

POPE ISSUES REFORMS

Pope Francis recently did the Catholic Church a great service in issuing some much needed changes in the Vatican's Code of Canon Law.

The new reforms provide sanctions against priests who "groom" or "induce" minors to perform sex acts. Similarly, the possession of child pornography is declared a crime deserving of punishment.

The most dramatic changes affect sexual abuse committed by priests against another adult. If a priest "forces someone to perform or submit to sexual acts," he will be punished. The penalty may include "dismissal from the clerical state if the case so warrants."

It remains to be seen how the norms that affect adults will be enacted. Will they, for example, be invoked against priests who engage in homosexual acts with other priests?

Another area of controversy is sure to be the norms that provide sanctions for "the attempted ordination of women." Currently, there are many dissident Catholic organizations that openly reject the Church's teaching on ordination.

It is refreshing to read that the new norms apply to lay leaders in the Church who abuse their office. They will now be held accountable for their own behavior.

Fortunately, the changes, which go into effect on December 8, 2021, will provide improvements in the due process rights of priests.

These reforms by Pope Francis will likely be welcomed by the vast majority of Catholics. Those who are likely to be troubled by them need to engage in some serious self-reflection.