

The United Nations has turned a noble report on child abuse into an assault on Catholic theology



The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has published a report into child abuse that, rightly, criticises the Catholic Church's handling of this gravest of sins. It recommends that the Vatican "immediately remove all known and suspected child sexual abusers from assignment", that it refers all allegations to the police and that it open its files up to scrutiny. It's unlikely that anyone would disagree with these suggestions and the Church has slowly – too slowly – been adopting its policies to match that agenda for a decade. There's no denying that reform needs to be expedited and, hopefully, that is what Francis will do.

But what's very troubling is that the UN has wandered into areas that are well beyond its competence. The panel members have taken the opportunity to attack aspects of Catholic moral theology that are a) the Church's business and no one else's and b) are never going to change anyway.

On abortion:

The Committee urges the Holy See to review its position on abortion which places obvious risks on the life and health of pregnant girls and to amend Canon 1398 relating to abortion with a view to identifying circumstances under which access to abortion services can be permitted.

Right, so the UN is instructing the Vatican to do something that generations of liberals within the Church have never succeeded in doing. Good luck with that one. And the idea that dogma could be rewritten to permit a sin to occur under "certain circumstances" completely misunderstands the nature of morality. If something's wrong, it's wrong full stop. And the Church won't be permitting it because some secular panel told it to.

Next, gay rights:

The Committee also urges the Holy See to make full use of its moral authority to condemn all forms of harassment, discrimination or violence against children based on their sexual orientation or the sexual orientation of their parents and to support efforts at international level for the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

The Church already does condemn the persecution of gays and lesbians, albeit sometimes not loudly

enough. From the Catechism: "They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided." Yes, there are some clerics who have ignored this instruction. They are wrong, the Catechism is right. Pray that they see sense.

And so it goes on – the UN tearing the faith apart for its views on everything from contraception to illegitimacy. The only surprise is that it doesn't conclude with, "And the Trinity makes no sense. Can you cut it down to just God the Mother?"

Whether you think the Catholic Church is the clarion of truth or an anachronism from the Medieval ages, there's no escaping the fact that this UN report represents a grotesque assault on freedom of thought. Most Catholics accept that their Church has no right to interfere in the workings of the state, that the state's separation from the Church is right and proper. But it works both ways: the Church has to be free from state interference, too.

And the report could be taken an insult to the noble cause of tackling child abuse. The UN's investigation is an important one, and it owes it to those it is trying to help to focus on the subject at hand. But the panel risks reducing the power of its findings by giving the impression that it is pursuing a political agenda. It's hard not to read this as a liberal assault upon the beliefs of millions of Catholics – an act of hubris on the part of the UN. A secular sin, if you will.

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