

Research Article

The Major Orders and the Minors: Exploring the Issue of Child Sexual Abuse Perpetrated by the Roman Catholic Clergy in the Philippines

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Abstract: This study examines the persistent issue of child sexual abuse perpetrated by Roman Catholic clergy in the Philippines, situating it within broader institutional, cultural, and theological contexts. Building on existing discussions, the paper explores the nature, extent, root causes, and consequences of the crisis, while critically assessing the responses developed by the Church. Using a qualitative thematic analysis of secondary sources, the research identifies key dimensions of the problem, including abuse of power, institutional concealment, lack of accountability, and the problematic idealization of suffering. The findings suggest that these elements are deeply interconnected and largely grounded in clericalism, understood as a structural distortion of authority within the Church. The study further highlights the extensive impact of clergy-perpetrated abuse on victims as well as its damaging effects on the credibility of the clergy and the Church. Despite the existence of formal institutional responses, such as Vatican directives and guidelines issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, their effectiveness remains constrained by inconsistent implementation. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for systemic reform, enhanced transparency, and stronger safeguarding mechanisms to address the crisis more effectively and restore trust within the Church.

Keywords: major order; minors; child sexual abuse; Roman Catholic clergy; Philippines

1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse has been one of the major problems in the Church. The clergy, who are supposed to be the “safe space” of the faithful, sometimes unfortunately fall into the sin and temptation of sexual abuse (Durkin et al., 2025). This problem has a major impact not only on the reputation of the clergy, but also of the church as a whole. Before proceeding to the core of the discussion, it is necessary first to define important terms: major orders, minors, and child sexual abuse.

Traditionally speaking, major orders refer to the ordained ministers of the church: Deacon, Priests, and bishops (Coghlan, 1987). Also called as clergy or clerics, they are consecrated to share and participate in the ministerial priesthood of Christ. The minors, on the other hand, are persons who have not yet completed their eighteenth year of age (Catholic Church, 1983; Coghlan, 1987). The period of minority is divided into three sections: first, infants or those under seven years old, hence, not yet having the use of reason; second, those who are over seven but not yet attained puberty, but presumed to have the use of reason; and age of puberty, completion of fourteenth year, wherein the child has greater capabilities (Martin, 1965).

Child sexual abuse or pedophilia is the sexual attraction to pre-pubescent children aged thirteen and below. The child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. Sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviors (Durkin et al., 2025; Osmeña & Barrera, 2021; Tarroja et al., 2019). Hence strictly speaking, pedophilia does not entirely cover the minor age in canonical context for minor in canon law includes the pubescent age. Yet, the fact remains that pedophilia victimizes those who are minors, specifically, in pre-pubescent age.

The Philippines has been known for its strong reliance to Christian teachings and values.

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Accordingly, approximately 90% of the people in the Philippines are Christians with the Roman Catholic Church dominating the number (The Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023). Though Filipinos are by nature “religious”, they are also somehow struggling from the realities of moral corruption; not only the laity, but also the clergy. It may be homosexuality, problem of celibacy, corruption, child-sexual abuse, and the like. These problems are crucial in understanding the life of the Church for they obstruct and hinder her sacred development. That is why this study is significant for this will serve as a comprehensive reading for the people to heighten their awareness regarding these issues especially that substantial discussions of these kinds of topic are often left out and disregarded. There is a limited number of studies especially in the Philippines which tackles clergy-related issues. That is why this will be beneficial not only for the clergy and the victim, but the Church as a whole by giving essential information about the problem. This may also serve as a basis for establishing further programs and practical solutions to address the problem.

This article will basically expose the issue of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the Filipino catholic clergy through exploration of its nature, extent, impact, and the responses initiated by the Church. The research questions that guide the discussion throughout the paper are: (1) What is the nature and gravity of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the Filipino clergy? (2) What are the main causes and impact of clergy-perpetrated child abuse on the victim, the clergy, and the Church? (3) And what are the Church’s response to the problem? Hence, this paper is divided into three major parts: first, understanding the nature and extent of sexual crisis; second, examining the causes and impact of sexual abuse; and third, discussing the response proposed by the Church in addressing this problem. Though this study specifically and mainly tackles child sexual abuse, this, however, does not radically and absolutely exclude or disregard other cases of sexual abuse by the clergy. Hence, the causes, impacts, and responses discussed are not strictly and exclusively for issues on child abuse only but may be applied to sexual abuse in general.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design grounded in a literature-based analytical approach. The purpose of this design is to provide an in-depth and systematic exploration of clergy-perpetrated child sexual abuse in the Philippine context by synthesizing existing scholarly and institutional knowledge. A qualitative framework is deemed appropriate given the sensitive, complex, and context-dependent nature of the phenomenon, which requires interpretive rather than statistical analysis.

The study is further structured through a thematic analysis framework, enabling the organization of the discussion into three central domains: (1) the nature and extent of the sexual abuse crisis, (2) the root causes and multidimensional impacts, and (3) the institutional responses of the Church. This design allows for a holistic and integrative understanding of the issue, bridging theological, sociological, and institutional perspectives.

Data for this study are derived exclusively from secondary sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, Church documents (e.g., pastoral letters, canonical texts, and Vatican guidelines), investigative reports, and publications from credible watchdog organizations such as Bishop Accountability. Additional data were gathered from reputable media reports and official statements to supplement limited academic documentation.

The selection of sources followed purposive sampling criteria, prioritizing relevance, credibility, and recency. Sources were included if they directly addressed clergy sexual abuse, Church governance, Philippine socio-cultural context, or institutional responses. Due to restricted access to primary data and archival materials, reliance on secondary sources was necessary.

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method of data interpretation. The analytical process involved several stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading, (2) initial coding of recurring concepts and patterns, (3) categorization of codes into broader themes, and (4) synthesis and interpretation of these themes in relation to the research questions.

Themes were systematically organized into the three analytical domains identified in the research design. Special attention was given to identifying underlying structural factors—such as power dynamics, clericalism, and institutional practices—that connect individual cases to broader systemic issues.

To enhance analytical rigor, the study applied triangulation across different types of sources (academic, institutional, and media) to validate recurring patterns and interpretations.

However, given the reliance on secondary data, the findings remain interpretive and are limited by the availability and transparency of existing records.

3. Results

3.1. *Understanding the Nature and Extent of Sexual Crisis*

3.1.1. Sexual Abuse as an Abuse of Power

Sexual abuse is not merely an external moral problem; it is primarily an abuse of power by the clergy. There are accordingly different layers of sexual violence committed by the ordained ministers and the core of such violence is the “abuse of power” (Cartagenas, 2011; Durkin et al., 2025). Hence, the problem is not only about violation of ethical standards but also the inordinate use and application of one’s power and authority leading to misuse and abuse. These layers are: first, betrayal of trust, second, misuse of authority and power, and third, taking advantage of vulnerability.

The first and outermost layer is the double betrayal of trust. Accordingly, “When someone “in a ministerial role of leadership engages in sexual contact or sexualized behaviour” with another person “within the professional (ministerial or supervisory) relationship” the essential harm is the “betrayal of trust” (Fortune, 1994). It should be noted that the clergy are expected to be morally, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually trustworthy. Priests are expected to be competent in their ministry as they represent the church in faithful and loving ways through various ministries (Carteganas, 2011). St. Gregory of Nazianzus provided a deep reflection on this matter: “

“We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify, lead by the hand and counsel prudently... [He is] the defender of truth, who stands with angels, gives glory with archangels, causes sacrifices to rise to the altar on high, shares Christ’s priesthood, refashions creation, restores it in God’s image, recreates it for the world on high and, even greater, is divinized and divinizes. And the holy Cure of Ars: “The priest continues the work of redemption on earth. ... If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love. ... The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus” (Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, 1994).

Hence, the priesthood, being the love of the heart of Jesus, must embody the very life and being of Jesus. And so, by committing sexual violence, one does not only violate the trust of the faithful, but the trust of Jesus himself. Hence, double trust is violated: the ethical sensibility of the community and divine expectations of God who called him to act on His behalf (Cartagenas, 2011).

The second layer is the misuse of authority and power (McGraw et al., 2019). Sexual abuse occurs because power is used not according to their ideal and proper purpose. Moreover, in the church hierarchy, there exists an inherent “inequality of power” and such hierarchical state is being exploited by the minister to advance his own self-interests and pleasures. This is further reinforced by the emotional and evocative dimensions of power and authority. Being viewed as someone above the lay faithful or carrying a special “sacred weigh” in act and words, priests further magnify their power and influence over the ordinary faithful. But this radical view of unequal power would become an avenue for the priests to abuse and misuse it for their selfish and inordinate interests (Cartagenas, 2011).

The third layer of violation, the deeper one, is the “taking advantage of vulnerability” (Hürten et al., 2025). It should be noted that the clergy should serve as the “safe space” to those who are struggling and suffering. They become the “trustee of private information about those who seek his service.” And this self-disclosure would deepen the vulnerability of the faithful and so increases the Pastor’s powers over them (CBCP, 2003). This further increase of power could be exploited by the clergy. It may be used to take advantage of the vulnerability of those who are seeking spiritual guidance. In that way, the pastor does not only violate the privacy and sacred trust, but also the divine mandate to protect the vulnerable from harm (Cartagenas, 2011).

3.1.2. The Problem of Institutional Concealment, Lack of Accountability and Idealization of Suffering

One of the main reasons why sexual crisis of the clergy continue to proliferate and escalate is due to the institutional concealment and lack of accountability (Durkin et al., 2025). Accordingly, “Revelations of sexual abuse all over the world show a consistent pattern of

concealment or denial with the blessing of the institution and the use of its apparatus (Cartagenas, 2011). The church, as a vastly large institution, has the power and authority to conceal and hide their abuses from the public. That is why “by conspiring to conceal those sexual assaults that were brought to its attention, the Church allowed further offences to take place” (Kerrigan, 2014). As Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, in his response to the pope’s pastoral letter to Irish Catholics on the abuse crisis, said: “The church tragically failed many of its children; it failed through abuse; it failed through not preventing abuse; it failed through covering up abuse” (Cartagenas, 2011). The clergy is confident in committing sexual crisis because they are somehow, in one way or another, protected and hence, tolerated. This problem is further related to another problem: the lack of accountability among the clergy. Accordingly, there are two major factors that can be accounted for their lack of accountability: first, the insufficient democratic features of the internal dynamics of the church such as due process, right to information, and freedom to organize; second, the idea of the separation of the church and state leading to the justification for pseudo-autonomy of the church matters, including the discipline of the clergy and religious, from the laws of the state (Abellanosa, 2020).

However, another crucial and somehow hidden problem that contributed to the perpetuation of child sexual abuse is the Church’s idealization of suffering. It is a common teaching in the Church to accept and embrace sufferings in life as a participation in the sufferings of Christ. Accordingly, the more one graciously suffers on earth, the more one could reach heaven without undergoing purgatory by offering up their sufferings and trials (Frawley-O’Dea, 2007). This idea might be, in itself, not erroneous. Sufferings and trials may be a way for spiritual growth and development. However, if suffering becomes isolated as a good in itself, the spiritual trans-formational potential might erode into a pathological valorization of sufferings. The idealization of suffering may be exploited in advancing evil actions and desires. That is why incidences of child sexual abuse may be perceived by the children as merely part of their earthly sufferings and so may be offered to God. This would evidently lead to silent sufferings and toleration on the part of the victims (Frawley-O’Dea, 2007). Hence, valorization or idealization of sufferings are implicated in the child sexual abuse crisis.

3.1.3. The Extent and Gravity of Child Sexual Abuse by the Clergy in the Philippines: Looking into the Statistics

The primary source of information to explore the extent and gravity of the problem of sexual abuse by the clergy in the Philippines is no other than the mass media communications. Unfortunately, there have been a major number of cases being left unreported due to the fear of reprisal, shame, and lack of support (Soto, 2025). Moreover, it is difficult to find official and organized details regarding these cases or proper documents that are publicly accessible. Accordingly, “there are no documentation coming from the dioceses or from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) about sex abuse allegations and how they were handled; or if there are, they are not made available. All we have are scattered news reports, anecdotes, gossip and innuendos” (Onato, 2017).

However, in an article written by the ABS-CBN media in 2017, Archbishop Emeritus Oscar Cruz, the one leading the CBCP’s national tribunal on clergy’s scandals that time, publicly stated that there have been many cases of pedophilia reported to them. A total of 14 cases of pedophilia have been tackled and investigated by the CBCP’s tribunal in the year 2016. But the most recent information of sexual abuse, particularly to the minors, by the Filipino priests was provided not by the CBCP, but by a US-based abuse watchdog named “Bishop’s Accountability”. Specifically speaking, they exposed details of Filipino priests accused of sexually abusing minors in the Philippines; Filipino priests accused of sexually abusing minors while working in the US; and accused clergy from the U.S., Australia, and Ireland who served part of their priesthood in the Philippines. A total of 82 clergy members were listed in the said database, which is indeed an alarming rate. To make the situation worst, none of them have been convicted by any civil court (Millare, 2025). Moreover, it has been said that at least seven of the accused priests continue to serve in parishes across the Philippines (Cole, 2007; The Strait Times, 2025).

The information simply speak of the gravity and seriousness of the problem of sexual abuse by the Filipino clergy. The number 14 or 82 may seem not concerning, but we have to understand that these are priests – publicly consecrated to be representatives of Christ. Moreover, as indicated beforehand, there are still cases left unreported due to certain reasons. Hence, it is possible that the real number of abuses may be higher than what is publicly

known. This is enough to realize the need for radical reform within the Church.

3.2. Examining the Root-Causes and Impact of Child Sexual Abuse Committed by the Filipino Clergy

3.2.1. Contributing Factors to the Problem of Sexual Abuse and the Filipino Culture

It should be noted that the problem of sexual abuse does not have a single cause. It may be rooted in various and different reasons which, in one way or another, contributed to the existence and proliferation of the problem. In Pope Benedict XVI's pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland in 2019, he said:

“Only by examining carefully the many elements that gave rise to the present crisis can a clear-sighted diagnosis of its causes be undertaken and effective remedies be found. Certainly, among the contributing factors we can include: inadequate procedures for determining the suitability of candidates for the priesthood and the religious life; insufficient human, moral, intellectual and spiritual formation in seminaries and novitiates; a tendency in society to favour the clergy and other authority figures; and a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, resulting in failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person. Urgent action is needed to address these factors, which have had such tragic consequences in the lives of victims and their families, and have obscured the light of the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution succeeded in doing” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010).

It is clear in his statement that sexual abuse is caused by various factors. These factors may include the insufficient formation and guidance in the seminaries, the inadequate judgment of suitability of candidates for priesthood, the inappropriate privilege of the clergy in the society, and many other more (Cole, 2007). It is undeniable that some of these factors are evident in the Philippine Church.

Some scholars and psychologist would even link the problem of sexual abuse with the mandatory celibacy. Ironically speaking, they consider priestly celibacy as one of the contributing factors to the problem of sexual abuse. Accordingly, celibacy prompts a heightened desire for physical intimacy and affection in clergy which would lead to abuse (Manzano, 2025). It hinders the seminarians' sexual development and would serve as a psychological block for priests which prevents many from bringing out and addressing psychological problems which were already present since their ordination (Manzano, 2025). This is indeed an ironical assertion in the sense that celibacy, which is supposed to help priests maintain sexual purity, would in turn lead to their sexual crisis. But it should be remembered that sexual crisis is not primarily a crisis of celibacy, but a crisis of commitment (De La Rosa, 2025).

The CBCP, in its pastoral guidelines on sexual abuses and misconduct by the clergy, identified some elements of the Filipino culture which might contributed to the problem of sexual crisis. Some of these elements are: touching as a common action in the Filipino culture but can be problematic when boundaries are unclear; much respect is given to adult and authority figures who could abuse their position; lack of awareness on the rights of the children; Clergy perceived as possessing supernatural power thereby overlooking their humanity; and the silence of the victims (The Holy See, 2011). From the information provided by the CBCP, it is clear that positive cultures of the Filipinos might be abused or misused. That is why the conference stated the necessity for “purifying and renewing the culture of Filipinos and our ecclesiastical culture”.

3.2.2. Extensive Impact on the Victim and the Spiritual Trauma

Sexual abuse by the clergy has a vast, extensive, and lasting impact on the victims. Meaning, it does not only harm the victim in one aspect of his life and in a particular moment of his/her life. It can have a lasting effect on the physical, psychological, mental, and spiritual life of the victim. Some of the physical, psychological, and mental effects of sexual abuse perpetrated by the clergy are insomnia, unexplained fears of adults, acting out of sexual behaviors with other children, failure to perform well in class, withdrawal from friends or isolation, low self-esteem, suicidal attempts, and many other more (Dy-Liacco & Werdel, 2019).

However, the worst aspect that is harmed by the abuse is spiritual life (Doyle et al., 2006). There are various symptoms of this trauma. One is the radical change of feelings and attitude towards priests. Some victims reported to have experienced confusions, grounded on deep respect and reverence for priests, but which is now compromised due to the abuse. Another symptom is the attitude towards the church. Some victims could no longer distinguish the

person who abused them and the church as a whole. Hence, they see themselves as victim not only of one person, but of the Church. Moreover, they experience an unexplained emptiness because they are not emotionally and spiritually disposed to participate in sacramental liturgies and rituals. In that way, they suffer from spiritual loss. This is not something to be disregarded for sacraments are the source of the nourishment of spiritual life of the believers. And then they would also experience despair from the loss of God. Sexual abuse has been described as a form of “soul murder”; victims, being isolated from the Church community, betrayed by the clergy, and unable to reach support, fall into great despair. This would unfortunately lead to the rupture of their relationship with God (Doyle et al., 2006).

Affirming the extensive impact of the problem on the victim, Archbishop Jose Palma, the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cebu, recently said:

“We acknowledge as an Archdiocese that sexual abuse of priests involving minors deeply wound the very fabric of our faith life and community and cause irreparable damage to the lives of the victims that can scar them for life. As we continue to confront these painful realities, we continue to invite the faithful to accompany ministers with prayers and to help in the vigilance of creating and fostering safe spaces in the Church most especially for the most vulnerable of her members” (GMA Regional TV News, 2025).

3.2.3. Impact on the Reputation of the Clergy and the Church: Loss of Credibility and the “Cafeteria Catholicism”

Sexual abuse crisis certainly brings major impact on the reputation of the clergy. They are expected to be morally upright and competent persons. Yet, sexual scandal could certainly turn this view around. One of the major impacts of sexual scandal by the clergy is the loss of their credibility. According to Dorr (2008), “at present, few people are willing to hear that message from us - mainly because the loss of credibility affects also the leadership of the Church. Much of this loss of credibility comes from the mishandling of clerical sex abuse.”

Failure to address clerical abuse would make an impression that the Church is indifferent to the problem. Moreover, committing sexual abuse would gravely destroy the good image of the priests. In that sense, people would no longer trust some of the clerics for they fail to practice what they are expected to. There is then an incongruence between their actions and their being as priests. Committing grave sins such as sexual abuse would certainly destroy the credibility of the clerics. Moreover, this also speaks of their failure to practice what they preach. Accordingly, discrepancy between clergy preaching and their personal conduct is an issue that undermines and diminishes the authority and credibility of church leadership (Green, 2024). Unfortunately, this loss of credibility does not only affect the clergy as an individual, but also the church as a whole. Considering that the Church is led by the priests, people who are experiencing and witnessing scandals would then perceive these leaders as morally and pastorally unworthy.

Moreover, sexual crisis of the clergy would also intensify the problem of so called “Cafeteria Catholicism” (De La Rosa, 2025). This is an ideology in which Catholics do not have to fully embrace all the teachings of the church have the right to choose certain doctrines which they accept or reject based on their personal convenience and preference. With this mindset, the problem of sexual abuse by the clergy would serve as an “added ammunition in their fight against some church doctrines that they disapprove.” The issue of child abuse by the clergy would serve as an aggravating factor for them to further advance their ideology of being “selective” to the Church’s practices and doctrines.

However, these are just one of the many consequences of clergy-perpetrated child abuse. Loss of credibility and worsening of “Cafeteria Catholicism” are just part of the extensive impact of the issue. Yet these reveal that the problem of child sexual abuse by the clergy is not a problem only of the clerics, but the entire Church. Hence, if this problem needs to be addressed, it is not only a reform and renewal of the clergy, but also of the laity – a reform of the whole church.

3.3. *The Church’s Response to the Problem of Child Sexual Abuse by the Clergy*

3.3.1. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith: “Circular Letter to Assist Episcopal Conferences in Developing Guidelines for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Perpetrated by Clerics”

The congregation of the Doctrine of Faith has released a circular letter on May 3, 2011, providing guidelines in dealing with the problem of child sexual abuse by the clergy. Some of the significant points tackled in the letter are: first, the victims of sexual abuse; second, the protection of minors; third, formation of future priests and religious; fourth, support of

priests; and fifth, cooperation with civil authority. First, the church should be willing and prepared to listen to the victims and their families, especially in assisting their psychological and spiritual healing. Second, the protection of the minors should be further advanced by organizing pro-grams of education and prevention within the Church in order to ensure “safe environments” for the minors. Third, there should be a deepening of the formation of future priests and religious in order to assure a proper discernment of vocations as well as healthy human and spiritual formation. Candidates should be able to appreciate the value of chastity and celibacy, and their responsibility as spiritual fathers (Pope Paul VI, 1967). Fourth, there should be proper support for the priests: the bishop should treat all his priests as father and brother, and in dealing with cases of abuses, the bishops must follow thoroughly the discipline of canon and civil law while respecting the rights of all parties. And fifth, there should be legal cooperation with civil authority. Sexual abuse is not mere canonical violation but a crime punishable according to the norms of civil law. That is why the Church should cooperate with civil authorities within their responsibilities.

3.3.2. CBCP: “Pastoral Guidelines on Sexual Abuses and Misconduct by the Clergy”

The Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines has also issued a document that provides pastoral guidelines on sexual abuse and misconduct by the clergy. Accordingly, the response of sexual abuse by the clergy must address the following: pastoral care of the victim, healing of the community, assessment of the accused, and sanctions and pastoral care of the offender. All persons involved in the case must be administered to and cared for according to the Gospel values of dignity, compassion, understanding, and justice. The rights of the victims, offenders, and the community must be properly protected (CBCP News, 2025; The Holy See, 2011).

Accordingly, the welfare of the victims should be prioritized. Dioceses and religious institutes should reach out to them, demonstrating and showing a commitment to their good and protection. They will offer healing and reconciliation through counseling, spiritual direction, social service, and sincere human interaction.

In investigating and studying the cases, the conference suggested the dioceses to form a team of competent persons from the laity, religious, and clergy to advise and assist the bishop (The Holy See, 2011). The team may include a canon lawyer, civil lawyer, clinical psychologist, and other experts. This team will be maintained to review periodically the archdiocesan/diocesan policies regarding sexual abuse or misconducts.

Therefore, the CBCP is not blind in dealing with these problems. Just recently, in 2020, the CBCP established an office on Protection of Minors, thereby further reinforcing its commitment in addressing sexual abuse by the clergy. One of its principal tasks is assisting diocesan safeguarding offices in handling abuse reports justly and appropriately.

4. Discussion

The study shows that the nature of the problem of clergy-perpetrated child sexual crisis is diverse and complicated: it involves the abuse of power, institutional concealment, lack of accountability, and idealization of suffering. However, these factors, if critically examined, share one single ground – Clericalism.

Clericalism is defined as the radical misunderstanding of the place of clerics in the Church. It is an erroneous belief that clerics form a special elite within the church and that because of their powers as sacramental ministers, they are superior to laity, are deserving of special and preferential treatment and finally, have a closer relationship to God (Doyle, 2003). Moreover, according to Wilson (2008), clericalism is understood as functioning in a two-way street: on the one hand, priests may develop themselves as entitled persons that assume their superiority over the laity, and on the other hand, laity can exalt the clerics to a superior status and reinforce separation between them and priests. In simple terms, clericalism suggests that clerics hold a radically superior and dominant position over the laity and such status may be advanced by the clergy themselves or the laity. Such status may be used to take advantage and manipulate the structure as well as the faithful of the Church. Due to clericalism, the clergy may abuse their power and privilege to advance selfish and immoral desires (Slater, 2019). They would use their authority and power to manipulate the vulnerable and broken, leading to abuse. Moreover, institutional concealment is also a form of clericalism wherein clerics would use their authority to hide and bury the problem. Unfortunately, most of the cases of child abuse are hidden and concealed from the public with the fear that it can affect the sacred image of the Church. Lack of accountability is also a manifestation of clericalism for the

clerics, perceiving themselves as morally upright and superior, would not admit or simply ignore the guilt and moral culpability. In brief, the nature of the problem is substantially grounded on the issue of clericalism. As to the study of the Dallas Charter, a group of lay catholic members commissioned by the National Review Board, clericalism as the nature of the problem of child sexual abuse (1) created a clericalist culture that placed loyalty to institution over protection of the venerable; (2) contributed to a culture of secrecy; (3) fostered a lack of independence in many diocesan investigations of abuse; (4) assisted bishops and other Church leaders to engage in massive denial; and (5) exacerbated the crisis by reinforcing the haughty attitudes of some bishops (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013).

From a broader perspective, the issue extends beyond individual members of the clergy and points to systemic failures within the institution itself. Institutional concealment and the lack of accountability reflect deeper structural problems within the Church's governance and oversight mechanisms. Addressing this crisis therefore requires not only holding individuals responsible but also implementing meaningful reforms geared at strengthening institutional transparency, accountability, and protective structures.

Moreover, concerning the extent and gravity of sexual crisis in the Philippines, the figure shows how concerning and serious the issue is. Unfortunately, the researcher had a limited resources to access the actual figure and number of cases for it solely relies on an online organization "Bishop's Accountability". This also shows that these cases are either underreported or concealed from the public. However, the reality still remains: that child sexual abuse by the clergy is a serious issue in the Philippines. If Bishop's accountability recorded 82 clergy members who are involved in child sexual abuse, a crucial question might be asked: how many children were victimized by each priest? Imagine the actual figure of cases, not including the unrecorded and undocumented ones.

The causes and impact of the problem of child sexual abuse by the clergy is complicated, vast, and extensive. The causes may be traced back to the issues in seminary formation. The study shows that some of the reasons for this problem are inadequacy of formation and guidance by the formators and insufficient judgement of applicability of candidates for priesthood (Cole, 2007). There are instances that formators would ignore the issues of the seminarians during formation and would tend to be tolerant with the problem. Or the possibility might be that seminarians would not disclose and reveal their issues with the fear of being expelled from the seminary. If these issues are not immediately addressed, they would worsen and manifest later on during their priestly life. That is why they should undergo extensive psychological evaluation before entering the seminary to determine the degree of emotional maturity, psycho-sexual development, and possible addictions or personal issues (Kartje, 2021).

In the Philippine context, the study suggest that Filipino culture may have contributed to the problem of child sexual crisis. For example, touching as a common action in the Filipino culture but may be problematic when boundaries are unclear; much respect is given to adult and authority figures who could abuse their position; and lack of awareness on the rights of the children. But critically speaking, Filipino culture by itself is not the problem, the problem is how one views and applies the culture in the actual context. These cultures may be abused by the clergy to advance their selfish and scandalous actions.

Concerning the impact on the victim, the clergy, and the Church, it is clear that the problem affects the entire fabric of the society and the Church. It does not only harm an individual, it does not only affect the reputation of the clergy, but it affects the entire image of the Church. According to a study, clergy abuse and scandals significantly contribute to the decline of religious affiliation, attendance, and participation (Bottan & Perez-Truglia, 2015). Hence, this problem would certainly distort and affect the evangelical mission of the Church.

The responses proposed by the Church, particularly the Congregation for the CBCP, offers a comprehensive and effective methods and guide in practically addressing the problem of clergy-perpetrated child abuse. For example, the CDF suggests a holistic approach, addressing the problem of the victim, protection of minors, strengthening seminary formation, clerical support, and legal considerations (Genilo, 2020). The CBCP similarly uses the same approach by prioritizing the welfare of the victim, healing the community, assessing and sanctioning the accused, and pastoral care for the offender. It also suggested to establish a team who will specifically handle these kinds of cases (CBCP News, 2025; Moreno, 2008; The Holy See, 2011).

These responses and solutions are sound and properly discerned, but the main problem lies on its actual and concrete application. The Church has always been proposing and

establishing programs to strengthen its campaign against church scandal but the problem is on how these proposals and programs are applied concretely to the reality of the problem. Are these solutions actually followed and employed or is there a need for further reinforcement?

To further strengthen the Church's campaign against sexual abuse, the researcher would like to provide certain proposals and recommendations. First, the problem of sexual abuse by the clergy should be publicly discussed through talks and seminars. One of the reasons why the problem persists and worsens is that no one usually talks about it. By publicizing the issue, the Church will be informed about the reality of the problem and suggest certain solutions. The publication of issue is not primarily aimed at shaming and destroying the image of the Church, but to raise awareness among the faithful and the clergy. Second, the church should strengthen her relation with the secular government to further reinforce legal proceedings about the issue. The accused should face the legal consequences of his actions as part of the Church's commitment to discipline. There should also be an independent investigative body who will exclusively handle these kinds of problem. Third, the local churches should establish a transparent reporting system. This should carefully and transparently record the issues and cases reported by the victims. Fourth, considering that the nature of the problem is essentially clericalism, the Church should strengthen her campaign against this problem. However, this is more than just disciplining individuals; it demands systemic reform that redistributes power, enforces accountability, ensures transparency, reforms clerical formation, and empowers the laity. And fifth, the Church should safeguard and strengthen seminary formation. Formation should ensure that future clergy are molded with strong foundations in ethical responsibility, emotional and spiritual maturity, intellectual competency, accountable leadership, and pastoral sensitivity.

These recommendations remain limited and largely abstract, as many dimensions of the issue still require further study and careful consideration. Ultimately, the greater challenge lies not in formulating policies but in the Church's capacity and commitment to effectively implement and sustain these programs in concrete settings. The success of any reform depends on the consistency, transparency, and sincerity with which these measures are carried out in practice.

5. Conclusions

Child sexual abuse is indeed a major concern in the life of the Church. The core issue here is not mere ethical problem, but the problem of authority and power by the clergy. Its proliferation is further advanced due to institutional concealment, lack of accountability, and idealization of sufferings. The core of the problem is fundamentally the issue of clericalism. In the Philippines, there have been certain cases reported yet the extensive information was provided only by the US-based watchdog called Bishop's Accountability. The problem of sexual abuse perpetuated by the clergy has various root-causes. Some of these are the insufficient formation and guidance in the seminaries, the inadequate judgment of suitability of candidates for priesthood, the inappropriate privilege of the clergy in the society, and many other more. Moreover, the Filipino culture, when exploited, would also contribute to the perpetuation of the problem. This problem has a major impact not only on the clergy and the victims, but also on the church as a whole. That is why the church proposed certain guidelines in order to address this problem. Some of these are the "Circular Letter to Assist Episcopal Conferences in Developing Guidelines for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Perpetrated by Clerics" issued by the CDF and the CBCP's "Pastoral Guidelines on Sexual Abuses and Misconduct by the Clergy." However, further reinforcement and development on the proposed solutions and guidelines must be made to address the in-creasing problem.

The reality of sexual abuse by the clergy simply speaks of the imperfection of the Church. She is always suffering from weaknesses, frailty, brokenness, and sinfulness. However, it should be remembered that the clergy play a vital and crucial role in the formation and guidance of the faithful. That is why there is a need to address these problems so that the Church would become a comfortable, inspiring, and enriching community. By being loving witnesses to Jesus Christ's life, the clergy will be able to effectively lead the church toward eternal salvation.

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