

Hyde presses church to report abuse

By Joyce Howard Price
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A prominent Roman Catholic congressman says the church must send police all accusations of sex abuse of minors by priests, something that is not official policy.

"I think child molestation is a very special evil. It's pretty hard to think of anything worse," Rep. Henry J. Hyde, Illinois Republican, said on CNN's "Novak, Hunt & Shields."

"I think they have made a mistake of not having a very tough policy. And the first thing is to send all these complaints to the police. That should be done forthwith," the congressman said.

Catholic Church leaders dominated the network news talk shows yesterday, after an unprecedented week in which U.S. cardinals were called to Rome by Pope John Paul II and agreed to recommend a process to defrock any priest who had become "notorious and is guilty of the serial, predatory sexual abuse of minors."

On Friday, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia insisted that all U.S. cardinals agree on a "zero tolerance" policy for priests who sexually abuse minors.

But some key cardinals yesterday made it clear that questions remained about how far this policy — nicknamed "one strike and you're out" — should go.

On "Fox News Sunday," Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, the archbishop of Washington, said the proposed policy would target future offenders and might apply even to past cases.

"Most of us are now saying that if something has happened in the past, you would be out," he said.

But Cardinal McCarrick said he was "uncomfortable" about cases

where, for instance, 30 years ago, a young priest "became infatuated with a . . . 17-year-old girl. Something happened. He straightened out. He's never had any trouble after that."

On a case such as that, the cardinal said: "I think I want to pray about it and talk to the people and get advice."

Cardinal Francis George, archbishop of Chicago, told NBC's "Meet the Press" that he believes a priest who sexually molests a child should not be in public ministry around children.

But if zero tolerance means "one strike . . . and you're rejected from the priesthood, there has to be some discussion," he said, alluding to the Catholic doctrine that ordination is a divine act that cannot be repealed.

Cardinal George said there is a "difference between a moral monster" like defrocked Boston priest John Geoghan, who abused more than 130 boys between the ages of 6 and 16, "and someone who, perhaps, under the influence of alcohol, engages in an action with a 16- or 17-year-old young woman who returns his affections."

There is a chance of reforming the latter, he said, because he "would feel remorse" for his offense.

Cardinal George said mandated sentences are "always easy," because "we don't have to think anymore."

"It's easy to disavow someone and put them on the street, and then the society has to deal with him . . . but I think the idea of asking some questions, even though it's not in vogue right now, is not irresponsible. In fact, just the opposite," he said.

On "Novak, Hunt & Shields," Mr. Hyde said he was disappointed the U.S. cardinals had not come up with a definitive policy for dealing with



Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, archbishop of Washington, was hesitant on "Fox News Sunday" to give full support to a proposed zero-tolerance policy for priests who sexually abused minors.

priests who sexually abused children and teens.

"On the other hand, you have to remember the Catholic Church is in the business of forgiveness and redemption, and it's pretty hard for these cardinals to come down in a draconian fashion on anyone," he said.

Cardinal George repeatedly pointed out on yesterday's shows that last week's Vatican conference was never intended for policy-making. Formulation and approval of a uniform policy for handling abusive priests binding on all dioceses must await a meeting of the U.S. Conference of Bishops in Dallas.

Both cardinals said sexual abuse of youngsters by priests is not a

widespread phenomenon.

"You're talking about 1.6 percent [of priests]. It's not an epidemic. It's hurting the church's credibility because it wasn't handled right," Cardinal McCarrick said on Fox.

The Washington archbishop also denied reports that one-third to one-half of all U.S. priests are homosexual. While some are saying men with homosexual orientation should be barred from becoming priests, Cardinal McCarrick says he would rather handle homosexual applicants on a case-by-case basis.

"Whether a person is homosexual or heterosexual . . . if he's been chaste all his life, I think you might want to give that person a chance," the cardinal said.