

Scandal, Canon Law, and the Roman Catholic Church

During the past few months, several people have contacted the Adult Faith Education Office concerned about what the media has reported regarding the Church's role in dealing with accusations of sexual abuse on the part of her clergy. Some are quick to condemn the Church for failing to act appropriately. While the Church has much to repent of, as our Pope has made very clear, not all of the accusations have been justified or fair. These accusations have been made primarily due to a misunderstanding of the Church's *Code of Canon Law*, its purposes and functions.

This past June, the US Council of Catholic Bishops sponsored a seminar for members of the media to address these misunderstandings. The texts of the four presentations, as well as videos of the presentations themselves are available on-line at www.usccb.org/canonlawseminar

The first and most useful address was given by Fr. Kevin McKenna, entitled 'Canon Law and Civil Law: Working Together for the Common Good'.

In short order, he delivered a summary of '20 centuries of canon law in one minute and a half', then continued to point out the differences between canon law and civil law. It is here that most misunderstandings arise, because most people assume that the principles of the two systems are the same. On the contrary—they are radically different.

Although a brief summary is given at <http://www.zenit.org/article-29600?l=english>, Fr. McKenna's address is easy to read and would be most helpful for those concerned about what is being said about our Church in the media today. Therefore I would encourage the faithful to read and discuss this essay, as appropriate, in order to be a leaven in society, working to dispel the misconceptions many people have about our Church.

The other three addresses focus more directly on issues relating directly to canon law and its relation to sexual abuse. They are also well worth reading.

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