

Institution: St Mary's University College

Unit of Assessment: 33: Theology and Religious Studies

Title of case study: Redeeming Power: Overcoming Abuse in Church and Society

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

In Autumn 2011, Dr Stephen Bullivant was appointed Director of the European Society for Catholic Theology's research project into 'the nature, function and location of theology, with particular attention to the power of theology to overcome power abuse in Church and Society' (InSpiRe 2013), and with a special focus on the nature and causes of clerical sexual abuse.

Given the gravity and urgency of the topic, the project's 'impact aims' have been to engage two particular non-academic audiences: the Catholic hierarchy, and those involved in setting church policy regarding safeguarding and the handling of abuse allegations; and the wider Catholic public (i.e., the Church as a whole). Its intention is to introduce both to the wealth of academic research being conducted in this area, and from which the Church can and must learn.

Although the research project was only recently concluded - and several of the main outputs have yet to appear - a significant amount of both kinds of impact has, even at this very early stage, already occurred. Since the project launch in September 2012, major figures from the world of Catholic safeguarding, at both national and international levels have been involved in various ways. Most notably, the Vatican's own chief prosecutor of abuse allegations has described the project as constituting 'an important moment to move from the hierarchy to the theologians' for proper reflection 'on this most tragic wound in the Church and in society' (Vatican Radio 2012a; 2012b; see section 4, below). The project has also received notable coverage from the international Catholic media.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Bullivant has been employed by St Mary's University College since September 2009, as: Research Fellow (0.3 FTE), Graduate Assistant (0.4 FTE) and Lecturer in Ethics (0.3 FTE) (2009-10); Lecturer in Theology and Ethics (1.0 FTE; 2010-13); and Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics (1.0 FTE; 2013-present). In September 2011 he was appointed as a committee member of the European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT), as its delegate to the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT).

In recent decades, questions of power, and its capacity for abuse, have emerged as urgent themes for theoretical and practical reflection within the global Catholic context. This has, of course, been prompted both by widespread revelations of sexual abuse, and by allegations of subsequent cover-ups, mishandlings, and safeguarding failures. The monumental tasks of, on the one hand, documenting and understanding these abuses, and on the other, of seeking ways of 'healing' or 'overcoming' them - to the extent that this is possible - and of preventing their happening again, have begun in earnest. In light of this, the *Redeeming Power* project took as its primary aim the task of engaging scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, and bringing these into contact not only with each other, but also with safeguarding and social work professionals, and those in key positions of oversight within the Catholic hierarchy on this matter.

To accomplish this, an initial network of interested parties from a number of European HEIs was created, with theologians and social scientists from St Mary's University College (UK), Heythrop College (UK), Durham University (UK), University College Dublin (Ireland), KU Leuven (Belgium), Opole University (Poland), and Trnava University (Slovakia). Following an

initial planning meeting at St Mary's, hosted by InSpiRe, in March 2012, two outward-facing events were organized: a launch conference at St Mary's on 4-5 September 2012; and a one-day conference in Bratislava in October 2012. A third conference, co-hosted by *Redeeming Power* and DaKaTeo (the Catholic Theological Society of Philippines), was held in Manila on 19-20 July 2013. Participants at the Redeeming Power meetings have included both world-leading scholars of the abuse crisis, and those at the 'sharp end' of the Catholic Church's institutional response.

Several of the main papers from the launch conference will be appearing in a special issue of the European theology journal *ET-Studies* in late 2013, co-edited by Bullivant. The conference proceedings from the Bratislava event have already been published (in Slovak) in book form. A book proposal for a major edited volume drawing largely on papers from the Manila conference, entitled *Theology and Power: An Intercontinental Conversation* (co-edited by Stephen Bullivant, Agnes Brazal, Daniel Pilario CM, and Eric Genilo SJ), is currently under consideration by a major international academic press.

Major findings from the research project include:

- The urgent need for the Catholic Church, at a hierarchical and institutional level, and theologians in general, to engage with and learn from the emerging findings from the social sciences on the topic of sexual abuse.
- A new focus on structural and/or systemic factors in causing/facilitating abuse, as opposed to blaming abuse on 'bad apples' in otherwise well-functioning organizations.
- Significant parallels between abuse crises within the Catholic Church (and other religious bodies) and other, secular institutions (e.g., the Savile affair at the BBC; the Sandusky case at the University of Pennsylvania), both in terms of sexual abuse itself, and subsequent mishandlings of allegations and cover-ups. This suggests that focusing exclusively on 'Catholic-specific' causes or catalysts of abuse (celibacy, 'clericalism') is misguided.
- The extent to which cultures of secrecy and silence facilitate abuse and its cover-ups; the need for increased transparency.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- Braunsteiner, Gloria and Bullivant, S. (eds.). 2012. *Prekonávanie zneužívania moci v Cirkvi a v spoločnosti* (Trnava, Slovakia: Dobrá kniha) [conference proceedings of Bratislava event]
- Bullivant, Stephen. 2013. "Always in need of purification" (*Lumen Gentium* 8): Vatican II and abuses in the Church', keynote paper given at 'Theology and Power' symposium, Manila, the Philippines, 19-20 July 2013 [included in planned edited volume]
- InSpiRe. 2013. 'Redeeming Power page', <http://www.smuc.ac.uk/inspire/redeeming-power.htm>
- Kruij, Gerhard and Stephen Bullivant (eds). 2013. *Redeeming Power: Overcoming Abuse in Church and Society*, themed issue of *ET-Studies*, 03/2013, [including introduction by Bullivant, 5 papers from Twickenham launch conference, and event report (in German) of Bratislava conference].

ET-Studies is an international, peer-reviewed journal, published by the European Society for Catholic Theology.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Although still *ongoing*, *Redeeming Power* has already had significant, international impact, especially in relation to the Catholic hierarchy, and those with oversight over the Church's response to instances of abuse (and allegations thereof).

The launch conference featured around 60 delegates, coming from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Slovakia, the UK, the USA, and Vatican City. In addition to university-based scholars from a large number of backgrounds (theology, religious studies, canon law, secular law, education, bioethics, paediatrics, psychology, sociology, and social work), the conference attracted significant numbers of safeguarding professionals. Among these were psychologists working with abuse survivors, the Safeguarding Officer for the Archdiocese of Birmingham; and three current members (and one former one) of the *National Catholic Safeguarding Commission* (NCSC), including its current Chairperson. The NCSC is an independent body established by the Catholic Church in England and Wales in response to the Cumberledge Commission's final report (2007), with oversight over the Church's safeguarding policies and procedures (see <http://www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/>). Among the keynote speakers were Monsignor (now Bishop) Charles Scicluna, who was at that time the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 'Promotor of Justice' (i.e., its head prosecutor of abuse allegations), and Bishop John Arnold, who is one of two representatives of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales on the steering committee of the NCSC.

The one-day Bratislava conference, *Prekonávanie zneužívania moci v Cirkvi a v spoločnosti*, brought together leading Slovak academics with politicians, and journalists, to explore the theme 'overcoming abuse in Church and society' with specific reference to the Central European, post-communist situation. Finally, the Manila conference on 'Power and Theology' included a half-day public event for over 100 theologians, students, and Catholic educators (including papers from Bullivant and Pia Matthews from St Mary's).

As mentioned above, a key 'impact aim' among the delegates at the launch conference was the wider dissemination of academic research into the nature and context of sexual abuse, in order to inform Church responses. Part of its impact strategy, therefore, involved building - and thus fostering dialogue - with key national and international figures. Even at so early a stage (at the time of writing, only one of the main research outputs has appeared in print), there is evidence that this strategy has borne (and this, will continue to bear) notable fruits at both international and national levels.

At an international level, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Mgr Charles Scicluna spoke to Vatican Radio from the launch conference (as part of a half-hour feature programme on *Redeeming Power*, also including an interview with Bullivant). Having mentioned that the Vatican's own February 2012 'Toward Healing and Renewal' conference was the Church hierarchy's 'opportunity to reflect on this most tragic wound in the Church and in society', he emphasized the landmark nature of *Redeeming Power* as:

...an important moment to move from the hierarchy to the theologians. I think that slowly, slowly, we're getting towards a response which is truly ecclesial – we're in this together, in suffering the wound and trying to respond to it - I think that's a very important aspect that I bring away from the conference, to share concerns. [...] We need the input from psychology, sociology, psychiatry, we need the human sciences to not only diagnose, but also to have a prognosis and also an efficient therapy.
 (Vatican Radio 2012a; 2012b).

In addition to this half-hour feature broadcast on 6 September 2012, Vatican Radio also

published a series of articles deriving from it on its website (in a variety of world languages). The conference also received coverage in *The Tablet* (UK), *Tertio* (Belgium), and in a number of other news outlets via the *Catholic New Service* (USA) (see section 5, below).

Closer to home, emerging directly out of the project - and the specific engagement with safeguarding professionals fostered by the launch conference - in summer 2013 the *National Catholic Safeguarding Commission* invited Dr Bullivant to conduct a 10-year analysis and review of its abuse allegation statistics for England and Wales. This project, which the NCSC is funding, is being undertaken in Autumn 2013, and its findings and recommendations will be made public with a press conference in early 2014, and will form the basis of the NCSC's *Annual Report* for 2013/14.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- Head of Theology and Religious Studies, Mary Immaculate College, Ireland, and President of the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology Chairperson, National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC).
- Van Lierde, Emmanuel, 2012. 'Theologen pakken misbruik aan', *Tertio*, 19 September, <http://theo.kuleuven.be/nl/nieuws-theologen/dillen.pdf>
- Vatican Radio, 2012a. 'Redeeming Power - beyond the sexual abuse crisis', 6 September, http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2012/09/06/september_6,_2012/en1-618918 [Half-hour feature on launch conference, including interviews with delegates]
- Vatican Radio, 2012b. 'Mgr Scicluna: Tackling Accountability in the Church', 5 September, http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2012/09/05/mgr_scicluna:_tackling_accountability_in_the_church/en1-618615
- Wooden, Cindy. 2012. 'Conference participants look at relation between power, abuse in the church', *Catholic New Service*, 6 September, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1203727.htm>