

Gabriel never received a response from the pope. The same thing that had happened to Juan Carlos Cruz, a victim of Father Karadima in Chile, who, as mentioned above, had written a long letter to the pope in 2015.

It is true that the pope suddenly made a U-turn and welcomed Juan Carlos and two other of Karadima's victims with open arms to his Santa Marta residence in Rome, apologized, and even shed some tears with them.

However, it is doubtful that this U-turn would ever have taken place were it not for the worldwide devastating media coverage that the pope's big blunder in Chile sparked and the resulting blowing to pieces of his international credibility.

²⁶ Luis Andrés Henao et Nicole Winfield, [Resurge papel de papa en caso de abuso sexual en Argentina](#), *Associated Press*, September 18, 2018.

Case of Cardinal George Pell in Australia

One last element that makes me question the interpretation that the pope's monumental blunder in Chile only came from the fact that he had been misinformed and even manipulated by the Chilean hierarchy: the case of Cardinal Pell in Australia.

Some background information.

Let us recall that Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected pope in the context of a historic crisis in the Catholic Church that led Benedict XVI to resign, something no pope had done in centuries. There was, of course, the clergy sex abuse scandal that had been erupting around the world for several years and that was shaking this institution to its core. But there was also Vatileaks, the straw that broke the

camel's back. Suddenly, and in a spectacular way, the whole world was discovering that many supposedly celibate prelates of the Vatican were not only financially corrupt but also had a very active sexual life!²⁷

It is in this context that Pope Francis, once elected, quickly acted by choosing a commission, composed of nine cardinals from each continent, to advise and accompany him in managing the crisis.

One of those he chose, as we have just seen, was Chilean Cardinal Errázuriz, whose behavior towards the victims of Father Karadima left much - to say the least! - to be desired. Another was Australian Cardinal George Pell, whose handling of victims of clergy sexual abuse also left much to be desired, as clearly illustrated in the following story reported by author Melissa Davey.

When Anthony and Chrissie Foster discovered in March 1996 that their daughter Emma had been sexually abused as a teenager for years by Father Kevin O'Donnell, they went to the office of George Pell, then archbishop of Melbourne. They had watched with horror and sadness as the life of their daughter had suddenly begun to

²⁷ For more information on Vatileaks, see the following sources: Gianluigi Nuzzi, *Sua Santità : le carte segrete di Benedetto XVI*, Chiarelettere, June 2012, Milan; John Allen, [All Hell breaks loose in the Holy See](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, May 24, 2012. Retrieved December 30, 2019; Dr Taylor Marshall, [Why did Pope Benedict Resign? McCarrick, Vigano and Vatican Bank Scandals Explained in Detail](#), published on YouTube August 27, 2018. Retrieved January 1, 2020; [Sex and the Vatican: viaggio segreto nel regno dei casti](#), Milan, Piemme, 2011. Abbate also published *Golgota : viaggio segreto tra chiese e pedofilia*, Milan, Piemme, 2012; [Vatileaks](#), Messymomentmedia, published on YouTube April 28, 2013. Retrieved January 3, 2020.

disintegrate but had not, until then, known why. Emma had fallen into drugs and a long depression and was regularly self-harming.

Both staunch Catholics, they were confident that the spiritual leader of their diocese would listen to their story, express understanding and compassion, and arrange for Father O'Donnell, already known and convicted for sexually abusing minors, to be laicized.

However, that's not at all what happened. After Anthony and Chrissie had testified at length, detailing the trauma their daughter endured - depression, drugs, anorexia, lengthy therapy, etc. -, Pell remained calm, indifferent, and cold. An attitude that did not even change when, to demonstrate the extent of the self-harm resulting from her deep trauma, they showed him a graphic A4 print of Emma's slashed wrists. He simply handed the picture back to them and commented without a grimace or a frown:

“I hope you can substantiate what you’re saying in court. It’s all gossip until it’s proven in court.”

Such was the shock and hurt caused by the archbishop's attitude and words that the couple, stunned and outraged, embarked on a long struggle against the Catholic Church to obtain justice and reparation.

“Three days after the meeting, comments Chrissie Foster, it ate away at me and it hit me. *Oh, I understand.* I realised he knew we had no proof and that’s why he kept shoving it down our throats to go to court. He knew we couldn’t. That was his bullying. It was just disgusting to go there with the rape of our child, and by then she’s been anorexia for a year, in and out of psych units, cutting her

wrists and herself, and all he can say is, 'Go prove it in court'.

“What sort of attitude is that? He was crushing us by getting us to prove it. What proof could we have, what proof does a child have? Do they take a camera with them? Of course not. It was his (O'Donnell's) word against her word, and Pell knew it.”

Katie, who only disclosed to her parents in November 1997 the sexual abuse inflicted on her by Father O'Connell, had also suffered from deep depression. But instead of falling into drugs to escape the trauma she had experienced, she had turned to extremely heavy drinking.

Emma died in 2008 of a drug overdose following years of self-harm. She was only 26 years old.

Katie was hit by a speeding car in 1999 when, stone drunk, she was crossing the street. She spent a year in the hospital and, because of permanent brain damage, is now wheelchair bound.²⁸

In collaboration with journalist Paul Kennedy, Chrissie Foster published *Hell on the Way to Heaven*,²⁹ a book in which she recounts the tragic experience of her two daughters and her relentless fight against the Catholic Church. According to Melissa Davey, it was the couple's activism, along with other survivors and advocates, that pushed the Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard to agree to do what all her male predecessors had refused to do in the past: set up the Royal Commission into Institutional

²⁸ Melissa Davey, [The Case of George Pell: Reckoning with Child Sexual Abuse by Clergy](#), Scribe Publications, 2020. The information about Anthony and Chrissie Foster was drawn from chapter 2, “Royal Commission”.

²⁹ Chrissie Foster, [Hell on the Way to Heaven](#), Amazon, October 2010.

Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, whose conclusions for the Catholic Church were devastating.³⁰

The blatantly clericalist attitude of George Pell, a close advisor to Pope Francis who also entrusted him with the responsibility of managing the finances of the global Catholic Church, is not limited to this very troubling case. The head of the Australian Catholic Church, who has repeatedly boasted that “through his [Melbourne Response](#),³¹ he was the first Catholic bishop in Australia, and indeed anywhere else in the world, to propose a comprehensive program to tackle the issue of clergy sexual abuse of minors”, is accused by several victims of having systematically protected abusive priests under his responsibility.³² An accusation validated by the Royal

³⁰ Melissa Davey, [The Case of George Pell: Reckoning with Child Sexual Abuse by Clergy](#), Scribe Publications, 2020, p. 359. Also see David Marr, [Royal Commission recommends sweeping reforms for Catholic Church to end child abuse](#), December 14, 2017. Retrieved January 24, 2021.

³¹ [George Pell](#), *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 20, 2020. The key features of the Melbourne Response “were the appointment of independent commissioners to inquire into allegations and make recommendations; a counselling and support service (Carelink); and the establishment of a compensation panel to advise on making "ex-gratia" payments to victims of child sexual abuse. The ex-gratia payments are made without the church recognising any liability to victims and were initially capped at \$50,000. It was increased to \$55,000 in 2000 and to \$75,000 in 2008.”

³² Louise Milligan, *CARDINAL: The Rise and Fall of George Pell*, quote from chapter 6, Melbourne University Press, 2017. Critics argued in 2019 that the Melbourne Response should be scrapped as they claim it “saw victims agree to potentially smaller sums of compensation while waiving their rights to sue the church”. Luque Henriques-Gomes, [Q&A: church leader says George Pell's Melbourne Response should be scrapped](#), *The Guardian*, March 4, 2019. Retrieved January 16, 2020.

Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which points out, in over 100 pages concerning Pell's actions, that the cardinal was aware of the existence of pedophile priests, both at the beginning of his career and in the following years.

“In particular, the commissioners dismissed [the cleric's long-stated defence that he didn't know about the actions of his former colleague Gerald Ridsdale](#) in the Victorian city of Ballarat, notes BBC.

“Ridsdale is in jail for hundreds of child abuse offences - and is considered Australia's worst convicted paedophile priest. (...)

“Pell was involved in the decision to transfer Ridsdale, as well other suspected abusers, to different parishes, the inquiry said.”³³

Even more dramatic and devastating for the Church is the fact that on December 11, 2018, this right-hand man of Pope Francis, who had been accused of sexually abusing two minors in the Melbourne Cathedral in the 1990s, was found guilty in a unanimous verdict by a 12-member Victorian court jury and sentenced to six years in prison.³⁴

A few words to explain to readers the alleged events that led to this conviction.

Author and investigative journalist Louise Milligan spent time interviewing the mother, father, and sister of Cardinal Pell's victim, the one who, as mentioned above, died of a

³³ [Cardinal Pell 'knew of' clergy abuse, says Australian royal commission](#), *BBC*, May 7, 2020. Retrieved August 21, 2021.

³⁴ Gerard O'Connell, [Cardinal Pell, top advisor to Pope Francis, found guilty of 'historical sexual offenses](#), *America*, December 12, 2018. Retrieved 21, 2021.

drug overdose. In her book, she gives this victim the code name Choir Boy.

She also met the other man who was abused by Pell in the cathedral at the same time and in the same sacristy as Choir Boy. She gave this other victim the code name The Kid. It was The Kid's accusations that led to Pell's conviction and imprisonment.

When their son died of an overdose in 2015, Choir Boy's parents were too ashamed to tell their friends, neighbors and relatives what really happened; so, they told them it was a car accident. They had no idea that their son's sudden and dramatic change in behavior at age 13, and his subsequent fall into drugs, had anything to do with sexual abuse. It was the Victoria Police SANO taskforce, which, months after the funeral, as the father pointed out in his letter to Pope Francis, informed the parents that their son had been sexually abused as a teenager in the past.

The parents did not know, however, that their son's abuser happened to be the former supreme leader of the Australian Catholic Church, now Pope Francis' right-hand man at the Vatican! It was Pell's other victim, The Kid, who one day found the courage to tell Choir Boy's mother what had happened, and who, in fact, was the abuser.

Milligan recounts in her book how the mother reacted when she heard this shocking news:

“Mary (that’s the code name Milligan gave to the mother) was overcome with a hot rush of anger. Not at The Kid, but at her son, for not telling her. Because Mary had asked her son. Not just once. Something inside of her, some mother’s intuition perhaps born in the shock after her boy went so quickly and spectacularly off the rails, had made her suspect that

he had been a victim of abuse. 'I asked (him), I can't remember the words I used, whether he was touched up, or played with, and (he) told me "no".' The boy shrugged. She says shrugging was something her son would sometimes do when he didn't want to talk about things. She still had a niggling feeling something was up. 'I never said anything to anybody,' she says. 'And then, again, after a while, I asked him and again he told me "no". And then I get this. And I was just so angry with (him),' she says, closing her eyes at the memory of it, 'for not telling me. So angry. Sometimes I'm still very angry.'

"The Kid gently told Mary what he says happened with the archbishop. 'He told me that himself and (my son) used to play in the back of the Church in the closed-off rooms,' she says.

"'In the cathedral?' I ask her.

"'In the cathedral, yep. And um, they got sprung by Archbishop Pell and he locked the door and he made them perform oral sex.' The Kid still remembered the incident so clearly. Being picked up afterwards by his parents. Staring out the car window on the way home. Mary swallows and looks at me in disgust." (...)

Mary told Milligan she was also angry at the Catholic Church.

"I sent my children there - I sent both of my children there - for an education, to be safe. You send your kids to school to be safe. Not to have this done. (...)

"The Kid told Mary that her son's funeral was the breaking point for him. It plunged him into despair and regret. His own mother was very concerned about his

wellbeing. He had not been coping since his friend's death. He decided that he had to come forward, he had to say something. (...) The Kid, with the support of his mum and a victim's advocate, went to Taskforce SANO.³⁵

Mary told Milligan that she believed The Kid because "she can't think what he possibly has to gain by coming forward. (...)" And contrary to her son and many other victims of child sexual abuse "he has not lived a chequered life".

"He's university-educated, he hasn't had trouble with the law, pursued Mary. He has a lovely young girlfriend, lots of friends, he's a pillar of his community in a sort of understated, slightly ironic way, and in that part of his life, he is, he told me, very happy. He's managed, just, to keep it together, He's been able to compartmentalize. He's the sort of complainant you'd want as a Victoria Police detective alleging historic crime."³⁶

Of course, like Father Grassi in Argentina, Father Karadima in Chile, and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick in the United States, Cardinal Pell has always proclaimed his

³⁵ Louise Milligan, *CARDINAL: The Rise and Fall of George Pell*, quote from chapter 26, Melbourne University Press, 2017. "The SANO Task Force was established to investigate historic and new allegations that have emanated from the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into child sex abuse involving Religious and Non-Government organisations. The task force will also coordinate investigations emerging from the Australian Government Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse." [Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Abuse](#), *Victoria Police website*, Retrieved January 16, 2020.

³⁶ Louise Milligan, *CARDINAL: The Rise and Fall of George Pell*, quote from chapter 26, Melbourne University Press, 2017.

innocence. And following the unanimous jury verdict, he filed a complaint with the Victorian Court of Appeal. However, in August 2019, that [court decided to uphold the jury's verdict.](#)

A formidable battler, Cardinal Pell counterattacked. He addressed yet another appeal, this time to the Australian High Court which in the end agreed to hear his appeal, a decision that deeply upset his victims, and in particular the father of the victim who died from a heroin overdose in 2015. The latter - his name cannot be revealed for legal reasons - felt so gutted when he learned that Cardinal Pell had been granted yet another chance to be heard that he wrote a letter to Pope Francis.

“I had a son, a nice kid, keen to learn to cook, to help others, to be involved, to play sports, visit his grandparents, until he became a stranger due to drugs, writes the father to the pope.

“At first, we did not know he was using (drugs), he hid it for a while, but his behaviour changed, he became anti-social, and had problems at school. He was coming and going at all hours of the day, unusual behaviour for a 14-year-old. Talking to him was hopeless, he would not engage and would refuse to discuss anything. (...)

“We never knew the real reason he took drugs and behaved the way he did from the time he was in his early teens.

“Sixteen months after his death, I was contacted by someone from the Sano Task Force, I was shocked and upset to be told that my son had been named as a victim of child sexual abuse.

“As a Catholic, I felt betrayed by the Church, but as a parent I felt like a failure. I felt as if I failed my son and my family, and I still feel that way today.
(...)

“The hurt never goes away, and I cry a lot over the loss of my son.

“I will always miss the innocent little choir boy that was my son, such a tragic waste of a beautiful boy whose life became a nightmare for himself and those around him,” pursues the father.

And he ends his letter by addressing a few questions to Pope Francis.

“Why does the church insist on celibacy for the clergy when it is so obvious - and has been proven - that it does not work? It is incomprehensible in this day and age to deny men the opportunity to engage in what is a natural act. Denial has forced many of them to pursue innocent children.

“Why has Pell kept his title as cardinal?

“Why have you not defrocked him and stripped him of his status within the church?

“What is the status of your investigation into Pell’s behaviour?

“Why have you not instructed Pell to drop his appeal and admit his guilt? He has been found guilty by a jury in a court of law in Australia.

“Why are women excluded from the clergy?”³⁷

Cardinal Pell's new appeal was successful. In early April 2020, the High Court gave its verdict: it cleared the cardinal of all assaults on the two minors.

Whether and to what extent this may have influenced the High Court's decision will never be known, but it is a fact that Cardinal Pell enjoys very close ties with several very influential figures - politicians and businessmen - in Australia. And it is also a fact that Robert Richter, the lawyer chosen by the cardinal to defend him, is mostly “known for representing some of Victoria’s most notorious gangland figures, and successfully”.³⁸

Just as Pope Francis had repeatedly expressed his clerical solidarity with Bishop Barros, naming him Bishop of Osorno despite long and massive protests, twice refusing to accept his resignation, and calling the very serious allegations made by the victims (because they were not proven in court) mere slander, he again expressed his clerical solidarity with Cardinal Pell, just hours after his acquittal.

“In these days of Lent, we have seen the persecution that Jesus suffered and how the doctors of the law went relentlessly against him, and he was judged ferociously, even though he was innocent, commented Pope Francis during the mass he was celebrating in the chapel of his Santa Marta residence in Rome. I would like to pray today for all

³⁷ [George Pell's appeal against child sex abuse convictions to be heard by High Court](#), *ABC News*, November 13, 2019. Retrieved January 13, 2020.

³⁸ Melissa Davey, [The Case of George Pell: Reckoning with Child Sexual Abuse by Clergy](#), Scribe, Melbourne - London, Chapter 1: Committal.

those persons that suffer an unjust sentence because someone had it in for them.”

And shortly after midday, the Vatican press office released the following statement:

“The Holy See, which has always expressed confidence in the Australian judicial authority, welcomes the High Court’s unanimous decision concerning Cardinal George Pell, acquitting him of the accusations of abuse of minors and overturning his sentence. Entrusting his case to the court’s justice, Cardinal Pell has always maintained his innocence and has waited for the truth to be ascertained. At the same time, the Holy See reaffirms its commitment to preventing and pursuing all cases of abuse against minors.”³⁹

On October 12, 2020, just a few months after Cardinal Pell’s release from prison, Pope Francis once again expressed his clerical solidarity with the cardinal by granting him a private papal audience. He even authorized - a clear sign that he wanted this audience to be widely publicized - the production of a [short video clip](#) in which we hear the pope saying, “I’m glad to see you...it’s been more than a year,” an allusion to the time Pell had spent in prison in Australia.⁴⁰

Pope Francis did not meet with The Kid - the code name given by Louise Milligan to the other victim of Cardinal

³⁹ Gerard O’Connell, [Vatican responds with measure to Cardinal Pell’s acquittal and release from prison](#), *America*, April 7, 2020. Also see Gail Grossman Freyne, [Cardinal Pell: A decision with little certainty](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, April 27, 2020. Retrieved June 15, 2020.

⁴⁰ Holy See: [Pope Francis meets cardinal Pell after sexual abuse charges acquittal](#), posted on YouTube October 12, 2020. Retrieved the following day.

Pell - who, when attending the funeral of Choir Boy, had decided that after all these years he had to come out of his silence. That he had to speak. That enough was enough. That he absolutely had to open up about what he knew and show his solidarity with Choir Boy who had been abused at the same time and in the same sacristy as him. Choir Boy, whose chequered life and tragic death resulted, The Kid was deeply convinced, from this traumatic and life-altering event.

Pope Francis did not show solidarity with The Kid, as he had suddenly done with the victims of Bishop Barros, once his international credibility had been blown to pieces by the media because of his big gaffe in Chile. He did not, as he done with the victims of Bishop Barros, invite The Kid to come and spend a few days with him at his Santa Marta residence in Rome - all expenses paid, a warm welcome from him and the members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, guided tours of the Vatican archives, etc. He did not rush to apologize to The Kid and to listen to his testimony, a testimony so powerful and credible that it had led to a unanimous jury verdict and a six-year prison sentence for Cardinal Pell.

*No. His solidarity went to Cardinal Pell... He adopted a strictly legal approach to the matter, as he had done in the case of Father Grassi in Argentina for several years, and as he had also done for a full three years in Chile regarding the serious, but unproven allegations of Karadima's victims about Bishop Barros. For him it sufficed that the High Court had acquitted Cardinal Pell on the basis that the jury had not given due consideration to all the evidence, some of which, in its opinion, did not make it possible to affirm, *beyond a shadow of a doubt*, Cardinal Pell's guilt. It sufficed to the point that he even compared the persecution*

suffered by Jesus at the hands of the doctors of the law to that suffered by Cardinal Pell.

And Pope Francis was not alone, among Catholic Church leaders, to draw a comparison between Cardinal Pell's long persecution - for years numerous survivors accused him of covering up priest abusers, and even of being himself an abuser, accusations that constantly made the headlines - and that of Jesus-Christ. After reading *Prison Journal*, a book reproducing excerpts from the diary written by Cardinal Pell in prison, three archbishops expressed their admiration for Pell. One even compared him to Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Martin Luther King, and Jesus!⁴¹

Could it be that the person who truly reflected Jesus' evangelical love and compassion was not the person who was accused, found guilty, imprisoned for more than 400 days, and then freed by the Australian High Court? Could it be that it was, instead, the person who was so deeply saddened and upset by his former teenage friend's suicide that he felt compelled to open up about what he knew, even though doing so required immense courage given that it concerned an extremely powerful and influential public figure?

The charges dismissed by the High Court of Australia are not the only ones this quasi-sanctified cardinal faces; there are a couple dozen more.⁴² Like the man alleging that Pell,

⁴¹ Cardinal George Pell, [Prison Journal, Volume I](#), Ignatius, December 2020. Retrieved January 10, 2021. See section 'Editorial Reviews'.

⁴² Gail Grossman Freyne, [Cardinal Pell: A decision with little certainty](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, April 27, 2020. Retrieved June 15, 2020. "In all, 26 charges have been laid, pursues Grossman Freyne. "The Bolt Report," [Sky News TV](#), conducted the first interview with Pell post-release on April 14, and the report noted there have been 26 accusations against Pell overall - until the Victoria Police announced they were beginning an investigation into a 27th for alleged criminal behavior relating to sexual abuse of a child in 1970s."

then a seminarian, had sexually abused him, then a 12-year-old altar boy, at a youth camp on Phillip Island in 1961. The man alleging that Pell had taken him out of the children's home where he was a ward of the state and raped him. And the man alleging that when he lived at St. Joseph's Home for Children in Ballarat, Pell, who came to their home to use the pool and play with the children, had repeatedly put his hands in his bathing suit and inserted his finger in his anus, causing him considerable pain.⁴³

That is why Cardinal Pell's detractors, of whom there are many in Australia, passionately believe that although the convictions against him over incidents in the Melbourne cathedral have been overturned, he is not innocent at all.

Lawyer and professor of law at Trobe University in Melbourne, Gideon Boas, makes a comment that may leave many readers scratching their heads:

“I've heard it said a lot in this case, 'How could the jury get it so wrong when the High Court decided unanimously it was an unreasonable verdict?' My response is: 'what's to say the High Court had it right?'”⁴⁴

⁴³ Melissa Davey, [*The Case of George Pell: Reckoning with Child Sexual Abuse by Clergy*](#), Scribe Publications, 2020. Chapter 1, “Committal”.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Joshua J. McElwee, [Up-close account of Pell's historic trial raises an uncomfortable question](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, le 28 septembre 2020. Retrieved the same day.

Trying to Overcome Clericalism but Still Stuck in It

As soon as Argentina's Jorge Mario Bergoglio became pope, like many other progressives around the world, I was delighted. And for three or four years I remained a great admirer of Pope Francis.

A very progressive Quebec priest, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, confided to me recently, “I have never prayed so much for a pope!”

His [speech in Bolivia](#) at the World Meeting of Popular Movements on July 10, 2015 was truly remarkable. Pope Francis went so far as to question an economic system that kills. In [Chile: The Divine Coup](#), I even showed the striking similarity between this speech and Salvador Allende's [memorable speech to the United Nations General Assembly](#) on December 4, 1972.

In [Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor](#), I pointed out that when the renowned Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki read [Laudato Si](#), Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, he was so deeply moved by its depth and beauty that he broke down in tears.

Pope Francis is a man who is desperately trying to reform a Catholic Church that is in dire need of reform. He is demonstrating this through numerous initiatives:

- He chose to live in the modest Santa Marta residence instead of the traditional papal apartments.
- Instead of a limousine, he chose a used car for his displacements.
- His first official trip was to Lampedusa, where thousands of refugees regularly arrive from Africa and Europe tries to turn away.
- When it was discovered that a German bishop had spent \$50 million renovating his residence, Pope Francis quickly replaced him.⁴⁵
- He sometimes invites the marginalized to share a meal with him.⁴⁶

Shortly after his election, he made many enemies in the Roman Curia by publicly listing a long list of their clerical sins and weaknesses, including what he called “spiritual Alzheimer's”.⁴⁷

Although in 2010 he denounced the law establishing same-sex marriage in Argentina as "the attempt to destroy God's

⁴⁵ Nicole Senèze, [L'évêque allemand de Limbourg éloigné de son diocèse](#), October 23, 2013, *La Croix*. Retrieved September 11, 2021.

⁴⁶ [Le pape à table parmi les exclus](#), *Le Soleil*, November 19, 2017. Retrieved September 11, 2021.

⁴⁷ [Pope blasts Vatican bureaucracy for having 'spiritual Alzheimer's'](#), *Associated Press*, December 22, 2014. Retrieved August 26, 2021.

plan,"⁴⁸ he later indicated in several statements that he opposes the traditional views of the Catholic Church that homosexuality is a human disorder,⁴⁹ and even accepted the civil union of homosexuals,⁵⁰ raising the hope, which was soon dashed, that he would accept that priests would also bless such unions.⁵¹

It is true that he played an important role "from 1973 as provincial of the Jesuits in Argentina, and then in a decisive meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Council in Puebla (Colombia) in 1979," to normalize the Vatican's opposition to liberation theology.⁵² However, his ideas are in many respects close to this type of theology.⁵³

⁴⁸ Julien Théry-Astruc, [Dans la peau du pape François : l'Église catholique face à la menace de son extinction](#), *Revue du crieur*, 5, October 2016, p. 4-19. Retrieved August 21, 2021.

⁴⁹ For the most spectacular of such statements, see Guillaume Stoll, [Le pape et l'homosexualité : "Un changement de ton"](#), *Le Nouvel Observateur*, July 29, 2013. Also see Rachel Donadio, [On Gay Priests, Pope Francis Asks, 'Who Am I to Judge?'](#), *The New York Times*, July 29, 2013. Retrieved August 27, 2021.

⁵⁰ Chico Harlan, Michelle Boorstein and Sarah Pulliam Bailey, [Pope Francis calls for civil union laws for same-sex couples](#), *The Washington Post*, October 21, 2020. Retrieved August 27, 2021.

⁵¹ Chico Harlan and Sarah Pulliam Bailey, [Pope Francis says priests cannot bless same-sex unions, dashing hopes of gay Catholics](#), *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2021. Retrieved August 27, 2021.

⁵² Julien Théry-Astruc, [Dans la peau du pape François : l'Église catholique face à la menace de son extinction](#), *Revue du crieur*, October 5, 2016, p. 4-19. Retrieved August 21, 2021.

⁵³ Leonardo Boff, a very influential Brazilian priest who has long been an advocate of liberation theology, was very pleased with the election of Jorge Bergoglio as pope. Bergoglio has unblocked the process of sanctifying Archbishop Oscar Romero, a great witness of liberation theology, whom his predecessors had done everything to thwart. On August 23, 2021, *El País* reported that several Brazilian priests who are inspired by this theological trend and Pope Francis are being persecuted by the ultraconservative Brazilians who elected the

During his trip to Africa in 2015, he publicly acknowledged, unlike his two predecessors, that condom use was one of the useful methods of protecting oneself from AIDS.⁵⁴

He favors a less dogmatic approach to divorced Catholic couples, and a more compassionate and pastoral one, agreeing to give them communion; a position that has triggered the publicly expressed fury of several conservative cardinals.⁵⁵

Contrary to Donald Trump, he wants to build bridges, not walls.⁵⁶ As the 2019 Netflix biographical drama [*The Two Popes*](#)⁵⁷ illustrates, most of his views are the opposite of those of his conservative predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI.

His [lengthy interview with Eugenio Scalfari](#), the atheist founder of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, the account of which was quickly translated into several languages, makes it clear that Pope Francis wants to reach

government of Jair Bolsarano. See Beatriz Jucá, Felipe Betim, Douglas Magno, Fernanda Siebra, [En el nombre del padre](#), *El País*, August 23, 2021. Retrieved the same day.

⁵⁴ Frédéric Martel, *Sodoma : enquête au cœur du Vatican*, Robert Laffont, 2019, p. 381.

⁵⁵ Joshua J. McElwee, [Cardinal critics of Francis reaffirm no Communion for divorced, remarried](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, April 7, 2018. Retrieved August 27, 2021.

⁵⁶ Gerard O'Connell, Pope Francis: '[Build bridges, not walls](#)', *America*, March 31, 2019. Retrieved August 27, 2021.

⁵⁷ *The Two Popes* is a 2019 [biographical drama](#) film directed by [Fernando Meirelles](#) and written by [Anthony McCarten](#), adapted from McCarten's play *The Pope* which premiered at [Royal & Derngate](#) Theatre in 2019.^{[B][4]} Predominantly set in the [Vatican City](#) in the aftermath of the [Vatican leaks scandal](#), the film follows [Pope Benedict XVI](#), played by [Anthony Hopkins](#), as he attempts to convince [Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio](#), played by [Jonathan Pryce](#), to reconsider his decision to resign as an archbishop as he confides his own intentions to [abdicate the papacy](#). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 10, 2020.

out to those who don't share his beliefs, not insist that he is sitting on eternal truth and they on error.⁵⁸

Pope Francis' struggle against clericalism is sincere. He has established a policy of zero-tolerance, obliged all Vatican officials and all priests and members of religious orders in the world to report all cases of sexual abuse and cover-ups of such abuse or attempts to silence victims, defrocked priests, bishops and even cardinals guilty of sexual abuse, and even eliminated papal secrecy in matters of sexual abuse.

However, even though he is discovering, day by day and as if in a long therapeutic process, the full depth of the non-evangelical clericalism that marks the clergy of the Catholic Church and is trying to combat it through courageous reforms, he himself nevertheless remains stuck in clericalism.

It is clericalism that led him to approve, in June 2019, an official Vatican document stating that the priest, during the Eucharist and confession, acts “not as a man, but as God”.⁵⁹

It is clericalism that led him to assert that the people of Osorno are “stupid because they don't know how to open their hearts to what God wants,” simply because they persisted in opposing his decision to appoint Juan Barros as Bishop of Osorno.

It is clericalism that makes him still value the rule of obligatory celibacy for priests, under the pretext that it would allow them to live a superior, deeper, and more engaged spiritual life. Or, as Pope Pius X puts it when

⁵⁸ Eugenio Scalfari, [The Pope: how the Church will change](#), *La Repubblica*, October 1, 2013. Retrieved September 11, 2021.

⁵⁹ [Note de la pénitencerie apostolique sur l'importance du for interne et l'inviolabilité du sceau sacramentel](#). Retrieved 10 janvier 2020.

commenting on the obligatory vow of chastity of priests: “Its brilliance transforms a priest into an angel, assures him the veneration of the faithful, and confers on his activity a supernatural blessing and efficacy.”⁶⁰ A rule with no foundation whatsoever in the Gospel, which was imposed only in the eleventh century, which Vatican II radically called into question, but which Pope Paul VI reaffirmed as “a splendid jewel that retains its value even in our time”, thus putting an end to all discussion in a monarchical way.⁶¹

It is clericalism that led him to ignore the motion to ordain married men to the priesthood in the Amazon, even though it had just been adopted by the great majority of bishops present in the 2019 [Amazon Synod](#), alleging that the Holy Spirit, to which he was somehow more directly connected than the 128 bishops who voted in favor (only 41 voted against), was not moving in that direction. And when, in that same document, he invites people to pray for more priestly vocations, reminding everyone that priests alone can preside the Eucharist and that this is their “particular, principal and non-delegable function”.⁶²

It is clericalism that leads Pope Francis, despite the courageous reforms he has implemented in terms of

⁶⁰ Quoted by Eugen Drewermann in [Fonctionnaires de Dieu \(Functionaries of God\)](#), p. 604. The original German edition was published in 1989. It was translated into French by Francis Piquerez and Eugène Wéber and published in 1993 by Albin Michel. All the following quotes from Drewermann originate from this French version.

⁶¹ [Lettre encyclique de Sa Sainteté le pape Paul VI sur le célibat sacerdotal](#), June 24, 1967. Retrieved November 23, 2019.

⁶² Joshua J. McElwee, [Francis declines to answer Amazon synod's requests for married priests, women ministers](#), *National Catholic Reporter*, February 12, 2020. Also see Barbie Latza Nadeau, [With a Big ‘No’ to Married Priests, Pope Francis Shows That, Yes, He’s Still Catholic](#), *Daily Beast*, February 12, 2020. Retrieved the same day.

accountability, to spontaneously stand in solidarity with abusive priests, bishops, and cardinals, not their victims.

And it is clericalism that causes his struggle against sexual abuse in the Catholic Church to limit itself to reforms constituting mere disciplinary band-aids and that leave aside its deep roots, as I demonstrated in [previous articles](#) and in [Why? Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse](#).⁶³

Ovide Bastien

Entrelacs, September 19, 2021

⁶³ Ovide Bastien, [L'Église catholique persiste à ignorer les racines de la crise des abus](#), *Le Devoir*, May 10, 2021. Retrieved August 23, 2021. Also see Ovide Bastien, [Catholic Church Persists in Ignoring Roots of Clergy Sexual Abuse](#), *Academia Letters*, July 2021.

Epilogue: Diary of September 19, 1973

I have often heard that the Catholic Church was not rooted in the working class. I have often discussed with people who tried to persuade me to believe that the Church sides with the powerful and rich.

At 31 years old, I did not share this view at all. Eight years spent in a religious community studying philosophy and theology, long hours of prayer, the ideal of justice and love that I perceived in the historical Jesus and constantly tried to imitate, the intense joy which I experienced in community life, - all this made me feel that this view of the Church was unfair and biased.

Today something has changed in me. What I have experienced since the coup d'état of September 11th has brutally awakened me. From the window of my apartment, I saw the Chilean Air Force shoot rockets at the Presidential Palace of a man who had just received - elections of March 1973 - 44% of the popular vote, a 44% that represents without doubt the most marginalized and poor sectors of Chile. I heard the last words of this dedicated man, expressed in a calm and very touching manner.

For four consecutive days, I heard constant gunfire outside. I saw jets leave on their mission of destruction. I heard people weep as they told me how their friend had been

tortured and shot. I heard a Canadian priest who told me of the president of a JAP in his neighborhood who was shot in front of his wife and eight children. I heard that workers had been shot merely because they admitted they were socialists. I discovered that a Bolivian student at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences—FLACSO—in Santiago was detained, tortured, and then killed; the director of this United Nations institute, called upon to identify the body, said it was very mutilated.

I saw terror spreading like fire among all those the least bit sympathetic to the Popular Unity government. I saw people cut their hair short, get rid of their beards and dress up like the rich, for fear of the military. I found myself obliged, like thousands of others, to get rid of all books and articles of a leftist orientation. I saw people obliged to hide and escape from the country just because of their ideas, or because, as this fine Chilean doctor, they were involved in concrete projects to help the have-nots organize. I saw smiling, high-class Chileans, report a frightened neighbor to the military. I can still hear this Chilean relate to me how he saw the soldiers cut his friend's ears off. To make a prisoner talk, they sometimes pull out fingernails, cut a finger or two, sometimes the entire hand.

In this situation of brutal repression, what does the head of the powerful Catholic Church of Chile do? He offers the military Junta “his complete and disinterested collaboration”. He kneels with them and prays the Lord so that he will assist them “in their very noble and difficult task”. He calls on all Chileans to collaborate with the patriotic military. Then he takes refuge in noble, vague and pious principles. Accepting to be crucified for matters of principle was okay in the time of Christ, when the Church was still young, somewhat naïve and charismatic, when it had not yet learned to compromise, to make deals with the powerful, to be diplomatic. What the Chilean Church needs

today are not values that would make it risk persecution, and possibly torture and death, but rather principles to save it from crucifixion!

That is why Cardinal Silva carefully abstains from condemning the military takeover and the brutal and massive repression that is now underway. That is why he sticks to pious principles: they are universal enough to be true, and too general to be pertinent. He readily speaks of sacrifice but does not have the courage to denounce the concrete atrocities now taking place. He does not have the courage to convene all his priests and to publicly denounce the massive repression, the wave of hate and fascism that is now rampant in Chile. Nor does he have the guts to stand up to the military, who claim in public that they are acting in the name of God, and to tell them: Basta! Enough! To stay in his Episcopal Palace, assembled with his priests, and to tell the military that he is willing to be bombed for values that are sacred.

Where is love? In these empty words of diplomacy emanating from this “representative of Christ on earth” or in the heart of this atheist who died in his Presidential Palace because he refused to abandon, under the threat of violence, a mandate given to him by his people? What is the meaning of the Cardinal’s political neutrality? What does his silence in the context of this ongoing Human Tragedy really mean?

May those who have an inferior and less noble calling do what they have to do. May they cleanse Chile of that diabolical Marxism that has sown hatred in hearts, that has invented the concept of social classes and class struggle, that has invented domination and exploitation, that has tried to indoctrinate the marginalized masses living in slums so that they would come to believe that that they are not equal to those who live in the ritzy neighborhoods with their big, expensive cars, their large luxurious houses, their

servants. As if all Chileans were not equal! Before the law. Before life. As if all Chileans were not, as sons of God and children of Mary, part of one big family. As if “los Chilenos rotos” — “the low-class raggy Chileans” — were not equal to those living in the ritzy neighborhoods. How ridiculous!

Go ahead, dear military, do what you must do! Use guns and tanks! Meanwhile, we, of a higher calling, will stay neutral. Completely neutral. We will go to our cathedral. We will pray for peace. For love. For justice. We will pray that the grace of the Lord may be with you when you fill the National Stadium with prisoners, when you execute the communist leader in front of his home, when you shoot the socialist worker in his shop, when you torture the Bolivian immigrant, the Mapúche Indian, when you burn Marxist literature in the streets of Santiago.

When things calm down in three or four years the Church may then decide to denounce the atrocities. But now? Never! Did the military Junta not make it ultra-clear who is the boss, and that it would not tolerate any criticism whatsoever?

Lord Jesus, you have no idea how happy I am that you died on the cross for us. What a beautiful symbol! I can sit here, on the pew of the cathedral and contemplate you for hours on end. Then I feel better inside, liberated. I can leave those modest and unrefined Chileans run in the streets of Santiago, shooting with their pistols at soldiers armed with machine guns, tanks, and Hawker Hunter fighter jets. And as these Chileans, who have lost their way, bleed in their hearts and body, I can make the Church bells toll to celebrate the victory of the wealthy elite.

Ovide Bastien

Santiago, Chile, September 19, 1973

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