

Social effects of sin greater than ever

VATICAN CITY - In today's globalized culture, the social effects of sin are greater than ever before and deserve the church's urgent attention, a Vatican official said.

New forms of sin have arisen in the area of biotechnology, economics and ecology, and many involve questions of individual rights and wider social effects, said Bishop Gianfranco Girotti.

Bishop Girotti is an official of the Apostolic Penitentiary, an office that deals with questions relating to penance and indulgences. He made the comments in an interview March 8 with the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

Bishop Girotti said the sense of sin in today's world should be even more acute than before, since the effects of sin are often widespread.

"If yesterday sin had a rather individualistic dimension, today it has an impact and resonance that is above all social, because of the great phenomenon of globalization," he said.

"In effect, attention to sin is a more urgent task today, precisely because its consequences are more abundant and more destructive," he said.

Among the "new sins" that have emerged in recent times, he pointed to genetic experiments and manipulation that violate fundamental human rights and produce effects difficult to foresee and control.

He said other areas where sin has a social impact include drug abuse, which affects

many young people; economic injustice, which has left the poor even poorer and the rich richer; and environmental irresponsibility.

Bishop Girotti was asked about public reaction to sin among the church's own members, a reference to priestly sex abuse.

"One cannot underrate the objective seriousness of a series of acts that have recently been reported and that carry with them the signs of the church's human and institutional fragility," he said.

But he said it should also be recognized that the church reacted to these reports and is continuing to do so, with "rigorous interventions and initiatives" aimed at protecting the church's good name and the people of God.

He added, however, that he thought the mass media had overemphasized these scandals in a way that brought discredit upon the church.