

Building a Culture of Healing *with the* *Magisterial Teachings*

WORDS MATTER

To build a culture of healing requires recognizing the culture of abuse that contributes to sexual abuse. This culture of abuse shames its victims and abuses power to silence the truth of Jesus' teachings. Also words that blame victims inappropriately are used in the culture of abuse in our everyday language. Two examples of such language are:

- “There was a sexual *relationship between or with* the perpetrator and victim.”
- “The victim has *lost their innocence*”.

Consider the actual meaning of these words we so often hear associated with abuse:

- The word *between/with* means to do something jointly.
- The word *relationship* means connected participant.
- The words *lost innocence* mean a loss of morality.

Such words, although not necessarily intentional, do perpetuate the harmful myth that sexual abuse includes the victim's participation and consent in their own abuse. The reality is that abuse is never the fault of the victim, and they should never be shamed into thinking it was.

The wounds of sexual abuse cause grave damage for anyone who experiences them and they are exacerbated by harmful myths of the culture of abuse. It is a myth that sexual abuse is about relations or lost innocence or even sex.

Sexual abuse is not done with the abuser, but by the abuser. The truth about sexual abuse is that it weaponizes God's gift of human sexuality. The experience of being abused is one of violence for the victim.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Yet there is hope in using words that state the truth about sexual abuse because the words we use can provide a vehicle for changing a culture of abuse to one of healing based on the truth concerning sexual abuse. The appropriate source of such words are the Magisterial Teachings of the Catholic Church.

MAGISTERIAL TEACHINGS

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #2356 and #1700 includes children and adults in its teachings about sexual abuse and acknowledges the God given dignity of every person.

“*Rape* is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect... to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents ... or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.” CCC #2356

(this is referenced in the index of the Catechism of the Catholic Church under Violence)

“The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God” CCC #1700

“The sexual exploitation of children is ... a scandalous and perverse reality in present-day society.” *Amoris Laetitia* #112

“The Church remains faithful to the integral truth about [all humanity when], she ... respects and promotes the person in their dignity ...” *Veritatis Splendor* #83

“Think about the task of human intelligence: To garner the wisdom of the ages, to hand down the good doctrine”, quote by Pope John XXIII, as we integrate the words of Magisterial Teachings into our common cultural language as a vehicle to achieve a culture of healing that is sound and true.

- Respectfully stop the common cultural language of referring to sexual abuse as “sex with” or “between” the abuser and the victim and call it *exploitation*, abuse or *rape* as it is rightly called considering that all sexual abuse is a form of violence.
- Justice calls for the words “lost innocence” to be replaced with “Loss of the right to have one’s God given dignity treated with respect”.
- Openly present the Magisterial Teachings in a manner that recognizes the right of all people to be treated with respect because it is God Who gives each of us human dignity.

References:

- Catechism of the Catholic Church #2356, #1700
- *Amoris Laetitia* #112
Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis
- *Veritatis Splendor* #83
Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II
- Quote from Pope John XXIII

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