

# Introduction

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In the Spring of 2019, James Keenan was a visiting professor at his alma mater, the Gregorian University in Rome. After several meetings with his friend and fellow Jesuit Hans Zollner and his colleagues at the then Centre for Child Protection, the two decided that the Centre together with Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) would host at the Gregorian University a “theological laboratory,” called “Doing Theology in the Face of Sexual Abuse.”

We designated it as a laboratory because we envisioned a deeply collaborative project of eighty theologians from a wide array of disciplines and from varied locations and perspectives. Five panels of inquiry were specified, and on July 15, 2019, we sent out letters of invitation for a March 11–14, 2020, meeting.

In preparation for the meeting, Australia’s Daniel Fleming proposed to co-chair with Keenan one of CTEWC’s newly launched “virtual tables” dedicated to the topic of theology and sexual abuse. After its international Conference in Sarajevo in 2018, CTEWC began hosting such “tables” that were monthly meetings of international theologians collectively grappling with a particular ethical challenge for 90-minute period. Fleming made his proposal in November, and in December 2019 the first virtual table was held, composed of eight members who would be attending the Laboratory in Rome. We invited three of these members to the table to offer brief “provocations” so as to get the discussion going in advance of our meeting in person.

Then COVID came. On March 5, 2020, the Italian government shut down all universities, and we postponed our meeting until the following January. But on October 15, 2020, we recognized that COVID would impact us longer than anticipated. We further postponed the meeting

until late 2021 and decided to invite other theologians to join the virtual table group.

The virtual table developed much further to sixteen members and, with Fleming and Keenan as co-chairs, continues to meet until the present time. At the end of April 2021, we realized that planning for an in-person meeting was delaying our project and that in fact in a variety of fora, particularly the virtual table, scholars were already connecting and doing what the Laboratory hoped to achieve: *Theology in the Face of Sexual Abuse*. We sent around a call for papers to the original members of the panels, to the virtual table members, and to other interested parties. You now have the fruit of that invitation in the chapters of this book.

There is a certain urgency about this volume, which is not often reflected in works of theology or theological ethics. The sheer scale of the undermining of human dignity through sexual abuse that has occurred within the Church asks questions of these disciplines and scholars within them: to what extent have we been blind to these issues? Why have our efforts in theology and theological ethics been so slow to wrestle with this crisis? How are theology and theological ethics implicated in the crisis? And how might the disciplines be constructive in responding? In this volume, we encounter a diverse range of scholars from all around the world wrestling with these and other questions.

In Chapter One, Michelle Becka writes from Germany with her contribution, “Sexual Abuse in the Church and the Violation of Vulnerable Agency.” Becka draws the discourse surrounding vulnerability in theological ethics into the context of the abuse crisis, arguing that the central moral problem of sexual violence is that it violates this vulnerable agency. Becka then explores the implications of this approach for cultures of safety, which she argues ought to address more nuanced understandings of power in order to protect vulnerable agency.

In Chapter Two, Carolina Montero Orphanopoulos from Chile also focuses on vulnerability in her contribution, “Vulnerability, Ecclesial Abuse, and Vulnerable Adults.” Montero Orphanopoulos introduces a transdisciplinary definition of vulnerability and, from this, casts her critical gaze towards the category of “vulnerable adults,” which is often

used within the Church and in the disciplines of health and law to describe potential subjects of abuse. Whilst recognizing the importance of acknowledging adult victims of abuse, Montero Orphanopoulos demonstrates the problematic nature of using the category of vulnerability as part of this, both because it incorrectly provides a rationale for abuse in a particular characteristic of a person and because vulnerability is a characteristic shared by all.

In Chapter Three, Dawn Eden Goldstein from the USA writes on “John Navone, SJ’s Theology of Failure and Its Importance for Pope Francis’s Spirituality in Light of the Church’s Pastoral Mission to Victim/Survivors of Abuse.” Focusing on Pope Francis’s spirituality of suffering, Goldstein traces a key inspiration of this body of thought to John Navone, SJ’s theology of suffering, particularly that which is expressed in his 1984 work *Triumph through Failure: A Theology of the Cross*. The essay examines these themes, and then offers reflections on how they can inform and guide the Church’s pastoral responsibilities to those who live with the spiritual wounds of sexual abuse.

In Chapter Four, Ronald Zacharias from Brazil offers his contribution, “Sexual Scandals in the Catholic Church: The Urgency of Building a New Formative Culture.” Noting the focus on reform in the context of formation of clergy, religious, seminarians and church authorities, Zacharias draws attention to elements missing from current formation, processes and argues for their inclusion. In particular, he puts forward a more expansive approach to formation which includes a focus on sexual health, and to the integration of sexuality into the project of life, positing that this is essential in efforts to develop a culture which prevents abuse in the Church.

In Chapter Five, Stephanie Ann Puen from the Philippines puts forward her contribution, “Design Thinking in the Catholic Church’s Organizational Structures: Responding to the Wicked Problem of the Sex Abuse Crisis.” Drawing on literature from organizational and leadership studies, Puen introduces the methodology of design thinking and the concept of “wicked problems”—both of which serve large organizations in dealing with complex problems and change management—and applies

these to the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. Puen argues that framing the abuse crisis as a ‘wicked problem’ supports appropriate analysis of the root causes of the issues and the inherently challenging nature of response, which opens up the possibility of utilizing design thinking in generating responses which truly foster transparency and accountability in the structures of the Church, without the familiar shortfalls of the failed responses we have so often seen.

In Chapter Six, Idara Otu writes from Nigeria with his piece, “Child Protection in the Church as Family of God.” Drawing from the ecclesiology of the Family of God—a central element of the identity and mission of some churches in Africa—Otu puts forward a theology of accountability for African Catholicism, summoning churches in Africa to acknowledge the unheard laments of those abused within the church and to serve as guardians and protectors of minors. This provides a platform from which Otu undertakes a critical analysis of the strategies adopted by particular churches in Africa, including their major obstacles, and proffers a vision for the central place of the Church in Africa in protecting the African child.

In Chapter Seven, Štefan Novotný from Slovakia offers his contribution, “Power versus Ministry? Recent Challenges for Priestly Formation in Responding to the Double Crisis in the Catholic Church.” Novotny’s focus is a theological reflection which seeks a paradigm for shifting from power to ministry in the Church. Focusing on the Johannine scene of Jesus’s crucifixion and burial (John 19), Novotny argues that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus provide interesting examples of a shift from power to ministry, which can be useful for the education and formation of future priests. Suggesting that such a paradigm includes a focus on dispositions including presence, listening, generosity, service and cooperation, Novotny looks to several national commissions of inquiry into the abuse crisis, which highlight a similar paradigm shift for the future training of priests, before illustrating how this paradigm could be implemented through evaluating the suitability of candidates for formation.

In Chapter Eight, Marcus Mescher from the USA writes on “Clergy Sexual Abuse as Moral Injury: Confronting a Wounded and Wounding Church.” Mescher introduces the concept of moral injury—widely used in healthcare and defense force literature—to help understand the effects of the deep and systemic harm caused by clerical sexual abuse and its cover up. Mescher highlights features of moral injury that pertain to this wound in the context of self-image, moral perception and reasoning, agency, relationships, and institutional credibility before analyzing the phenomenon within the context of the ecclesial community. From the latter, Mescher introduces the phenomenon of conscience—knowing together—which he argues ought to proceed in a way which centers the experiences of survivors of clerical sexual abuse. Such an approach provides a foundation from which Mescher is able to introduce several strategies for healing the spiritual and moral wounds which endure in the Church today.

In Chapter Nine, Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs of New Zealand offer their contribution, “Obeying God’s Plan? The Spiritual Abuse of Nuns.” Their chapter synthesizes findings of research into the systemic mistreatment experienced by six former nuns who belonged to the community “Servants of God’s Plan” in Peru, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. Figueroa and Tombs argue that the category of ‘spiritual abuse’ accurately describes the experience of these nuns. Whilst sexual abuse was not part of their experience, Figueroa and Tombs suggest that the insights garnered through this study regarding the phenomenon of spiritual abuse are relevant, proffering that when sexual abuse takes place within a religious institution, it is very common for spiritual abuse to be an enabling factor. Their contribution thus recommends developing a deeper understanding of spiritual abuse in analyses of the sexual abuse crisis in the Church.

In Chapter Ten, Anthonia Bolanle Ojo from Nigeria puts forward her contribution entitled, “Sexually Violated: A Moral Theological Response to Children’s Rights.” Bolanle begins her essay with a focus on sexual abuse as a violation of children’s rights, with consequences both for children themselves and the community as a whole. She puts forward the

theological principle of the dignity of the human person as a limitation of the dominion that one person can have over another and, with a focus on several case studies from the Nigerian context, argues that this principle can underpin the crucial place of the Church in speaking out forcefully and convincingly on the rights of the child and the necessity of child protection policies.

In Chapter Eleven, Daniel Bogner from Switzerland puts forward his offering for the volume, “Journeying Together: Does a Synodal Church Improve Respect for the Human Person?” Out of the background of the popular turn to synodality as a response to the abuse crisis, Bogner asks whether the concept is sufficient. Pointing out that “synodality” is an instrument from the social-philosophical mindset of antiquity, and that it is often understood in terms of vague forms of including different voices, Bogner argues that today’s synodality must incorporate elements from the constitutional tradition of democracy and the rule of law if it is to play a constructive role in responding to the abuse crisis and preventing further abuse and its cover-up.

In Chapter Twelve, Tina Beattie from the UK offers her contribution, “Theological (De)formations? The Sex Abuse Crisis in the Context of Nuptial Ecclesiology and the Theology of Priesthood.” Beattie’s essay begins with research into the phenomenon of clericalism among younger priests and, on this basis, enters into a consideration of the ways in which Hans Urs von Balthasar’s nuptial theology and Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body intersect with this phenomenon through an exaggerated emphasis on anatomical sexual difference. Beattie draws attention to the deeply problematic sexual analogies used by both Balthasar and some advocates of Theology of the Body, linking these to the dysfunctional dynamics of masculine clerical power that have been revealed through the abuse crisis. She argues for an urgent transformation of the symbolics of gender in Catholic theology in order to provide a foundation for a truly life-giving and affirming ecclesiology.

In Chapter Thirteen, Konrad Glombik from Poland contributes to the volume with “Between the Pillory Treatment and Reliable Clarification: On the Role of the Media in Response to the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the

Catholic Church in Poland.” Glombik’s focus is on the fraught role of media in the context of the Church’s abuse crisis in Poland. On the one hand, it played a crucial role in detecting abuse and bringing it to light but, on the other hand, passed judgment uncritically and undermined just investigation of abuse. Out of this, Glombik invites consideration of the challenges for theological reflection and puts forward a vision for the responsibility and role of media in this difficult area.

In Chapter Fourteen, Kate Jackson-Meyer from the USA writes on “A Clergy Abuse Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” Drawing on the deployment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in political contexts, Jackson-Meyer argues that such an instrument in the context of the abuse crisis could be appropriated and enacted through theological commitments to truth, justice, and forgiveness. Such a commission would offer a path for healing by centering survivor’s needs and stories and creating a culture of accountability through the integrity of its process. Jackson-Meyer examines what would distinguish such a commission in the Church (as distinct from the specific political contexts in which other commissions have often taken place) and provides several practical suggestions for its establishment.

In Chapter Fifteen, Werner Jeanrond from Germany puts forward his contribution, “Abuse, Cover-Up, and the Need for a Reform of Church and Theology.” Jeanrond puts forward a case for a renewed reflection on the Christian praxis of love, which places victims and survivors of abuse within the Church at the center of theological concern. Jeanrond analyses how such an approach sits in contradistinction to various elements of the theology and practice of the Church. In placing the Christian praxis of love at the center, Jeanrond also considers its implications for the divide between laity and clergy.

In Chapter Sixteen, Massimo Faggioli writes from the USA on “The Need for the Historiographical Approach to Understand and Address the Sex Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church.” Faggioli analyses two dominant approaches that have characterized and shaped our understanding of the abuse crisis in the Church. The first is the dominant approach of investigative journalism, and the second is the courtroom. Distinct from

these, he puts forward the importance of an historiographical approach, which aims at understanding the abuse crisis as a complex historical phenomenon. He argues that such an approach can open up a deeper comprehension of the roots of abuse, its cover up, and the failure to respond adequately to it.

In Chapter Seventeen, Richard Lennan from the USA offers his contribution, “Ecclesiology and the Challenge of Ecclesiological Failure.” Lennan focuses on the capacity for a sacramental understanding of the Church to enable self-critical reflection, support reform, and nurture hope for the Church’s capacity to witness to God’s mercy, even in the wake of the crisis. This, Lennan proposes, is one way in which ecclesiology can constructively respond to the abuse crisis, the inherent contradiction between the scandal of abuse and its cover-up, and the “missionary option” that Pope Francis promotes. Lennan sees forming Christian community for discipleship in the world as a central task for the credibility of ecclesiology today.

In Chapter Eighteen, Gill Goulding from Canada writes on “Interconnectedness: The Thread that Enables a Theological and Synodal Response to Abuse.” Goulding’s contribution takes its point of departure from Greek mythology, and the thread that Ariadne gives to Theseus to enable him to find his way out of the Labyrinth. She argues that the concept of interconnectedness is such a thread in the context of the abuse crisis, enabling a sense of congruence between a spectrum of issues and opening up the possibility of a theological response. Goulding’s essay finds such a response in Christ’s clear injunction to pay attention to the child and his own identity as child in relationship with the Father, generating reflections on authority as service and the importance of the child as both agent and teacher.

In Chapter Nineteen, Nikolaus Wandinger from Austria offers his essay, “Can Purgatory Help? Reflections from Dramatic Theology in the Context of the Abuse Crisis.” Wandinger begins with observations on the limitations of existing systems of legal justice and contemporary pastoral theologies which emphasize God’s mercy and forgiveness for the experience of survivors. Noting that within these frameworks survivors

may never have assurance that justice is achieved in response to the abuse against them, Wandinger turns to dramatic theology to propose an understanding of the last judgment which draws from the idea of purgatory. He argues that if the last judgment is understood in a particular way, it can hold together the hope that justice will be done without at the same time sacrificing hope in God's mercy and forgiveness alongside the possibility for universal salvation.

In Chapter Twenty, Neil Ormerod writes from Australia on "Mission, Reform and Suffering: The Challenge of the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Church." His article explores the nature of the Church's mission and its relationship with the mission of Jesus, arguing that such an exploration can uncover ways in which that mission could be perverted in the manner seen in the abuse crisis. Ormerod then proffers three dimensions of possible reform for the Church. On this basis, he considers the place of suffering in the path to reform today.

In Chapter Twenty-One, Claudia Leal from Chile offers her contribution, "Sexual Abuse in an Ecclesial Context and Gender Perspective: Challenges for the Ethical Administration of Power." Leal focuses specifically on the situation of women within the Church, homing in on an analysis of abuse from a gender perspective. From the perspective of moral theology, she puts forward several categories for understanding the abuse of power within the Church: positional vulnerability, personal vulnerability, consent, and professional ethics. Leal draws out the implication of these categories in dialogue with specific cases from the Latin American context, highlighting their significance in understanding and responding to the abuse crisis.

And finally, in Chapter Twenty-Two, Nuala Kenny from Canada writes in "Clergy Sexual Abuse, Trauma-Informed Theology, and the Promotion of Resilience." Building from a consideration of the staggering harm—including spiritual trauma—caused by the abuse of children by clergy, Kenny looks to the systemic factors that provide a condition of possibility for such harm. Turning her attention to current work on vulnerability as a condition of the moral life, Kenny argues that responses to abuse within the Church must be trauma-informed and look to the

promotion of the moral agency of children and their resilience. She suggests a path forward through a theology of childhood, centered on discipleship.

We commend the authors for bringing their scholarship to this difficult topic. Doing theology and theological ethics in the face of sexual abuse is painful, but crucial, work. We offer this volume in the hope that it will be one among other constructive and critical responses to the affront to human dignity that is sexual abuse in the Church, and the work required to assure human dignity into the future.



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