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Ananova :

Pope calls paedophile priests scandals 'dark shadow'

The pope says the "grave scandal" of sex abuse cases in the Roman Catholic Church casts "a dark shadow of suspicion" over all priests.

In an annual message to priests worldwide, John Paul said "as priests we are personally and profoundly afflicted by the sins of some of our brothers who have betrayed the grace of ordination".

It is the first time the pontiff has publicly broken his silence on the scandals, which have surfaced in the US, England, France and Australia in recent months.

He said the priests had succumbed "to the most grievous forms" of what he called, using the Latin phrase, "mystery of evil".

The pope added: "Grave scandal is caused, with the result that a dark shadow of suspicion is cast over all the other fine priests who perform their ministry with honesty and integrity and often with heroic self-sacrifice."

John Paul said the Church "shows her concern for the victims and strives to respond in truth and justice to each of these painful situations".

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The accusations of sexual abuse have led to the resignation of one bishop, from Palm Beach, Florida, and tarnished the reputation of Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston for failing to take action against a child-molesting priest.

There have also been scandals elsewhere and the problem has worldwide implications for the Church.

In January, the Catholic Church in Ireland agreed to a landmark £77 million payment to children abused by clergy over decades. More than 20 priests, brothers and nuns have been convicted of molesting children.

For years, the Vatican viewed such reports as attempts to discredit the church or as part of an orchestrated campaign against celibacy .

Story filed: 11:53 Thursday 21st March 2002

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