



28. november 2012

Louise Vella's historie

Gennem vore internationale kontakter har vi modtaget dette fra den amerikanske kirkejurist Tom Doyle OP.

Louise Vella is one of the very few voices speaking for abuse victims in Malta. I have been in contact with her for years and am amazed at her tenacity and effectiveness. Last week I asked her to type up her story so that I could get it on the net. It came in the other day and is attached. The Maltese situation is much akin to where Ireland was a few years ago ... a hierarchy that is in willful denial and a population significantly brainwashed by the church. If you can, put her story on your blogs/websites etc. She needs all the support she can get. On the flip side it is encouraging for some of us who have been wading through the ecclesiastical cesspool for more than two decades to see the commitment and persistence of people in Europe.

Cheers

Tom November 5, 2012

My story regarding sexual abuse by Maltese priests by Louise Vella, Mosta, Republic of Malta

1999

In February 1999 I was discussing a topic on "Persons we trust" with my class of eight-year olds. A girl told me in front of all the pupils that a priest was telling her to do rude things. I spoke to the girl privately later and confirmed that she was being sexually abused by a priest. At the time this priest was living in the UK but he often came to Malta on holiday. That same day I reported the matter to the school authorities, as required by school procedures. A few days later two social workers came to our school. They spoke to the girl on her own and then to me. They later told me that we gave the same version of what had actually happened in class. The parents were informed and a report was made at the police station. The social workers continued to work with the family.



After about a fortnight I went to the parish priest to inform him of the matter and to see what help he could offer the family which was going through a very difficult time. As soon as he realised what our conversation was about, he put his finger to his lips as if to ask me to lower my voice as there were people in the waiting room who could overhear me. He informed me that he already knew about the matter. He asked me if I would like to speak to the archbishop. I told him that I do not regret doing what I did and I would do it again if need be. I added that, as long as the archbishop's aim was not to make me shut up, I would be willing to meet him. So I gave him my telephone number.

A few months later I gave evidence in court during the compilation of evidence. As far as I know this was the first ever court case in Malta of a priest accused of sexual abuse of children. In the meantime I was worried that this priest was abusing more children. I kept in contact with the family and urged the parents not to give up as justice had to be done.

2000

In January 2000, I was asked to give evidence before the archbishop's curia's Response Team. There were two persons hearing my evidence: the chairman, retired judge Victor Caruana Colombo and Mgr Mario Grech, later Bishop of Gozo. They asked me only one question after hearing my evidence: Was I a relative of the victim? I answered that I was not.

Months passed and I did not know what action was being taken. So I started writing letters to local newspapers wondering if there were Maltese paedophile priests, as in Catholic dioceses abroad, and how they were dealt with. Nobody ever replied to my letters. I felt like a voice in the wilderness.

In November I got a call from Fr Charles Cordina. He said that he was calling regarding the letters I was writing in newspapers. He said that he was the archbishop's delegate on the matter. He asked if I would like to meet him as he wished to explain the Church's policy on these things. I said that if his intention was to make me stop writing there was no need for any meeting. He assured me that it was not his intention. When we met he said that as soon as they get to know that a priest was abusing children they remove him from the children. I said that what they were doing was simply not enough. These were criminal matters and they had to be reported to the police. He said that they do not report these matters to the police; however they do not stop parents from reporting them if they so wish. He added that parents never want to file a report with the police. I insisted that the police must be informed as nobody is stopping the paedophile priests from abusing more children. Fr Cordina also said that the Church protects its members and will not report them to the police.



I asked if the Church protects its collared members only. I added that I always taught my pupils that we were the church and not just the priests and bishops. I then asked him if he had a guilty conscience and if he slept easy knowing there were paedophile priests roaming our streets, possibly abusing more children. He said he had no guilty conscience as they were not required by law to report to the police. I then said that I believe that Jesus referred specifically to them when he talked about whitewashed tombs. He was taken aback and asked me if I meant what I said. I assured him that I did.

2002

Proceedings started once again in court and we were called to testify. By this time the girl was eleven. We were to testify in a court room full of people with the paedophile priest present. The journalists waited outside. The girl had been assured that the psychologist provided by the social workers was to accompany her while she gave evidence as she was scared stiff. As they were about to enter the hall they were told that the priest's lawyer objected, as the psychologist would have to give evidence at a later stage. The girl started to cry and she refused to enter the court room on her own. I encouraged her telling her that we came this far and we have to continue. I also told her that I would be praying for her. Of course I could not enter the court room because I was put down as one of the witnesses.

When the girl came out of the court room she looked very pale. The defence lawyer had grilled her for an hour and a quarter. She came to me crying and saying that the priest's lawyer got her all confused. Eventually the court case took some nine years and the priest was found not guilty. The sentence was never reported in the press.

2003

I was invited by the Jesuits' Provincial Fr Paul Chetcuti for a meeting as the case I was involved in dealt with an ex-Jesuit who used to teach at St Aloysius College. He told me that they were offering help in the form of prayer meetings to victims of sexual abuse by priests and asked me to inform victims I was aware of. I told him that it was of the utmost importance that they reported paedophile priests to the police as nobody was stopping them. I asked him whether this particular priest was dismissed by the Jesuits because he had abused children. He said that it could be that he left on his own accord or was encouraged to do so. I also asked if the Jesuits had informed the Director of Education that there were rumours regarding this priest when later on he went to teach in a state secondary school for boys. He told me that he did not know as he was not in charge at the time.



Another case of sexual abuse by priests emerged. Three priests were accused of sexually abusing children at St Joseph Institute – an orphanage for boys. The alleged abuse took place between the early eighties and nineties when the victims were aged between 13 and 16. The victims had a meeting with the Pope when he visited Malta in April 2010. In the meantime one of the priests passed away. The other two were found guilty by the court in August 2011 and given 5 years and 6 years, respectively. They were also defrocked by the Vatican in 2011. The priests have appealed the court sentence and they are still free. The final judgement should be sometime in November 2012.

2005

In the case I was directly involved in, the girl's mother died aged 41 years after suffering a stroke. I went to the parish priest requesting him to invite the archbishop for her funeral mass in our magnificent church as I felt he was partly responsible for her death. I also sent an email to Jesuit Fr Paul Chetcuti informing him of her death and asked him to also celebrate in her funeral mass with the reading being: Matthew 18:6: "But if anyone causes one of these little ones...". He answered that he could not make it but will remember her in his prayers.

2006

In May 2006 the editorial of the Church's newspaper Il-Gens was entitled Inaccettabbli (meaning "Unacceptable"). It was about a current case of a man found guilty of sexual abuse of children: he was the janitor of a football playground frequented by school children. I sent the editor an email congratulating him on the editorial. Then I asked him if the attitude of the Church was acceptable when bishops transferred paedophile priests known to them to unsuspecting parishes. The editor apparently forwarded my email to the archbishop's Public Relations Officer as the latter sent me an email a few days later inviting me to a meeting with Archbishop Mercieca. A meeting was arranged for the 10th June.

I went along with my husband. The archbishop's PRO greeted us but asked why my husband was there. I said that I would only meet the archbishop in my husband's presence. So we entered the archbishop's office. The archbishop had a file with my name written on it. It probably held all the letters I had been writing to the papers. He started by saying that a few weeks previously he had a meeting with a woman who had written a letter in a newspaper regarding priests who convince people on their deathbed to leave their assets to the church in return for prayers and a place in heaven. He asked her if she had any proof and, if she hadn't, he told her she should stop writing.



Archbishop Mercieca then spoke about the letters I was writing about paedophile priests. I stood my ground - he knew that I had enough proof - and assured him that I will not be stopping until they reported them to the police. The archbishop then tried to calm me down and said that he was telling this to me only: the priest who abused the girl in my class did so many ugly things that he sent his file to the Vatican. The priest in question had been defrocked for more than a year and couldn't function as a priest. I urged the archbishop to issue a press release to warn the public about this dangerous paedophile. The archbishop looked surprised and said that he would seek advice. He never issued any press release.

During our meeting I referred also to one of the priests who had been charged with abusing boys at St Joseph Institute. I asked the archbishop why he sent this priest as a spiritual director to a secondary school for girls when he knew that he was wanted by the police in Canada for raping a boy. The archbishop said that the priest denied all accusations. I asked him if he contacted the police in Canada and he said that the priest's denial was enough.

I also asked the archbishop whether I could make some research in the curia's secret archives regarding sexual abuse by priests, as I had information on dioceses abroad but I had nothing about the Maltese diocese. He refused.

I also told him that a priest informed me that he had reported a paedophile priest to the archbishop and a few months later this abusive priest was appointed parish priest. The archbishop seemed shocked and told me that this was a serious matter. I said that it was indeed a very serious matter. I asked him whether it was true. The archbishop said that it wasn't true. So I said that one of you must be lying. He immediately changed the subject.

2008

I met Gozo Bishop Mario Grech when he baptised my nephew's daughter. After mass I entered the sacristy. A parish priest and a female helper were present. I reminded the bishop that we met some eight years previously when I gave evidence regarding a paedophile priest at the response team. He remembered the case but did not remember me. I urged him to hand over the files of abusive priests to the police because these are criminal matters. He said that he will definitely not do so.

2010

I sent a letter to the Maltese Minister for Justice Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici urging him to introduce mandatory reporting of child abuse. He thanked me and promised to see to it.



Just before the pope's visit I was invited by a Net TV presenter to tell my story for a programme regarding sex abuse by priests. I was recorded at my own home a couple of days before the programme. Two top church officials and a female lawyer were in the studio during the live programme. The priests' aim was clearly to defend the church's reputation.

In November I was invited on the national TV during a live programme. I was present in the studio together with one of the top church officials who took part in the Net TV programme earlier in the year. I repeated the story regarding the priest. Other guests related their own stories and spoke of the horrible effects of child abuse.

2012

Mandatory reporting eventually became law in January 2012. Article 5(2) stipulates that "Any person being a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of a relevant entity who becomes aware of the commission of a scheduled offence and fails to report the fact to the Commissioner of Police shall be guilty of an offence and shall on conviction be liable to the same punishment laid down in sub-article (1)." The punishment is imprisonment from 3 months to 4 years or a fine of not less than €2500 and not more than €50000 or to both such fine and imprisonment.

I do not know if the archbishop has handed over files of abusive priests to the Commissioner of Police or if the Commissioner of Police asked for them.

4th November 2012