

Abuse 'shatters' German bishops

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A leading German Catholic bishop has spoken of the "perfidiousness" of the way Catholic priests had used their power and authority to groom children for sexual abuse.

Bishop Stephen Ackermann of Trier, the German bishops' spokesman on matters of clerical sexual abuse, said he was "shattered" by a report into calls to a special hotline set up in 2010. He presented the report last week and said he was deeply ashamed about what it contained.

He said he had been particularly repelled by the way the perpetrators had built up their victims' confidence in them in a calculating way before abusing them.

"I was particularly shaken by the fact that priests had disgracefully abused the confidence of children who were probably seeking their help in a difficult situation."

The wickedness was compounded, he said, "since priests already have a higher credit of trust. It is truly abhorrent when they then abuse that trust in this way". Nothing at all could "whitewash" the findings, he said, which would be taken into account in the development of abuse prevention strategies.

The hotline was called by 8,500 people in the two years it was open. The overwhelming majority of victims (90 per cent) were male, Andreas Zimmermann, the expert responsible for analysing the results, told the Catholic news agency KNA.

The abuse by priests, he said, had certain "specifically Catholic" characteristics. Thus priests had used their moral authority and the psychological effect of rites like confession or prayer in order to gain power over children, even to the point of telling them that the assaults were an expression of "God's special love" for them.

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