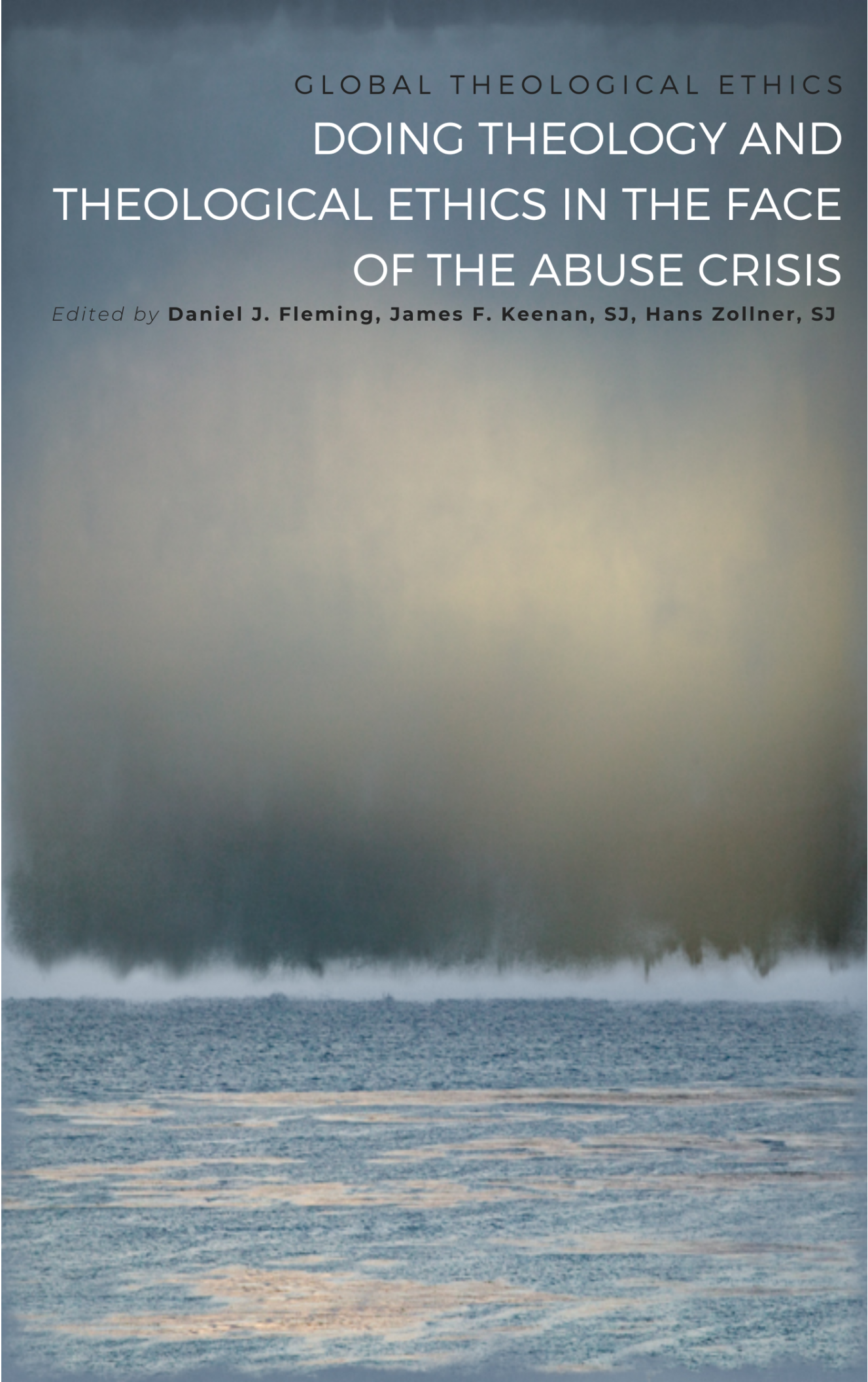


GLOBAL THEOLOGICAL ETHICS
DOING THEOLOGY AND
THEOLOGICAL ETHICS IN THE FACE
OF THE ABUSE CRISIS

Edited by **Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan, SJ, Hans Zollner, SJ**



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and
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DOING THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS IN THE
FACE OF THE ABUSE CRISIS

Theology, Ethics, and Social Justice

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DEDICATION

We dedicate this book to all of those whose flourishing has been undermined by any kind of abuse in the Church. We hope that it will contribute to a future in which the dignity of all who are entrusted to the ministry or care of the Church can be assured.

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We want to thank the contributors to this volume. This international contribution required a great deal of shared confidence and respect in responding critically and theologically to the sexual abuse crisis in the church. The quality of these essays conveys, we think, the breadth and depth of that collaborative social trust.

We thank the participants in the virtual table which was central to this book's development. The meetings were so engaging that we have decided to continue with the initiative. See <https://catholicethics.com/virtual-tables/> for further information.

This volume has benefitted greatly from the support of a number of students at Boston College. Jessica Saeli supported our authors for whom English is not their primary language by editing their essays for style, syntax, and expression. Samuel Peterson and Steven Roche ensured that the technical elements of essays—especially their footnotes—were consistent with the *Journal of Moral Theology's* style guide. We also express our gratitude to Alexander Rivera for his assistance in translating Claudia Leal's contribution (in chapter twenty-one) from Spanish to English.

Finally, we thank the editors of the *Journal of Moral Theology* for their superb guidance and support.

Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan, SJ, and Hans Zollner, SJ

Introduction

Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan, SJ, and Hans Zollner, SJ

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.

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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

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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.



Daniel J. Fleming is head of ethics for St. Vincent's Health Australia and Adjunct Professor of Ethics in the School of Medicine at the University of Notre Dame Australia. Fleming holds a PhD in moral philosophy and theology and is the author of over fifty academic and media publications in the areas of theological ethics, health care ethics, and moral education. He is an active member of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC), and co-chairs CTEWC's virtual table on the topic of abuse in the Church with James F. Keenan, SJ.

James F. Keenan, SJ, is the Canisius Chair, director of the Jesuit Institute, and vice provost of global engagement at Boston College. In addition to being a distinguished scholar, with over twenty-five books and three-hundred essays published, he is also the founder of the CTEWC network. His most recent book is *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics* (Paulist, 2022). Receiving a licentiate and a doctorate from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Keenan has been a Jesuit priest since 1982.

Hans Zollner, SJ, is Director and Professor of the Institute of Anthropology and Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC), at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He has been a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors since its inception in 2014.

Chapter 1: Sexual Abuse in the Church and the Violation of Vulnerable Agency

Michelle Becka

The causes of sexual abuse in the church are manifold. The perpetrator is responsible. There are systemic and structural causes that favor sexualized violence and prevent its reprocessing. There is also a theology that conceals or even justifies some of the favoring factors. Much could be said about each of these personal, structural, and theological dimensions.¹

This paper focuses on one of the causes of sexual abuse: disregard for the dignity of the person and especially for his or her self-determination. Abusers disregard the self-determination of the person. Furthermore, the moral-theological tradition has often ignored this aspect of dignity. While respect for the relational and vulnerable autonomy of the human person has become a nucleus of theological ethics more recently, it is still given too little consideration in the church's debate about sexual violence. To address this issue, this article proceeds in four steps. First, drawing on a concept shaped by Hille Haker, this essay outlines vulnerable agency that links autonomy with relationality and vulnerability.² Second, the essay argues that the central moral problem of sexual violence is that it violates this vulnerable agency—in contrast with a view that would see this primarily as a violation of the vow of chastity. In the third step, the essay focuses on a culture of safety that, to protect vulnerable agency, requires a changed understanding of power as well as clear control structures. The essay ends with warnings against instrumentalizing people and actionism when developing structures to protect vulnerable agency.

¹ A large number of recent publications, which cannot be presented here, illustrate this. The situations vary from region to region. The perspective of this article is a European one, especially a German one.

² Hille Haker, *Towards a Critical Political Ethics. Catholic Ethics and Social Challenges* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2020).

Autonomy, Vulnerability, Vulnerable Agency

The basic assumption of every theological ethics is the human being as a responsible subject. As rational beings, we are able to make decisions and to act accordingly. In this capacity, every human being is to be respected by others on the one hand and responsible for their actions on the other. These ideas are firmly rooted in moral theology and social ethics, for example, in the principle of personality. It is this fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching which implies basic anthropological assumptions. It reaches far back into the theological tradition, and at the same time, it is very current in its interweaving of individuality and sociality. The human being is an individual and, as such, special, unique, and gifted with reason. At the same time, the human being, also in the sense of the tradition that goes back to Aristotle in particular, is considered to be a *social* being. The human being is an individual *and* referred to others. As such, sociality is not subordinated to the individuality, as if one were first a self, to which somehow another is added, but individuality and sociality are of equal origin, because without one or the other there is no self.

These ideas can be connected to contemporary concepts of autonomy and dignity (especially through the influence of feminist theories, alterity philosophy, and intersubjectivity theories, as well as special education concepts and more), which no longer construct autonomy and relationality as opposites but rather view them as intertwined. In these approaches, there remains the assumption of the moral subject who is self-determined and responsible, but this capacity is relativized. We are always also conditioned by structures and by others. Hille Haker coins the term *vulnerable agency* in this context.³ The concept is of particular importance because it expresses that autonomy and agency, on the one hand, and vulnerability and relationality, on the other hand, cannot be separated. They belong together. This link gives the concept of human dignity clearer contours, insofar as it becomes evident what exactly is to be respected and protected.

³ Haker, *Critical Political Ethics*, 135–168.

Strongly influenced by Kant, in contemporary philosophical and theological ethics the concept of human dignity is closely related to self-determination.⁴ Because every human being is fundamentally able to make decisions and act according to them and is thus a subject of responsibility, everyone is to be respected as such. Therefore, corresponding to the categorical imperative, we have to treat each other not as a means to an end but always at the same time as an end. Unconditional respect is the attitude that corresponds to dignity. Instrumentalization, which turns the other into an object, is a disrespect and a violation of dignity. Moreover, Kant emphasizes that human dignity cannot be assigned a particular, comparable value such as a price, for “what has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity.”⁵ Human beings are not interchangeable; dignity demands that “human beings be respected in their uniqueness. Human beings are comparable only in their incomparability, that is, in their unjustifiable particularity, which, however, is to be respected in each and every one.”⁶ These two insights have been an integral part of the concept of human dignity up to the present day, and they also characterize theological ethics.

The idea of self-determination would be excessively overstretched, however, if one thought that in the name of autonomy one could defend oneself against any claims of others. This misinterpretation must be countered by the insight that one’s own freedom always ends at the freedom of others because these others also have a claim to be respected. Moreover, as we all experience, our autonomy is limited. Against this background, the idea of human autonomy, and thus the basic assumption of a responsible subject, must be both defended and modified today.

A contemporary autonomy-based concept of dignity is aware of the limitations of autonomy. It includes relationality and vulnerability. This is

⁴ I am referring here mainly to German-language discourses, but it also applies beyond that.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed., trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 42–43.

⁶ Heiner Bielefeldt, *Auslaufmodell Menschenwürde?* (Freiburg: Herder, 2011), 71.

important because it overcomes the constructed opposition between those who are autonomous (e.g., healthy, young, etc.) and those who are supposedly not (e.g., sick, old, etc.). All people are autonomous, all can shape—larger and smaller—spaces of agency. This can be quite different in different phases and situations of life, and for some groups of people, the restrictions are greater than for others. Complete autonomy, however, is just as illusory as complete dependence. These approaches are often constructed as mutually exclusive, such as autonomy-based concepts of dignity on the one hand and care ethics that emphasize dependency on the other. However, they are not opposites. Even if the capacity for autonomy is limited, spaces of agency remain, and the human being remains a responsible subject who is entitled to dignity. Under conditions of great dependency though, it becomes a special challenge to recognize, to open up, and to enlarge the small spaces of agency. Every autonomy is to be respected, even and especially if it seems to be small.

Judith Butler helps to understand this basic assumption in a deeper way (although she herself does not speak of autonomy or human dignity).⁷ Butler points out that the Other is indispensable for my own history and thus for my self-constitution. I am dependent on him or her because I have to be recognized by others for being a subject. On this dependence, vulnerability is based. My expectation can be disappointed, trust can be abused, and the dependence cannot be met. Consequently, if we want to speak of autonomy, we do so under the condition of this vulnerability. Vulnerability pervades all autonomy. As the subject is only through and with others, we are enmeshed in relationality. Relationality and vulnerability are thus inscribed in the concept of human dignity just as autonomy is. And because the human being is particularly vulnerable, his or her integrity is to be protected. These assumptions lead to the term *vulnerable agency*.⁸

⁷ Judith Butler, *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 34–45.

⁸ Haker, *Critical Political Ethics*, 136–167.

Vulnerability, in Haker's concept, comprises three dimensions. First, ontological vulnerability refers to the anthropological affectability of human beings, namely to be touchable by others and open to the world (in a thoroughly positive sense). It is significant and characterizes every human being. Through it, we are receptive and responsive to others. Second, moral vulnerability refers to susceptibility to harm inflicted by others. "As ontological vulnerability is first and foremost the susceptibility to any pain and suffering, moral vulnerability is first and foremost the susceptibility to be harmed by someone else."⁹ These harms are profound because they affect the complexity of self-constitution in which we depend on others. This, in turn, also compromises agency. The subject is at the same time a free agent *and* vulnerable. Because the self-determination and agency that constitutes the human being is always at risk, it requires special protection. The dignity of this subject combines both dimensions: "Normatively speaking, dignity therefore points not only to the status of the human subject as free and/or autonomous agent but also acknowledges the fragility of this status in the world of human interactions, social structures, and institutions which often cement privileges rather than securing equal rights."¹⁰ Continuing in this line the third dimension, which is structural vulnerability, addresses structures that create an environment or social codes that foster violations. "Structural vulnerability refers to particular states of vulnerability."¹¹ This is what Butler calls "precarity": situations and structures in which people lack security and social freedom other groups have.¹² It is a major obstacle to people developing any sense of their own agency. People no longer feel like subjects who can be heard; they are silenced. Or they lose any openness to the world and thus the ability to trust. The protection of human dignity, understood as vulnerable agency, on the other hand, aims to ensure that receptivity to suffering and harm

⁹ Haker, *Critical Political Ethics*, 139.

¹⁰ Haker, *Critical Political Ethics*, 144.

¹¹ Haker, *Critical Political Ethics*, 145.

¹² Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London/New York: Verso, 2004).

does not destroy freedom and the ability to interact. “Receptivity is not the opposite of agency—it is an essential dimension of it.”¹³

Theological Categorizations of Sexual Abuse

With respect to sexual abuse of children and adults, these basic considerations are relevant in several ways. The term sexual *abuse* does not mean to suggest that there could be something like a *proper use* of other people. Of course, there isn’t. This difficult term refers to the fact that in the various forms of sexualized violence, a fundamentally wrong attitude towards another person is expressed, namely that a person is not respected as a person but is *used* and therefore *abused* for the satisfaction of one’s own needs. In an abuse of one’s own position of power, the other person is turned into an object.

Abuse contradicts basic ethical convictions, and yet, at the same time, there are threads of tradition and argumentation in theology in which respect for the autonomy of others has not prevailed. They favor abusive relationships: “From the beginning, official ecclesiastical commentaries and statements on the cases of abuse frequently spoke of sins against the Sixth Commandment or, again based on the view of current canon law, of misconduct by priests against chastity or the promise of celibacy.”¹⁴ Like *Codes Iuris Canonici* (CIC) c. 1395 § 2, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 2351-2359) also conceives of sexual abuse and rape as violations of the vow of chastity. The *Compendium to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists in a series—under the heading of principal sins against chastity and without further differentiation—“adultery, masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution, rape, homosexual acts.” (no. 492) Understanding sexual violence as an individual sin against the Sixth Commandment prevents understanding the core of the problem

¹³ Haker, *Critical Political Ethics*, 158.

¹⁴ Konrad Hilpert, “Die Diskussion um den Missbrauch in der Theologie von 2010 bis 2020,” in *Ohnmacht, Macht, Missbrauch: Theologische Analysen eines systemischen Problems*, ed. Jochen Sautermeister and Andreas Odenthal, trans. M.B. (Freiburg: Herder, 2021), 177.

that people disregard other people's self-determination and dignity—a disregard that culminates in violence.

To some extent, the one-sidedness of canon law can be explained by the fact that it is characterized by the principle of not considering such offenses as are already punishable under secular law. However, this explanation has to be critically evaluated, as Stephan Ernst points out, since it does not apply, for example, to homicide.¹⁵ Besides, the consequences of the imbalance of canon law are far-reaching and must not be ignored. For in the case of sexual abuse, this principle led to “a purely internal remedy of the ‘nuisance’ decided according to one’s own, often exclusively subjective discretion.”¹⁶ Ernst highlights that even in moral theology it has taken a very long time to state clearly what exactly the injustice of rape and sexual abuse actually consists of. Even in the important *Handbook of Christian Ethics* of 1978 (edited by Hertz, Korff et al.), child abuse does not appear at all. With regard to the related offense of rape, Ernst diagnoses a “strange and frightening taciturnity”¹⁷ because it hardly addressed what harm is actually done to the victim. Here, too, rape is considered primarily an act of unchastity. With the Second Vatican Council, some basic assumptions of the Church’s sexual doctrine changed, insofar as sexuality is considered responsibly consummated when it is embedded in a relationship of personal love (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49). Sexuality is understood as a medium of expression of the person, even though the norms of prohibition (premarital sexual intercourse, homosexual acts, contraception, etc.) remain in place and set very narrow limits to this expression. Yet, there is an important shift: “That sexuality

¹⁵ Stephan Ernst, “Ein Kleriker, der sich auf andere Weise gegen das sechste Gebot des Dekalogs verfehlt...‘ Anmerkungen aus moraltheologischer Sicht,” in *Der Strafanspruch der Kirche in Fällen von sexuellem Missbrauch*, ed. H. Hallermann, Th. Meckel, S. Pfannkuche and M. Pulte (Würzburg: Echter, 2012), 188.

¹⁶ Sabine Demel, “Moral ohne Recht—Recht ohne Moral? Über die Freiheitsordnung in Staat und Kirche,” in *Zukunftshorizonte kirchlicher Sexualehre: Bausteine zu einer Antwort auf die Missbrauchsdiskussion*, ed. K. Hilpert (Freiburg: Herder, 2011), 257.

¹⁷ Ernst, “Ein Kleriker,” 193.

must be integrated into the framework of personal love means, in fact, conversely, that all action is ethically unacceptable in which the other is selfishly used as an object or opportunity for the satisfaction of one's own sexual needs."¹⁸ If this is taken seriously, rape and sexual abuse are objectionable not because of the violation of the commandment of chastity but because a person is made an object against his or her will. To implement this conclusion consistently in practice (but also in magisterial proclamation and canon law) is yet to be done.

The violation of basic norms of Christian ethics is obvious. By disregarding the will of the "victim"¹⁹ (or not even considering that this person might exist and play a role), he or she is not respected as a person but downgraded and instrumentalized. This is a violation of the right to self-determination, especially the right to sexual self-determination and an exploitation of vulnerability.

It must be taken into account that, in highly asymmetrical relationships, terms such as "voluntariness" and "against one's will" become blurred. In particular, children and adolescents who may feel particularly attached to an authority figure, through affection or admiration, are often unable to classify an assault by the latter. From (initial) affection and being flattered to confusion and fear to shock, disgust and self-hatred, a variety of reactions are possible. Generally, the young victim cannot prevent the assault on her own or do anything to counter it, but this is not synonymous with consent or voluntariness! As such, the reference of perpetrators to a lack of resistance (possibly interpreted as consent) cannot be accepted under any circumstances. Because the personality of children and

¹⁸ Ernst, "Ein Kleriker," 197, with reference to *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 24.

¹⁹ To not re-victimize the affected, the concept of *victim* has been avoided in this paper so far. In addition, the concept of victim has been theologically charged. Neither discourse can be addressed here. The fact that I nevertheless speak of "victims" at this point is intended to point out that these difficult contexts must not be ignored either. Perpetrators turn others into victims, that is, into people who feel powerless. Those affected must be strengthened so that they can expand their scope of action—however small it may be—and become empowered again.

adolescents is particularly vulnerable, there can be no consent—with regard to age and position of power—in strongly asymmetrical relationships. They are morally unacceptable. Moreover, the wounds inflicted on children and adolescents generally have more profound effects.²⁰ The disregard of the existing (but still developing and thus particularly vulnerable) agency of children and adolescents endangers the further development of the same, the personality development as a whole, and their ability to build trust in others. The damage done to young people is immense. Moral theology and moral teaching of the Church must clearly name this as an evil and not trivialize it by assigning it to the Sixth Commandment. Until respect for and protection of the vulnerable agency becomes the linchpin of sexual morality, Church teaching cannot adequately grasp sexual abuse or analyze it adequately.

It requires very close attention to the point at which pastoral relationships tip over and become structural vulnerability. In relationships of trust, to which pastoral relationships can belong, because speaking about faith and doubt is deeply personal, one is particularly vulnerable. One opens oneself, firmly trusting in a safe space. The pastor has to maintain this safety, which at the same time gives him power. If this position of power is abused, it is a structural violation that causes lasting damage to agency. “But if this intimacy is shamelessly abused, where should I turn, seeking God?”²¹ This is one of the questions that victims of sexual abuse ask. It is a fundamental theological question that leads far beyond what can be discussed here. At the same time, it directs our gaze to the structures and ways of dealing with power.

²⁰ Children are more vulnerable physically and psychologically than adults. Sexualized violence therefore has serious consequences for personality development. See Jörg Fegert, “Sexueller Missbrauch an Kindern und Jugendlichen,” *Bundesgesundheitsblatt—Gesundheitsforschung—Gesundheitsschutz* 50 (2007): 78–89.

²¹ Kai Christian Moritz, “Theologie—es geht weder mit ihr noch ohne sie,” in *Nicht ausweichen: Theologie angesichts der Missbrauchskrise*, ed. Matthias Remenyi and Thomas Schärtl (Regensburg: Pustet, 2019), 36.

Structures of Power Favoring Abuse

Sexualized violence in the church cannot be separated from the responsibility and guilt of individuals, namely the perpetrators and those who covered up the acts. However, these are not isolated cases. There are systemic causes and favoring structures. There is a responsibility of the institution and of those in leading positions to prevent future abuse and deal with past abuse. This was usually not done in the past. In the cover-up of sexual abuse, the affected were and are once again disregarded. The good or reputation of the institution is placed above respect for the person. Respect for the vulnerable agency is not only incumbent on individuals, it requires structures that enable and support this respect. It requires a responsible handling of power because sexualized violence by priests is always an abuse of a position of power.²² Preventing future abuse, as well as disclosing and dealing with existing abuse, therefore requires a reflective, responsible, and controlled approach to power.

Human relationships are always characterized by power. Power refers to the influence on the actions of others in the personal sphere and at the societal level. In Max Weber's sense, it can be understood as the opportunity to assert one's own will even in the face of opposition²³ or, in Arendt's sense, as the ability to join forces with others and act together with them.²⁴ Regardless of whether power is defined in this way or quite differently, it shapes human interaction. It is therefore not a question of its existence but of how it is exercised. Power is shaped in very different ways. In relationships of unequal positions, such as those between priest and the child, but also priest and lay persons in general, the distribution of power is asymmetrical. Power can be exercised by one over the other in different

²² This point can be dealt with here only briefly. See Jochen Sautermeister and Andreas Odenthal, ed., *Ohnmacht, Macht, Missbrauch: Theologische Analysen eines systemischen Problems* (Freiburg: Herder, 2021); Stefan Kopp, ed., *Macht und Ohnmacht in der Kirche: Wege aus der Krise* (Freiburg: Herder, 2020).

²³ Hannah Arendt, *Macht und Gewalt* (München: Piper, 1970).

²⁴ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

ways: “beneficial, acceptable, or abusive.”²⁵ Not every use of power is an abuse. In asymmetrical relationships, the more powerful can also help to increase agency of the less powerful through empowerment.

However, in pastoral relationships the power imbalance is simultaneously reinforced and disguised in various ways. Frequent reference is made in this context to Foucault’s notion of pastoral power. This power is exercised not through direct coercion but through powerful narratives such as shepherd and flock, practices such as confession, and the fostering of a willingness to be led.²⁶ Closeness and distance, as well as heteronomy and autonomy, become blurred. In the lifelong guidance to salvation, a lifelong control is inherent. Even if this pastoral power, whose beginnings Foucault locates in the Middle Ages, has changed and decreased, there remains in part that special relationship of soul guidance characterized by trust, dependence, and obedience. It is one of those situations in which the special openness goes hand in hand with increased vulnerability. It is a vulnerability that has to be dealt with in a particularly sensitive way because it is a vulnerability in which the danger of abuse is particularly high. The power imbalance that is not reflected favors abuse. It also favors systemic silence and concealment: a multitude of reports of survivors testify to how difficult it is to speak, because many psychological obstacles stand in the way and then to be heard and believed by others.²⁷

Given the complexity of these contexts, a few lines of action can only be pointed out. The first concerns ecclesiastical (and theological) speech. The factual power in Church is still concealed by a certain use of language, talking of *servicing* instead of exercising power represents an idealization that

²⁵ Hans Zollner, “Macht und Ohnmacht aus psychologischer und theologischer Sicht,” in *Macht und Ohnmacht in der Kirche: Wege aus der Krise*, ed. Stefan Kopp (Freiburg: Herder, 2020), 31.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Ästhetik der Existenz* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 81–104. See also Rainer Bucher, “Body of Power and Body Power: The Situation of the Church and God’s Defeat,” *Concilium* 40 (2004): 120–129.

²⁷ Moritz, “Theologie,” 32–37.

threatens to hide the existing asymmetrical power structures.²⁸ This facilitates the abuse of power. For where there *is* no power, it cannot be abused, not an issue at all. Instead, it would be necessary to perceive and reflect on structures of power and personal power. Just as in other professions where the interaction with people in asymmetrical relationships is important (such as social work), one's own position would have to be the object of critical reflection as part of a professional ethic. Self-reflection is part of professionalism. At the same time, secondly, the power asymmetry itself must be questioned and dismantled. This is a far-reaching ecclesiological question, especially of the theology of ministry. From the point of view of social ethics, there is a further demand of the division of powers. If the church no longer ignores the effects of existing power structures, the next step has to be the appropriate control of that power. The principle of division of powers must also be applied in the church. If power is not distributed and thus made controllable, misuse and abuse cannot be contained. If those who can exercise more power are at the same time those who control that power, while lay people are largely excluded from both, systemic silence and concealment of sexual abuse is encouraged.²⁹ Thus, even though critical self-reflection on one's position of power is an important aspect of professionalism, power control must at the same time be institutionalized through division of powers, lay participation, transparency, and institutionalized control bodies.

Even beyond power control, structures play an important role in dealing with sexualized violence. Avishai Margalit's concept of the "Decent Society" can provide important clues in this regard.³⁰ For him, the absence of humiliation is the minimum of a decent society. Humiliation—

²⁸ Hilpert points out that there are several terms that can disguise power differentials, including talk of "brothers and sisters." See Hilpert, "Die Diskussion um den Missbrauch," 185.

²⁹ Hilpert, "Die Diskussion um den Missbrauch," 184–185.

³⁰ Avishai Margalit, *Politik der Würde. Über Achtung und Verachtung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012). See also Jochen Sautermeister, "Theologie unter dem Vorzeichen von Missbrauch in der Krise," in *Ohnmacht, Macht, Missbrauch: Theologische Analysen eines systemischen Problems*, ed. Jochen Sautermeister and Andreas Odenthal (Freiburg: Herder 2021), 25.

the complete and conscious disregard of the person—is a strong form of instrumentalization. Margalit is not only concerned that people should not humiliate one another, but he highlights that social practices and structures can themselves be humiliating, as in certain forms of penal systems. A humane society must not have humiliating structures; more than that, its structures must prevent humiliation. Sexualized violence is an abyss. It is about practices that leave broken people, that leave *survivors*. It is a form of humiliation, a form of instrumentalization and violation of dignity. So where is the vulnerable agency disregarded and violated? What structures protect it? What structures and practices contribute to its violation? How can humiliation be prevented? These must be the guiding questions to create a culture of safety. That is the test criterion for institutions and everyday practices. Because: “No, there is nothing more important than the human being. He is at the center and must be.”³¹

Consequences for Prevention and Consideration of Those Affected

If self-determination is to be taken seriously then the voices of those affected must firstly be given space and secondly be involved in the development of guidelines and concrete measures for prevention. These are important issues, but they are complex. There are pitfalls in dealing with them. I would like to point out two of them. Participation and prevention are too important to allow those affected to be instrumentalized (again) and for prevention to become actionism.

The persons concerned speak for themselves; there are many examples of this in the German-speaking area.³² These voices must be heard, but the way there is long for many of them. They have been silenced many times. Some have lost their speech. It is therefore necessary to consider when and

³¹ Moritz, “Theologie,” 36.

³² See: Barbara Haslbeck, Regina Heyder, Ute Leimgruber, and Dorothee Sandherr-Klemp, *Erzählen als Widerstand: Berichte über spirituellen und sexuellen Missbrauch an erwachsenen Frauen in der katholischen Kirche* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2020).

how survivors can and cannot speak. In a very different context, but quite comparable, Gayatri Spivak tells the story of Khan, a Bengali farmer who, to illustrate his difficult circumstances, was asked to speak at the UN.³³ He did so, but he could not make himself understood because the framework into which he was forced was too narrow. The speaking time was short, his language was not that of the delegates, which was not only a translation problem, and his world was too different to make himself understood. At the same time, the organizers supposedly did their duty. After all, they were listening to someone who was affected. More is needed to hear and understand. Just as the farmer cannot be pressed into a scheme that otherwise remains unchanged, victims of abuse in the church cannot be heard *en passant*. It takes a break in the routine, it takes time, and it takes tolerance for different forms of language. Also, some things may remain incomprehensible to people who have not had similar experiences. It is an ongoing task, not one that can be quickly checked off.

Preventing future sexualized violence requires work on guidelines and concrete prevention measures. In German dioceses, there are now different prevention training programs. It is important that this exists, and many of these measures are good. However, there sometimes emerges a feeling of unease. When young group leaders in youth camps don't take a homesick child in their arms, fearing they could be considered intrusive, then measures have overshot the mark. When in care institutions (for children, for the elderly, for people with disabilities, etc.) the difficult balancing of closeness and distance leads to the avoidance of any closeness, important goods are lost. Sometimes we have to ask if the measures target those who are more likely to become perpetrators. Prevention measures must not become blind actionism intended to show "we are doing something" but doing nothing to change the causes. It is difficult to design guidelines and prevention measures wisely. It succeeds more easily if different groups of people are involved in drawing them up.

³³ Gayatri Spivak, "Responsibility," *Boundary* 21, no. 3 (1994): 19–64.

In addition, a distinction must be made between target group-specific prevention measures and prevention in a more general sense. The latter aims to raise awareness in dealing with issues of closeness and distance and for the vulnerability of the person. The other is to be respected in his/her autonomy, and the same applies to myself, as well as to every person, including every child. Everyone is to be respected as an end in themselves and must not be instrumentalized, and special vulnerability requires special protection. It is the basis of a culture of safety. One of the many challenges here is to minimize the risk of being hurt by others, but at the same time to maintain openness and receptivity. The goal of general prevention, then, is respect for and protection of the vulnerable agency of myself and of the others.



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Chapter 2: Vulnerability, Ecclesial Abuse, and “Vulnerable Adults”

Carolina Montero Orphanopoulos

The term *vulnerable adult* has been used for decades,¹ usually within health disciplines or legal scientific reports and to describe the subjects of abuse, or potential subjects of abuse, such as the elderly, the poor, or people with some kind of disability. Be it because of age or because of cognitive or other health limitations, it refers mostly to people who cannot defend their rights and their integrity due to something that they appear to lack in the eyes of modern society. This context views efficient performance in every aspect of life as mandatory, demanded, and self-demanded.² In other contexts, if one looks up *adultos vulnerables* in Spanish for example, most of the references will be on discriminatory policies due to social economical differences. The variation in the emphasis is not accidental since, as theological ethics understands, there are distinctive differences between North American, European, and Latin American understandings of the word “vulnerability.”³

In its ordinary use, the risk of abuse among the so-called *vulnerable adult* population generally stems from their dependence on others for care, their potential inability to communicate, and, as in every abuse, the disparity of power that exists between the caregiver and the person who receives acts of care. A trusting relationship between the perpetrator and

¹See, for example, Richard L. Douglass, Tom Hickey, and Catherine Noel, *A Study of Maltreatment of the Elderly and Other Vulnerable Adults* (University of Michigan: Institute of Gerontology, 1980).

²Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

³For example, excellent research that highlights these differences from an ethical point of view is Henk Ten Have, *Vulnerability: Challenging Bioethics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), and from a sociological perspective, Barbara Misztal, *The Challenges of Vulnerability* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

the victim presents a further opportunistic factor that contributes to the risk of abuse. Abuse of the vulnerable always encompasses a complex and multifaceted reality. The width and scope of vulnerabilities experienced and the variety of abuses that are possible complicate the recognition and prevention of such exploitation.

More recently, the term *vulnerable adults* has appeared in relation to ecclesial abuse in relation to the definition of these adults and the terms of the reparation that they are owed. In the Apostolic Letter Issued *Motu Proprio* by Pope Francis, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019), article one lists “delicts against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue consisting of i) forcing someone, by violence or threat or through abuse of authority, to perform or to submit to sexual acts; ii) performing sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person” and then explicitly defines a *vulnerable person* as “any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or otherwise resist the offence.” Once again, here, the fundamental aspect is the person’s autonomy, understood as capacity to consent.

Yet in 2021, Pope Francis established a new canon⁴ in the section of the Code of Canon Law entitled “Offences against Human Life, Dignity and Liberty”:

Canon 1398 §1. A cleric is to be punished with deprivation of office and with other just penalties, not excluding, where the case calls for it, dismissal from the clerical state, if he:

1. commits an offence against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue with a minor or with a person who habitually has an imperfect use of reason or with one to whom the law recognizes equal protection.
2. grooms or induces a minor or a person who habitually has an imperfect use of reason or one to whom the law recognizes equal

⁴ For a complete review of the canonical aspects of the matter, see Brendan Daly, “Canon Law in 2021 on Sexual Abuse,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 98, no. 4 (2021): 449–473.

Vulnerability, Ecclesial Abuse, and “Vulnerable Adults”

- protection to expose himself or herself pornographically or to take part in pornographic exhibitions, whether real or simulated;
3. immorally acquires, retains, exhibits or distributes, in whatever manner and by whatever technology, pornographic images of minors or of persons who habitually have an imperfect use of reason or one to whom the law recognizes equal protection.

As we can see here, the term *vulnerable adult* is excluded and replaced by the lengthier explanation: “person who habitually has an imperfect use of reason or one to whom the law recognizes equal protection.” This formulation had been already included as equivalent to the definition of “minor” in John Paul II’s 2001 *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* before 2019 and is recovered in the newest definition of those who previously were considered to be *vulnerable adults*. It is, in its essence, a legal description which emphasizes cognitive and rational aspects of a person’s humanity.

In the Catholic church, the recognition of adult victims of sexual or conscience abuse is a breakthrough toward acknowledging that the damage committed does not only concern minors. However, the use of the term *vulnerable adults* to describe these victims is ambiguous. Such use entails a risk in its potential revictimization, because it situates the source and the (perverse) reason of the abuse on the assumed vulnerability—and on a specific way of understanding vulnerability—of that particular adult rather than on the person that perpetrates the abuse. Such an approach distorts what happened: a power abuse over against the sexual and conscience integrity of an adult, by claiming the lack of certain qualities—especially a certain understanding of autonomy—in the victim.

The problems with such an approach become clear when we consider several critical questions. What happens in the case of abuse perpetrated against adults who have no cognitive or autonomy deficiencies? Or those who have no economic or social “debts” (frequent in Latin America) with the church? What happens when factors concerning—trust, or generosity, or faith, and not disability or precariousness, makes the abuse possible? Or if it is a result of a distorted image of God, of God’s will and how God

manifests it, in what we would call perfectly “capable” and “independent” men and women?

Redefining the Ethical-Anthropological Category of Vulnerability

As we have seen in a society where the *Autonomy Myth*⁵ prevails, vulnerability is habitually understood as a lack of cognitive and voluntary freedom to consent and/or protect one’s own interests.⁶ It is seen as a flaw in the striving for independence and rooted in the understanding that human plenitude is a state where will and reason are irreplaceable.

I attempt to redefine the concept of vulnerability. Based on extensive research and the contributions of many authors who have also reflected on this term, I define human vulnerability as a universal anthropological trait. It is to be understood as the intrinsic openness of human beings to the world in which they are immersed, to the bonds established by each person, and to the way in which they positions themselves before their own subjectivity and that of those around them.⁷ It is the potential ability of every woman and every man to be affected bodily, mentally, emotionally, or existentially by the presence, being, or acting of someone or something else. It is the condition of the permeable, porous being of those who are affected and transformed in interacting with their environment, themselves, others and with that which transcends them. This openness is reflected in human corporeality, in a more evident way, but it is also constitutive of our social condition and of the diverse ways in which people interact with the world.⁸

⁵ Martha Albertson Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency* (New York: The New Press, 2004).

⁶ Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, *International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, 1993), 10.

⁷ See Ignacio Boné Pina, *Vulnerabilidad y enfermedad mental. La imprescindible subjetividad en psicopatología* (Madrid: Editorial Comillas, 2010).

⁸ Carolina Montero Orphanopoulos, *Vulnerabilidad: Hacia una ética más humana* (Madrid: Editorial Dykinson, 2022).

Vulnerability is an inherent, universal, and anthropological attribute that is categorized or individualized in concrete women and men in different ways. We are all vulnerable, but each individual is positioned in different ways in life, in his or her biography, social spaces, and the way we are supported—or not—by social institutions.⁹ The result is that every human being is not always equally vulnerable in different situations. This is what is called *situational vulnerability*, but it is the direct result of the human characteristic of common anthropological vulnerability defined as one’s inherent openness. Here we are reminded of Karl Rahner’s notion of the human being as *spirit*,¹⁰ openness to its reality, to others, and to God. We are affected and affect people, nature, ourselves, etc., and that differentiates our vulnerability from animal vulnerability.¹¹

However, the concrete experience of universal anthropological vulnerability is always situational, changing, asymmetrical, singular, and contingent. Human vulnerability, although an anthropological characteristic common to all, is not experienced in equal ways by all, nor can it be objectively assessed or compared in diverse situations and scenarios. In different ways, some of us are, in certain circumstances, more vulnerable than others, perhaps living with a greater degree of exposure or precariousness, even though we all participate in shared radical vulnerability. The American legal expert Martha Albertson Fineman resolves this apparent contradiction with clarity:

While vulnerability is universal, constant and complex, it is also particular. While all individuals are in a position of constant vulnerability, each is positioned individually. We have different ways of embodying ourselves, and we are also situated differently in networks of economic and institutional relations. As a result, our vulnerabilities

⁹ Martha Albertson Fineman, “The Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State,” *Emory Law Journal* 60 (2010): 31.

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, *Oyente de la Palabra: Fundamentos para una filosofía de la religión*, (Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 1976), 79.

¹¹ Cf. Orphanopoulos, *Vulnerabilidad*.

range in magnitude and potential at the individual level. Vulnerability is therefore both universal and particular, uniquely experienced by each of us.¹²

Hence, there is no opposition between an understanding of vulnerability as a universal human condition, and the evident differences in the particular vulnerabilities of each one, since there are existential, physical, sociopolitical, and economic contexts that exacerbate the common anthropological vulnerability.

It is true that the word *vulnerability* etymologically refers to every human beings’ capability or exposure to being wounded. Perhaps the possibility of being hurt is in turn a condition of possibility of a type of intersubjective relationship that aspires to something important and profound, to the *good life*. Hence, human vulnerability would stress the permeability necessary to be affected by others. If we were self-sufficient, impermeable, and completely independent, we could not be hurt, but we would also be condemned to the most monotonous and absurd solipsism. Certainly, to acknowledge vulnerability as a humanizing possibility is not simple. The vulnerability of others can generate feelings as contradictory as contempt or compassion, care or violence, and one’s own vulnerability, as we indicated, can cause fear, shame, and various psychological defense mechanisms.

Moreover, because we live exposed, and because of *human lability*,¹³ the always latent possibility of failure in the personal and social axiological project is real. There are social and personal realities that aggravate vulnerability and lead it towards being, in fact, violated. The concept of vulnerability then requires us to examine how power, social goods, and wealth are distributed. What is relevant is to point to the need of restructuring social institutions and challenging social inequities. The

¹² Martha Albertson Fineman, “The Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State,” 31.

¹³ I propose here the term *human lability* as the great French philosopher Paul Ricoeur defines it: “I understand by lability that constitutional weakness that makes evil possible.” Paul Ricoeur, *Finitud y culpabilidad*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Editorial Trotta 2011), 15. My translation.

perpetual risk and reality of vulnerability is that it often leads to exploitation or abuse, manipulation, conflict, inequality, and violence, rather than solidarity, which acknowledges the shared destiny and mutual interests of the common good. This exploitation of vulnerability does not have its source in the vulnerable person or group. Rather, it originates in the will—be it personal, institutional or political—of those who take advantage of it in a way that it ends up exacerbating it.

Seen in this way, human vulnerability is both the possibility of generative transformation and of devastation, being wounded and exploited. Vulnerability is a characteristic of the human person, irremediably open to be wounded and to heal, to contingency and relationality, in multiple experiences in one’s lifespan.¹⁴ Vulnerability expresses how the human being experiences unlimited desire and longing as well as the limited reality of each person and of the world. Vulnerability always demands an ethical choice because it engages the face—Levinas’s *visage*—of the other, of others, and of one’s own face, naked.¹⁵ Human vulnerability—radical, anthropological, and situational—is possibly threatening or enriching, being an ambiguous feature of human life. In the actualization of the wide possibilities of realizations of vulnerability, vulnerability can be experienced as pure threat, pure joy, trust, or all of them together. Thus, vulnerability could be called a neutral quality, in so far as it does not possess a specific value connotation, but when it is approached ethically and therefore phenomenologically, it can also be evaluated in its ambiguity.

Vulnerability thus understood refers to a human dimension that has not been fully incorporated in our modern society. It seems that the unique and constant invitation of contemporary society is the imperative of autonomy and self-sufficiency, where the construction of personal identity and the project of life is voluntarist and solitary. However, there

¹⁴ A. Cavarero, *Horrorismo. Nombrando la violencia contemporánea* (Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos, 2009) 58.

¹⁵ See Emanuel Levinas, *Humanismo del otro hombre* (Madrid: Editorial Siglo Veintiuno, 1974), 58.

are those who argue that the human being is essentially *a destitute structure*,¹⁶ given its ontological, ethical, psychological, social, cultural, and natural vulnerability. Suffering and illness would be *epiphanies of that vulnerability*¹⁷ and they would entail an ethical dimension: responsibility for the other. The truth is that we are always vulnerable, potentially open to the possibility of being hurt and of loving.

Vulnerable Adults?

If we assume that this definition of vulnerability is true then all human beings, children, adults, and elderly people, are vulnerable. The problem is produced in ecclesial cases when relations that, by their nature, are supposed to be hospitable, caring, and accompanying the life and faith of those who have put their trust in those to whom they give authority, are betrayed. In the asymmetry of power and in controlling one’s conscience, vulnerability is *vulnerated*—i.e., exploited and abused—by making real what is always latent and potential.

To claim that vulnerability can be recognized as a potentially valuable and inherent human characteristic is one thing. However, many times what it produces—in relations of power, manipulation, and objectification—is quite different. To guarantee that the vulnerable aspects of being human can be carriers of beauty does not lessen the ethical requirement of one’s responsibility in relation to that vulnerability. The vulnerability of those who open themselves to faith and to the ecclesial community in search of transcendent meaning and of a life traversed by the Good News of Jesus is marked by generosity and the desire of God. This openness, this vulnerability, commits in binding ways those who interact with it to respect and protect the integrity of the other without manipulating the exposed intimacy and generosity of searching for a relationship with transcendence, with the Transcendent One.

¹⁶ See, for example, Arnold Gehlen, *El hombre: Su naturaleza y su lugar en el mundo* (Salamanca: Editorial Sígueme, 1980), 37.

¹⁷ Francesc Torralba, *Antropología del Cuidar* (Madrid: Institut Borja de Bioética—Fundación Mapfre Medicina, 1998), 267.

Sexual abuse, abuse of power and abuse, and manipulation of consciences *vulnerate* the victim’s physical, biographical, and psychological integrity as well as one’s worldview, beliefs and values. This way of being affected does not happen only to people with diminished capacity to consent. It happens to all those who in their vulnerability, their openness and permeability, are willing to trust, to love, and to believe in the other, in a relation that has its roots in transcendent values. It is from this shared reality of being vulnerable people that our Church is composed. Everyone—children, youth, and adults—is exposed to abuse because we are all vulnerable.

Given the above, I consider the term “vulnerable adult” to be dangerous. In sexual, conscience and power abuse, the problem is not the vulnerability of the victim. The problem occurs when in a particular human relation—for example, in the asymmetry of power or in the presumption of control of consciences—the common anthropological vulnerability of one of the present is abused, transforming the possibility of harm, due to openness, into physical or moral injury.¹⁸ Both sexual and non-sexual abuse violate not only the physical integrity of the other but also their biographical, psychic integrity and their worldview, values and beliefs, and radical vulnerability. Similarly, the existence and acknowledgement of this reality at a social level aggravates the vulnerability of every human being in society, producing scandal, collapsing trust, and delegitimizing leaders and institutions.

The Church itself, as a human structure and institution, is also vulnerable, and therefore labile, capable of acting upon the vulnerability of its members within the whole spectrum that goes from the margins of

¹⁸ See, for example, Kathleen McPhillips “‘Soul Murder’: Investigating Spiritual Trauma at the Royal Commission,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 42 (2018): 231–242; Danielle M. McGraw, Marjan Ebadi, Constance Dalenberg, Vanessa Wu, Brandi Naish, and Lisa Nunez, “Consequences of Abuse by Religious Authorities: A Review,” *Traumatology* 25, no. 4 (2019): 242–255; M. Benkert, Thomas P. Doyle, “Clericalism, Religious Duress and its Psychological Impact on Victims of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 223–238.

love to violence. Only since the ecclesial crisis of abuse of minors and adults, in which we are immersed, have we begun to understand that the possibility of abuse and violence can occur within the Church. This situation scandalizes us because neither has anything to do with the person of Jesus and his way of relating and living, nor with the Gospel that he gave us as Good News for the whole world and for all times, nor with the mission of the Church to follow Jesus Christ, risen and present, especially in the midst of human vulnerability. What shocks, together with the ecclesial narcissism that has led to the systematic cover-up or categorical denial of these abuses, is the lack of preparedness and response, which has left the Church structurally unprotected.¹⁹

The “coercive control in a religious context”²⁰ (in this case, sexual and non-sexual abuse in ecclesiastic contexts) has a double tributary in relation to human vulnerability. First, it does not occur because of a concrete weakness, like when, in our collective imaginary, we are accustomed to thinking (although many times we do not actually verbalize it) about the victims of abuse as weak or dysfunctional in some aspect. Second, paradoxically, coercive ecclesial control sometimes occurs out of our strengths such as a decentered generosity, the desire to give one’s life, the meaning found in fidelity, and the pursuit of God’s will. The abuse here leads to a dispossession of oneself for the benefit of the perpetrator, who grows in power and control over the abused person.

There are other instances where there is, in fact, a specific or situational vulnerability. They are people in situations of special vulnerability given previous violations, conditions of physical or mental fragility, or biographies particularly traversed by damage, poverty, exclusion, and affective absence. Somehow, we could all find ourselves in these hardships,

¹⁹ A very suggestive investigation into the shadows (along the lines of Carl Gustav Jung) of the Church and ecclesial narcissism is developed in Camilo Barrionuevo Durán, *Una Iglesia devorada por su propia sombra: Hacia una comprensión integral de la crisis de los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia Católica* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2021).

²⁰ Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys, *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Cultures* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2019).

at some point in life. In case of people experiencing great vulnerability, what troubles is that the abuser exercises control through the identification of that vulnerability, often under the guise of protecting or welcoming it, harming the victim even more by manipulating, objectifying, and abusing that vulnerability.²¹

As we have pointed out, the dual conception of vulnerability, anthropological and situational, requires respect for the integrity of all people and special protection for those who experience greater vulnerability.²² This means that in case of the abuse prevention protocols and policies, including non-sexual abuse, implemented by many groups, congregations, or dioceses today, this double vulnerability should be made explicit. First, we are all vulnerable to sexual or power abuse. Hence, the physical, emotional integrity, and conscience of every Christian, of every human being, must be respected and promoted. Second, individuals or groups who are in situations of greater vulnerability must be explicitly protected from any increased possibility of abuse.

It is true that, from the perspective of clinical psychology, formulated with more relational and phenomenological perspectives, certain distinctions could be allowed in measuring the fragility or psychic strength of different people (for example, at the level of coherence, structuring, and internal unity) that varies according to various experiences of attachment or traumas of early relations.²³ From this distinction, on the one hand, it could be said that there are adults whose relational dynamics are more fragile and who may be more vulnerable to abuse. However, on the other

²¹ A thorough study of this *modus operandi* is described in Carlos Barrias’s doctoral thesis on the emblematic “Karadima Case” in Chile. Carlos Barria, “*Condiciones psíquico-institucionales de producción subjetiva y de violencia sexual presentes en el caso Karadima*” (PhD diss., University of Chile, 2017), repositorio.uchile.cl/handle/2250/146182.

²² UNESCO, *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*, 2005. Art. 8. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146180.

²³ See, for example, theories that go from different types of attachment in John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 1: *Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), to theories of resilience in Boris Cyrulnik, *Resilience: How Your Inner Strength Can Set You Free from the Past* (London: Penguin, 2011).

hand, the various ecclesial relational contexts place believers in a situation of special vulnerability, particularly when it comes to relations with clergy, which are still, for too many, asymmetrical. In the case of ecclesial abuses, this vulnerability is further accentuated by how what is sacred is projected into the performative language of the Catholic Church and into its members, in particular, the clergy.

I argue, then, that the term “vulnerable adults” is inappropriate, first, because every adult can be—and in the reality of the clerical ecclesial structure we live in today—is vulnerable to sexual and non-sexual abuse. Second, it is inappropriate because it shifts the focus of responsibility of the abuse committed from the perpetrator to the victim. The message that “vulnerable adults” seems to suggest is “you have been abused because, even as an adult, you are vulnerable. The manipulation, exploitation, or objectification to which you have been subjected is your vulnerability’s fault.” Finally, to refer to “vulnerable adults” is inappropriate because it stigmatizes, like any attempt to categorize people into vulnerable groups or populations, and increases the risk of undue paternalism, by increasing people’s vulnerability to abuse.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen how universal human vulnerability and situational vulnerabilities can be defined in a new way which discontinues the myth of the self-sufficient individual autonomy of contemporary society. This way of understanding vulnerability entails an explicit ethical dimension: respect and solidarity in our shared vulnerability and the protection and promotion of the integrity of those who are in situations of special vulnerability.

Sexual abuse of minors has now been, for at least the past five decades, motive of incommensurable suffering, trauma, and treason for thousands of people throughout the world. It has also been, as some have said, the greatest ecclesial crisis since the Protestant Reformation. It has been an occasion of scandal and delegitimization of the Christian faith in civil

society. Much has been written, scientifically explored, and articulated in order to react and prevent ecclesial abuse.

Non-sexual abuse is neither a watered-down version of the more serious sexual abuse nor merely a prelude to it. Non-sexual abuse, given the current structure of the institutional Church, is sadly widespread and silenced, and its traces carry trauma, humiliation, pain, and contempt for the ungraspable subjectivity of every human being. These are neither mere authoritarian or narcissistic acts of a misunderstood authority nor are they exclusively perpetrated by “bad apples” within the ecclesial community. They manifest systematic dynamics that creep into our organizational structures, our ways of relating with others, and our perceptions of how to respond to what is invested as sacred, staining the institutional *ethos* and perpetuating violence and violations.

The Christian God, the Father of Jesus, is certainly a God in love with all that is human and, in particular, the beauty of human vulnerability, understood as we have been defining it. Hence, this inherent openness, although it exposes us to be wounded, makes solidarity, love, tenderness, and compassion possible. As a Church, whether ecclesial communities or hierarchical structures, we are failing when we are unable to watch over the integrity of every human being, recognizing their fragility, desires, needs and the sacred beauty of their pursuit for happiness, plenitude. When, in the most despicable ways, we abuse the particular and concrete situations of vulnerability in which women and men, children and young people, find themselves, we are betraying the covenant and mission with which God has made us partakers of the life of Jesus Christ, particularly present in each one of the victims and survivors.

It can be discussed, and indeed it is discussed philosophically,
if human beings enjoy a special dignity in the whole of nature.
It is disputed whether its preeminent place in the whole cosmos
is true or if it is a simple claim of fellow feeling,
but what does not enter the realm of discussion is its radical
vulnerability.

What unites us to human beings, to all human beings,
beyond our obvious differences, is vulnerability.²⁴



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²⁴ Francesc Torralba, *Ética del Cuidar: Fundamentos, contextos y problemas* (Madrid: Institut Borja de Bioètica—Fundación Mapfre Medicina, 2002), 247. My translation.

Chapter 3: 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

Dawn Eden Goldstein

“In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds.”¹ Those words of Pope Francis, from his first major interview as pope, bear witness to the priority that he has given in his pontificate to addressing suffering in its various guises. Moreover, both before and during his papacy, Francis has put forth a spirituality of suffering that can offer guidance to victim/survivors of sexual abuse and those who accompany them pastorally.

Francis has acknowledged that some of the ideas he presents in his spirituality of suffering are inspired by a fellow Jesuit. When he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, he told his biographers that John Navone, SJ's insights in *Triumph through Failure* concerning the patience of Christ led him to understand patience as a boundary experience, one that enables those who endure it to attain true maturity.² Also while archbishop,

¹ Fr. Antonio Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis by Father Antonio Spadaro,” September 21, 2013, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html.

² John Navone, SJ (1930–2016), was a professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio's comments concerning Navone's influence appear in Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, *Pope Francis: His Life in His Own Words*, trans. Laura Dail Literary Agency (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 2013), 71–72. The edition of Navone's book that Francis read was John Navone, *Teologia del Fallimento* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1988), the Italian-language translation of *Triumph through Failure: A Theology of the Cross* (Homebush, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 1984), which is itself an expanded edition of *A Theology of Failure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974). See Jorge Mario Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart* (New York: Crossroad, 2013), 297, n. 19, where Bergoglio cites the 1988 edition of *Teologia del Fallimento*.

Francis published a reflection, "The Failure of Jesus," in which he adapted ideas from *Triumph through Failure*, with attribution.³

Phrases, images, and concepts from *Triumph through Failure* likewise appear in Francis's papal teachings on the spiritual meaning of suffering. Although many of the similarities between the two authors' spiritualities may be attributed to their shared Ignatian patrimony, there nonetheless remain numerous passages in Francis's writings where he clearly seems to draw upon or develop ideas found in the book.

Here, I examine how Francis has used ideas from *Triumph through Failure* to develop a spirituality of suffering that can aid the Catholic Church's pastoral mission to those who live with the spiritual wounds of sexual abuse. First, I identify concepts from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola that Francis draws upon in his spirituality of suffering. Doing so will shed light upon the lens through which Francis reads Navone, who, like the pope, was formed in the Jesuit spiritual tradition. Then I outline major concepts of *Triumph through Failure* that Francis has integrated into his own spirituality of suffering. I conclude with a reflection on the significance that Navone's insights and Francis's development of them hold for me personally as a victim/survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

Ignatian Foundations of Francis's Spirituality of Suffering

Pope Francis's spirituality of suffering strongly emphasizes that every Christian needs to engage in purification of memory. He speaks of memory in terms that suggest a sacred space or, given that we choose what and how we remember, a space that should be sacred. On Francis's account, we are to offer our memory to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, so that the Father might make it a privileged place of encounter with Christ.

³ Bergoglio writes, "On this theme of the failure of Jesus, I have taken some ideas from chapter 3 of the work of John Navone, *Teologia del Fallimento*." Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 297, n. 19.

In his first major papal interview, Francis, speaking to *Civiltà Cattolica* editor Antonio Spadaro, SJ, drew attention to the role of memory within the Spiritual Exercises. He discussed the topic in answer to a question asking his preferred method of prayer.

Prayer for me is always a prayer full of memory, of recollection, even the memory of my own history. ... For me it is the memory of which St. Ignatius speaks in the First Week of the Exercises in the encounter with the merciful Christ crucified. And I ask myself: “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What should I do for Christ?” It is the memory of which Ignatius speaks in the “Contemplation for Experiencing Divine Love,” when he asks us to recall the gifts we have received.⁴

Francis then described how God, specifically God the Father, through the vehicle of memory (both God’s own and that of the faithful), reveals to the faithful their identity in Christ:

But above all, I also know that the Lord remembers me. I can forget about him, but I know that he never, ever forgets me. Memory has a fundamental role for the heart of a Jesuit: memory of grace, the memory mentioned in Deuteronomy, the memory of God’s works that are the basis of the covenant between God and the people. It is this memory that makes me his son and that makes me a father, too.⁵

In this way, the pope highlighted three aspects of the *Spiritual Exercises*, namely (1) the role of memory in facilitating an encounter with Christ, (2) the “encounter with the merciful Christ crucified” itself, and (3) the *Contemplatio ad amorem* (the Latin name of the “Contemplation for Experiencing Divine Love”).⁶ It is worth taking a moment to examine Francis’s understanding of these aspects more closely.

⁴ Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis.”

⁵ Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis.”

⁶ Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis.”

The Role of Memory

When Francis spoke to Spadaro of the role of memory in facilitating an encounter with Christ, he was expressing ideas that he had begun to develop many years earlier. In a 1978 address to a provincial congregation of the Society of Jesus in Argentina, the then Father Jorge Bergoglio, SJ, observed, “It is memory that provides the most radical grounding for a Jesuit’s heart. When St. Ignatius says that we should bring things to our memory [in the *Contemplatio ad amorem (Spiritual Exercises, no. 234)*], he is speaking to us about a retrieval of our history of grace.”⁷

With his next words, Bergoglio co-identified Ignatian remembrance with remembrance of the mercy of God:

And the graces, given our sinful condition, are always gifts of mercy. It is the awareness of being grounded in the paternal mercy of the Lord making us sons that grounds us as true Fathers. For me, this meaning is also there in Ignatius’s desire that we should be ‘familiar with God’: the Jesuit familiar with God can be son, brother, and father.⁸

We see therefore that, for Bergoglio, when Christian individuals, in prayer and meditation, make an act of Ignatian remembrance, that act enables them to recollect their personal history within the overarching context of divine mercy. In this way, they come to ground their self-understanding in their identity in Christ. Francis brought this understanding of memory into *Lumen Fidei* when he observed, “Self-knowledge is only possible when we share in a greater memory” (*Lumen Fidei*, no. 38).

The Encounter with the Crucified Christ

The examples of Ignatian prayer that Francis cites in Spadaro’s interview are effectively the bookends of the Spiritual Exercises: the encounter with Christ crucified (with the self-questioning that Francis mentions)

⁷ Jorge Mario Bergoglio, “Holding the Tensions,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 45, no. 3 (2013): 25.

⁸ Bergoglio, “Holding the Tensions,” 25.

transpires within the first meditation, and the *Contemplatio ad amorem* is the final meditation in Ignatius's manuscript.⁹ Together they form the spiritual framework within which the exercitant opens his mind and heart to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"Imagine Christ our Lord present before you on the Cross" (*Spiritual Exercises*, no. 53).¹⁰ Those words from the first meditation mark the first of many times in the *Spiritual Exercises* that Ignatius invites retreatants to picture themselves face-to-face with Jesus. One could even say that the entire program of the exercises is designed to enable participants to encounter Christ directly, in the present moment. Why, then does Francis, in discussing the "encounter with the merciful Christ crucified," speak of that meditation primarily in terms of calling to mind something that is past? Why does he call it a "prayer full of memory"?

In answering that question, it is helpful to consider another statement Francis made in Spadaro's interview, one that is relevant to his understanding of Ignatian remembrance as "a retrieval of our history of grace."¹¹ He said, "We must let God search and encounter us. Because God is first; God is always first and makes the first move."¹² Francis's emphasis on the primacy of God's action is characteristic of the Ignatian

⁹ Ignatius places the *Contemplatio* outside his delineation of the four-week structure of the exercises, a decision which led to disputations among early commentators regarding at what point during the four weeks it should be undertaken. Today, there is general agreement that it belongs in the final week of the exercises. See the note by George Ganss in Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 418; also Giles Cusson, *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988), 312–315.

¹⁰ All quotations from the *Spiritual Exercises* are taken from St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010).

¹¹ Bergoglio, "Holding the Tensions," 25.

¹² Spadaro, "Interview with Pope Francis." The pope has made this point on many occasions. See, for example, Ambrogetti and Rubin, *Pope Francis*, 41; Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 13; Silvina Premat, "The Attraction of the Cardinal," *Traces*, July 2001, archivio.traces-cl.com/Giu2001/argent.htm.

understanding of human love as a response to the divine initiative.¹³ What is significant for our purposes is that his writings and statements, both before and during his papacy, indicate that he connects this understanding with Ignatian remembrance. On his account, our encounter with God gives us the eyes to see how God has already been present throughout our lives. Hence, Francis said in a pre-papal reflection that although prayer includes remembrance of salvation history,

at the same time, prayer goes beyond history, for it sees in God's historical deeds an ongoing theme that offers a key for reading the present and a promise that opens toward the future As a result, when human flesh settles down to pray, it rescues memory: our flesh is remembrance. And the memory of the Church is precisely the memory of the suffering flesh of God, the remembrance of the Lord's Passion, the eucharistic prayer.¹⁴

Francis's own experience of the "memory of the suffering flesh of God" is strongly informed by a prayer from the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* that, although not written by Ignatius, has come to be identified with Ignatian spirituality: the *Anima Christi*. In his address at the Jesuit provincial congregation, Bergoglio observed that "in the *Anima Christi*, [Ignatius] places us in contact with the Lord's sanctifying body in such a way that we are hidden in his wounds and thus have our own wounds and sores healed."¹⁵ As archbishop and as pope, he would continue to incorporate the *Anima Christi* into his reflections.¹⁶

¹³ See, for example, Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 123.

¹⁴ Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 251.

¹⁵ Bergoglio, "Holding the Tensions," 26–27.

¹⁶ See, for example, Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 287, and Francis, "Papal Mass for the Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome," April 7, 2013, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130407_omelia-possesso-cattedra-laterano.html.

Contemplatio ad amorem (Contemplation for Experiencing Divine Love)

The *Contemplatio ad amorem* is a meditation that is entirely directed toward bringing the exercitant into greater gratitude toward God and therefore into greater love for him. Ignatius divides it into four points, each beginning with a contemplation of God as giver: (1) giver of all that the retreatant has personally received; (2) giver of creation itself and of life to all creatures; (3) giver of his own labor, working for the retreatant “in all creatures upon the face of the earth”; and (4) the giver of “all blessings and gifts” (Spiritual Exercises, nos. 234–237). In this way, Ignatius brings the exercitant to envision an ever-widening circle of thanksgiving, beginning with the personal and ending with the universal. It is surely for this reason that Francis cites this meditation as the example par excellence of Ignatian remembrance, “a retrieval of our history of grace,”¹⁷ as it unites personal history with salvation history.

Within each of the exercise’s points of contemplation, after engaging in the prescribed remembrance, the exercitant prays the prayer known after its first word in Latin as the *Suscipe*: “Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will.” The word *suscipe* is the present singular active imperative form of *suscipere*, meaning “to take, catch, take up, lift up, [or] receive.”¹⁸ Within the context of the prayer, it therefore denotes an offering of self that has Eucharistic connotations. (Indeed, the Eucharistic liturgy of Ignatius’s time employed a form of the word *suscipe* in the offertory; it also appears in the Latin text of the offertory today.)

Francis is highly attuned to the Eucharistic aspect of the *Suscipe*. Addressing his fellow Jesuits at the provincial congregation, he said that when we pray our own *Suscipe*, “Our devotion thus emerges from

¹⁷ Bergoglio, “Holding the Tensions,” 25.

¹⁸ T. Charlton Lewis, “Suscipio,” in *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (New York: American Book Company. 1890), www.perseus.tufts.edu.

thanksgiving, from Eucharist. We are following Jesus to the place where he has made a complete act of thanks to the Father who is in heaven.”¹⁹

The sacrifice that the exercitant makes begins, as we have seen, with his liberty, and then extends to his mental faculties, which Ignatius lists as memory, intellect, and will—the powers through which the human mind is an image of the Trinity, according to St. Augustine.²⁰ Francis, in a homily for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, observed that the foundations of this self-offering are intimately connected. He pointed to the day’s reading from Deuteronomy, when Moses reminds the Israelites how the Lord, after freeing them from slavery in Egypt, provided for them during the forty years when they were being led through the wilderness to the Promised Land: “The Lord your God ... fed you with manna, a food unknown to you” (Deuteronomy 8:2–3). In this way, Francis said,

The Scriptures urge the people to recall, to remember, to memorize, the entire walk through the desert, in times of famine and desperation. The command of Moses is to return to the basics, to the experience of total dependence on God, when survival was placed in his hands, so the people would understand that “man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).²¹

If we dream of foods other than the bread of life, Francis added, we are “like the Hebrews in the desert, who longed for the meat and onions they ate in Egypt, but forgot that they had eaten those meals at the table of slavery. In those moments of temptation, they had a memory, but a sick memory, a selective memory. A slave memory, not a free one.”²²

¹⁹ Bergoglio, “Holding the Tensions,” 27.

²⁰ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 10.11.

²¹ Pope Francis, “Homily at Mass on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi,” June 19, 2014, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140619_omelia-corpus-domini.html.

²² Francis, “Homily at Mass on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.”

The pope's words pose a special challenge to the listener whose personal history includes regrets or resentments. If we have been wounded by others or have endured other kinds of hardship, we may be tempted to self-pity, despair, or anger. How can we escape such thoughts, based as they are upon our past experiences? As Francis delivered the homily, he seemed to recognize this challenge, for he proceeded to offer a solution to it. He exhorted the faithful to choose to remember their encounter with the Father, who "tells us: 'I fed you with manna, which you did not know.'" "This is the task," he said, "to recover that memory," the memory that leads us to "our manna, through which the Lord gives himself to us."²³

The Influence of John Navone, SJ, upon Francis's Spirituality of Suffering

In the interview in which he credited Navone's *Triumph through Failure* with informing his understanding of Jesus's patience and his "failure," the then-Archbishop Bergoglio said he often used the expression "travel through patience." "By reaching the limit, by confronting the limit, patience is forged. Sometimes life forces us not to ['do'] but to 'suffer,' enduring—from the Greek *ypomeno*—our own limitations as well as the limitations of others."²⁴

The importance that Navone's book holds for Francis's understanding of patience extends to several other aspects of the pope's spirituality of suffering. In this section, I examine how Francis develops ideas from *Triumph through Failure* concerning three theological topics: (1) Jesus's "failure," (2) the salvific role of memory, and (3) the reality of the Resurrection.

²³ Francis, "Homily at Mass on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi."

²⁴ Ambrogetti and Rubin, *Pope Francis*, 72, translation modified according to the original Spanish. The English edition translates Bergoglio's "hacer" as "make." I have chosen "do." See Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, *El Jesuita: Conversaciones con el cardenal Jorge Bergoglio, sj.* (Buenos Aires: Vergara, 2010), 69.

Jesus's "Failure"

"Failure" in Navone's theology comprises a synecdoche for all the effects of the physical and moral evil, *malum culpae* and *malum poenae*, that result from human finitude.²⁵ Thus, in referring to Jesus's Passion and death as his "failure," Navone emphasizes that Jesus, through his redemptive act, "has embraced and elevated human finitude," complete with its negative consequences.²⁶ What this means for the human person is that

failure, whether culpable or inculpable, can always be redeemed into a kind of *felix culpa* through the transforming power of love. This is the lesson of the Cross, where the very symbol of failure and death has been transformed into a symbol of love and life. Love overcomes failure by reversing its meaning, by giving it a new, positive, redeeming meaning that becomes the message and good news of the disciples of Jesus.²⁷

Navone's account of the Cross giving a "new, positive, redeeming meaning" to suffering evokes the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22, which says of Christ, "By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning."

Pope Francis in his first message for the World Day of the Sick appeared to draw from both the Council and Navone, writing,

The incarnate Son of God did not remove illness and suffering from human experience but by taking them upon himself he transformed them and gave them new meaning. New meaning because they no longer

²⁵ For example, the first line of chapter 1 of *Triumph through Failure: A Theology of the Cross* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014): 9, is "Failure, whether culpable or non-culpable, is a universal human experience." Nine other times in the book, Navone speaks of failure in terms that encompass both culpable and non-culpable failure. See Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 9, 10, 14, 21, 24, 32, 53, 88, 103.

²⁶ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 28.

²⁷ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 21–22.

have the last word which, instead, is new and abundant life; transformed them, because in union with Christ they need no longer be negative but positive.²⁸

Another point of *Triumph through Failure* that Francis appears to have absorbed is Navone's account of the Father's intervention at the point of Jesus's "failure." In referring to "the transforming power of love"²⁹ that gives meaning to suffering, Navone sought to draw readers to reflect upon the Father's acceptance of Jesus's self-gift. He observed, "Failure is an invitation and a challenge to love. It is a cry for love epitomized by Jesus' agonized question: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"³⁰ Hence, he wrote, "the resurrection of Jesus is the light after the darkness of failure; it is the Father's loving response to the cry of Jesus on Calvary."³¹

Francis likewise views the Resurrection as the Father's answer to Jesus's call from the depths. In a 2014 general audience, he stated, "When all seems lost, ... it is then that God intervenes with the power of his Resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus is not the happy ending to a nice story, it is not the 'happy end' of a film; rather, it is God the Father's intervention there where human hope is shattered."³² By contrasting God's intervention with a "happy end," the pope emphasizes that Jesus's Resurrection is not the end. Rather, the Resurrection shows what God intends to do through Jesus for each of us—if we, like Jesus, are willing to endure utter humiliation, failure, and death for God's greater glory.

Thus, on Francis's account, our times of greatest weakness become privileged opportunities for sequela Christi. "When at certain moments in life we fail to find any way out of our difficulties," he said in a general

²⁸ Pope Francis, "Message for the Twenty-Second World Day of the Sick," December 6, 2013, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco_20131206_giornata-malato.html.

²⁹ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 21–22.

³⁰ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 24.

³¹ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 24.

³² Pope Francis, "General Audience," April 16, 2014, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140416_udienza-generale.html.

audience, “. . . it is the moment of our total humiliation and despoliation, the hour in which we experience that we are frail and are sinners. It is precisely then, at that moment, [when] we must not deny our failure but rather open ourselves trustingly to hope in God, as Jesus did.”³³

The Salvific Role of Memory

In a chapter titled “The Remembering that Transcends Failure,” Navone asserted that “remembering is essential to the people of God.”³⁴ He called attention to the multivalent action of divine memory: “God remembers certain persons and shows them his grace and mercy (Genesis 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Exodus 32:13; 1 Samuel 1:11, 19; 25:31). His remembering is an efficacious and creative event, which enables man to remember God.”³⁵ Through the Holy Spirit, Navone wrote, memory becomes the field of action for an encounter with Christ. “Christ is really present among the people of God because they are being reminded of him by his Holy Spirit, who calls their attention to his presence.”³⁶ To illuminate this salvific role of remembrance, Navone examined references to memory in the Old and New Testament. He observed that, “throughout the Old Testament, God, like Moses, David, and Nehemiah, encourages Israel to remember Israel’s future was promising on the condition that she remembered a path of promises.”³⁷

Moving on to the Gospels, Navone wrote that “the Old Testament patterns of remembering continue into the New Testament.”³⁸ Among the examples he cited was that of the women’s encounter with the angel at Jesus’s tomb:

³³ Francis, “General Audience.”

³⁴ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 144.

³⁵ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 199, n. 1.

³⁶ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 147, emphasis in original.

³⁷ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 150–151.

³⁸ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 152.

In the Lucan resurrection narrative, faith in the risen Lord is linked with the obligation to remember his words, when the angel commands: “Remember how he told you when he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful man and be crucified, and on the third day rise” (Luke 24:6). The women who had come to Christ’s tomb obey the command: “And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest” (Luke 24:8–9).³⁹

Thus, Navone wrote, “Luke recognizes the Lord’s remembering as the grace of salvation enabling the sinner’s entrance into the kingdom of God, as well as the Christian’s obligation to remember the words of the Lord, as a prerequisite for communicating and participating in the mystery of the resurrection.”⁴⁰

Pope Francis, commenting upon the same scripture passage in an Easter Vigil homily, arrived at a similar conclusion concerning the salvific role of memory. The women at the tomb, he said,

are asked to remember their encounter with Jesus, to remember his words, his actions, his life; and it is precisely this loving remembrance of their experience with the Master that enables the women to master their fear and to bring the message of the Resurrection to the Apostles and all the others.⁴¹

The Reality of the Resurrection

We have seen that Catholic teaching concerning Jesus’s salvific humanity and the reality of his Resurrection are important for Francis’s theology of suffering and redemption because they direct the Christian toward imitation of Christ. It is therefore significant that the chapter of *Triumph*

³⁹ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 152–153, emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 153.

⁴¹ Francis, “Easter Vigil Homily,” March 30, 2013, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130330_veglia-pasquale.html.

through Failure that Francis acknowledged as a source for his own reflections,⁴² “Jesus’ Response to Failure,” treats those topics specifically.

In that chapter, Navone wrote, “The theology of failure counteracts the tendency to minimize the humanity and the historical condition of Jesus.”⁴³ He went on to assert that this tendency, which was manifest to an extreme degree in the Docetist heresy, remains with us:

In its most subtle forms, Christians whose belief is otherwise orthodox hesitate to attribute to Jesus those aspects of the human which in more refined societies are thought to be gross or unseemly That the historical Jesus died a failure and that his death was that of a publicly shamed and disgraced scoundrel are elements of history which the neo-Docetists shy away from.⁴⁴

Bergoglio, in “The Failure of Jesus,” drew upon Navone’s points as he wrote,

We need to “touch” the flesh of Jesus. Our certain sense of “politeness” may tempt us to avoid what seems “scandalous,” but in so doing we would be denying the role of Jesus’ flesh in his failure. We would simply be adopting a form of the enlightened neo-Docetism that is found so often these days among our ecclesiastical elites, our agnostic leftists and our unbelieving rightists.⁴⁵

Bergoglio went on to reinforce his critique of “enlightened neo-Docetism” by asserting that the “ecclesiastical elites” exclude themselves from Jesus’s call to practice the Beatitudes, which refer mostly to “the failures that humble folk experience”; upon hearing Jesus’s message, “they turn up their

⁴² Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 297, n. 19.

⁴³ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 44.

⁴⁴ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 44.

⁴⁵ Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 283, punctuation modified to match that of the Spanish edition (the English edition contains a comma after “leftists”). See Jorge M. Bergoglio, *Mente abierta, corazón creyente* (Madrid: Editorial Claretiana, 2013), 227.

noses at the thought of failure and are scandalized.”⁴⁶ Above all, the archbishop said,

They are neo-Docetists because they basically do not believe that Jesus the Christ is bodily alive, is truly risen. At most, they accept a spiritualist idea of resurrection, something closer to what Bultmann proposed, and they do so simply because they refuse to accept the reality of Christ’s failure and so deny his flesh.⁴⁷

In other words, on Bergoglio’s account, to deny the reality of Christ’s “failure”—i.e., his “complete humiliation”⁴⁸—is to deny his Resurrection.

The parallels between Navone’s reflections concerning “neo-Docetists” and those already noted by Bergoglio are readily apparent. Both identify the modern exponents of the heresy with Christian elites who are scandalized by Jesus’s “failure.” There is, however, a subtle difference of emphasis. Whereas Navone seeks to counter “the tendency to minimize the humanity and the historical condition of Jesus,”⁴⁹ Bergoglio has a more specific aim: he wishes to identify the error of those who “basically do not believe that Jesus the Christ is bodily alive, is truly risen.”⁵⁰

At the same time, the substance of Bergoglio’s core message—without Jesus’s “failure,” there can be no resurrection—is likewise central to Navone’s reflections in “Jesus’ Response to Failure,” as it provides the grounds for Navone’s argument that eschatological hope does not conflict with the Church’s healing mission but rather enables it. Navone wrote, “the theology of failure does not encourage fatalism, passivity, indifference to the world; rather it affirms that the man who cannot freely lay down his life is one whose ideals and values are already compromised.”⁵¹ Hence, Navone wrote,

⁴⁶ Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 283.

⁴⁷ Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 283.

⁴⁸ Francis, “General Audience.”

⁴⁹ Francis, “General Audience.”

⁵⁰ Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 283.

⁵¹ Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 43.

The theology of failure, based upon the rediscovery of Christ's historical failure (the cross) and trust in a divine solution (the resurrection), has a resonance with today's revolutionary ferment throughout the world, with the longing for a new society based on social justice and peace Such a theology must remind us that there is no authentic Christianity without the willingness to risk failure and that to attempt to insulate ourselves from the possibility of failure is a betrayal of the Christian spirit, so that our attitude toward failure measures the degree of our self-transcendence in Christ.⁵²

The thrust of Navone's argument, and even some of his phrasing ("divine solution," "revolutionary ferment") is closely echoed by Bergoglio in a passage of "The Failure of Jesus":

It is there on the cross that Jesus feels the full force of failure and evil, and it is there that he transcends them In the crucified Jesus, we see the culmination of all those ancient failures that we read of in the Old Testament in particular times and places Now only one solution remains: the divine solution, which in this case is resurrection as revolutionary ferment. This means that Christians today must incorporate into their daily lives the conviction that Jesus Christ is fully alive and walking in our midst.⁵³

Given that Navone wrote in English, Bergoglio read him in an Italian translation and summarized him in a reflection composed in Spanish, and the Spanish reflection was then translated into the English that we now have before us, the visible similarity between Bergoglio's words and *Triumph through Failure* testifies to the depth of Navone's influence upon his thought.

⁵² Navone, *Triumph through Failure*, 43–44.

⁵³ Bergoglio, *Open Mind, Faithful Heart*, 284.

Concluding Observations

From a pastoral standpoint, Navone's account of Jesus's "failure" accomplishes three things. First, in presenting the drama of redemption and the human person's response, it places the focus upon the gratuity of divine mercy rather than upon the human person's moral obligation. Second, it challenges the human person to an *imitatio Christi* that necessarily entails death to self and therefore death to sin: the road to Resurrection for each Christian must pass through the "failure" of the Cross. Third—and this, I believe, is key for Francis—once the Christian sufferer is brought to understand *malum culpae* and *malum poenae* as two complementary dimensions of the state of subjection from which Jesus redeemed humankind, he or she is able to experience psychological and spiritual healing on a new level.

Psychological and spiritual pain comes from feeling one's self to be wounded by evil. Out of this pain come classic questions of theodicy like "why do bad things happen to good people" and "why do children suffer." Navone's account of Jesus's "failure," as adapted by Francis, offers a positive counter to these questions because it asserts that God transforms us, re-creates us, to the extent that we have participated in Jesus's "failure." On this understanding, our pain bears the new meaning of which the Second Vatican Council speaks in *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22: whatever evil we have suffered is our share in Christ's redemption of the world.

An objection could be raised to this from readers who, like me, are victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse: is not Francis's spirituality of suffering, as I have articulated it here, simply a repackaging of the old admonition to "offer it up"? I grant that, in a certain sense, it is, in that it invites identification of one's own sufferings with those of Christ. But there the similarity ends. For, whereas the "offer it up" approach emphasized the passive aspect of suffering (sometimes in ways that were

profoundly harmful),⁵⁴ Francis's spirituality of suffering—and its precedents in Ignatius, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22, and Navone—returns personal agency to the sufferer.

I cannot erase the wounds that I bear from the abuses I suffered. But I can, with the aid of God's grace, re-conceive my wounds so that the power of my abuser no longer dwells in them. God enables me to participate in my own re-creation, giving me the strength to appreciate my weaknesses as opportunities for divine power to show forth in me. Then, in the words of Francis,

Our wounds begin to be strengths when we discover by grace that the true enigma is no longer “why?” but “for whom?”; for whom did this happen to me? In view of what result did God mold me throughout my history? Here everything is overturned; everything becomes precious; everything becomes constructive. How can my even sad and painful experience become, in the light of love, a source of salvation for others—for whom?⁵⁵



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⁵⁴ See Robert Orsi, “Mildred, Is It Fun to Be a Cripple? The Culture of Suffering in Mid-Twentieth Century American Catholicism,” in *Between Heaven and Earth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 19–47.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, “General Audience,” September 19, 2018, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/co/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180919_udienza-generale.html.

Chapter 4: Sexual Scandals in the Catholic Church: The Urgency of Building a New Formative Culture

Ronaldo Zacharias

Sexual scandals in the Church have changed some of the behaviors of some clergy, religious, seminarians, and church authorities. There are others who may have become more aware of the requirements of their vocation in the area of sexuality and act in accord with this awareness. There may be others still who have changed their way of interacting with others because of fear of unwanted consequences, like punishment, suspension, scandal, imprisonment, or fear of community control, when a community becomes aware of its role and its responsibility to protect the young and vulnerable adults.

However, it is premature to say that these changes are a result of greater maturity in individuals or that they are the result of substantial shifts in the formative process. There has not been enough time for any changes to have had a significant impact. A substantial change requires conversion of mentality and the building of a new culture. Without a strong communal effort to build a new formative culture, the needed changes run the risk of being only cosmetic. They will show that the ecclesial community is sensitive to the issue of sexual abuse, but they will not create a real cultural change.¹ Although being more and more rigid and clear about the “rules” and stressing Magisterial orientations may strengthen external conformity, these approaches will not be effective in the long run, especially from a preventive perspective, if there is no true conversion.

¹ See the important works of Amedeo Cencini, *È cambiato qualcosa? La Chiesa dopo gli scandali sessuali* (Bologna: EDB, 2015); Daniel Portillo Trevizo, ed., *Teología y prevención. Estudio sobre los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia* (Maliño, Cantabria: Sal Terrae, 2020); Daniel Portillo Trevizo, ed., *Formación y prevención. La prevención de los abusos sexuales en los procesos formativos de la Iglesia* (Boadilla del Monte, Madrid: PPC, 2019).

My interest in this essay, rather than taking into consideration the sexual scandals in themselves, is to turn my attention to the formative process of clergy and religious. I address ten elements of the formation process that cannot continue to be ignored if we, as Church, really want to effectively face the wounds in the Church caused by the sexual abuse of the vulnerable by some clergy. Without systemic change in our formation to healthy sexuality in the seminaries, the wounds caused by representatives of the church will deepen and the hurt continue.²

Some Essential Elements to Consider³

The sexual scandals in the Church unveiled the necessity of considering the initial and ongoing process of clergy and religious formation in what one needs to do to integrate one's sexuality in a project of life.⁴ At the same time that such an important issue cannot be ignored, misconceptions about it have led the Church all over the world to face serious negative

² See, for example, Marco Marzano, *La casta dei casti. I preti, il sesso, l'amore* (Milano: Bompiani, 2021).

³ See the work of Alfredo César da Veiga and Ronaldo Zacharias, ed., *Igreja e escândalos sexuais. Por uma nova cultura formativa* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2019). Special attention should be given to the chapter "Equívocos no processo formativo" (209–252), which forms the basis of the proposals given here. This work is intended to assist those who have responsibility for vocation discernment and the formative process within the Church. Although the presbyterate and religious communities have this responsibility, those who work more directly with young people in formation need to go beyond establishing a merely preventive culture and initiate a new formative culture. Concretely, this will require integrating sexuality and chastity, celibacy and quality of relationships, eros and agape and, especially, formation of the heart for ministerial life into the curriculum of the formation communities.

⁴ See, for example, Irma Patricia Espinosa Hernández, "La integración de la afectividad y de la sexualidad en la formación vocacional para la prevención del abuso sexual," in *Formación y prevención. La prevención de los abusos sexuales en los procesos formativos de la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Boadilla del Monte, Madrid: PPC, 2019), 135–149; Jose Parappully and Jose Kuttianimattathil, ed., *Psychosexual Integration & Celibate Maturity: Handbook for Religious and Priestly Formation* (Bangalore: Salesian Psychological Association/South Asian Formation Commission of the Salesians, 2012); Paolo Gambini, Mario O. Llanos and Giuseppe M. Roggia, *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate* (Bologna: EDB, 2017).

consequences. Because of this, such issues, if properly taken into consideration, could pave the way for promoting a new culture of preventing and dealing with sexual scandals in the Church, a new formative culture. I note the following ten essential elements of this work.

First, clergy and religious cannot ignore that they are sexual people. Sexuality is a constitutive dimension of human personhood, which includes clergy and religious.⁵ It characterizes people's whole way of being, the way of manifesting and communicating themselves to others. Sexuality also characterizes people's way of feeling, expressing, and embodying their human love.⁶ It is the true way of being from one's personality.⁷ Being a "fundamental component of personality,"⁸ we cannot ignore sexuality in the formative process. Clergy and religious exist "in flesh" as men and women. They are persons who are deeply marked by their own sexuality. They express who they are and establish relationships with others from their sexual reality, as men and women. There is no other way of existing and fulfilling themselves as persons but as sexual persons. Therefore, in embracing priestly celibacy or a vow of chastity as a path for personal realization, clergy and religious must understand that this choice does not mean the denial of their own sexuality or reducing it to something accidental or secondary in their life. On the contrary, they must embrace and receive their sexuality as a gift they possess as well as one that they give as a gift for others. Because human sexuality is "the place" from which they relate to others, to the world and to God, it is "called" to inspire them to

⁵ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2008).

⁶ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19831101_sexual-education_en.html.

⁷ Giuseppe Mariano Roggia, "Cammino spirituale e maturazione affettivo-sessuale," in *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate*, ed. P. Gambini and M.O. Llanos and G.M. Roggia (Bologna: EDB, 2017), 107. All translations are those of the author.

⁸ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*.

go beyond themselves to be open to their surrounding reality. In this process, they find everything as a possibility for a meaningful relationship. Sexuality is both a high gift and a high form of fragility in the life of human beings. If clergy and religious do not know how to integrate their sexuality into a project of life that provides meaning, that same sexuality can become a “place” of dehumanized experiences of the self and with the other.⁹ Instead of being a language of love, fidelity, reciprocity, openness, and self-donation, sexuality can signify unlove, infidelity, abuse, possessiveness, exploitation, and violence. This can happen regardless of our personal choice for priestly celibacy or consecrated life.

Second, clergy and religious cannot ignore that sexual orientation is part of a person’s identity. Clergy and religious are men and women who love people as hetero and homosexuals. Regarding sexual desire, they do not choose to whom they feel attracted. They all discover their own attraction within a process of sexual development and maturing. When attraction is constitutive, that is, exclusive or predominant,¹⁰ it is also part of their identity. Therefore, this attraction must be accepted if it is to be integrated into a personal existence. Sexual orientation is characterized as a concrete way that they embody love. Because of this, it can be defined as an anthropological condition,¹¹ a way of being and loving, whether or not it entails a sexual relationship with someone. While sexual orientation, when constitutive, does not depend on personal choice, the way to satisfy this desire is part of one’s freedom. Thus, the person is the one responsible

⁹ See, for example, Dysmas de Lassus, *Schiacciare l’anima. Gli abusi spirituali nella vita religiosa* (Bologna: EDB, 2021).

¹⁰ It is important to keep in mind that there are sexual attractions—both heterosexual and homosexual—that are best characterized as being momentary, occasional, peripheral. Such attractions are not part of a person’s identity; rather, they are dependent upon stages of development, the contexts in which one lives, the experiences one has had and several other factors. Since they are not constitutive of one’s identity, they are conditioned more by lived experiences than by a certain way of being. See Ronaldo Zacharias, “Orientação afetivo-sexual. Para além da cultura do ‘não pergunte, não diga’,” in *Formação: desafios morais*, ed. J.A. Trasferetti, M.I.C. Millen, and R. Zacharias (São Paulo: Paulus, 2018), 201–233.

¹¹ Marciano Vidal, *Ética da sexualidade* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2017), 119.

for his/her decisions. Clergy and religious cannot forget that they choose priestly celibacy or consecrated life as persons who, with regard to desire, are hetero or homosexuals. This awareness means recognizing that the process of integration of sexuality is always dependent on self-acceptance of their own identity and the satisfaction of their own desire. Priestly celibacy and a vow of chastity do not annul any desire but require that such a desire be integrated, whether hetero or homosexual, into a personal project of life.¹²

Third, clergy and religious cannot ignore the risk of identifying continence and chastity as the same thing. While continence means abstinence from sex for an experience of pleasure, chastity is “the successful integration of sexuality within the person” (*Catechism*, no. 2337). In other words, chastity means the integration of sexuality in one’s own project of life. Certainly, a person can be abstinent without being chaste, that is he/she can abstain from sex without integrating his/her own sexuality. Clergy and religious must also have in mind that, although sexual abstinence limits and disciplines a determined expression of sexual desire—that is, an expression through genital intimacy—this abstinence is unable to limit or discipline all expressions of this desire.¹³ Hence, it is a huge and tragic mistake to believe that sexual abstinence leads to the control of sexual desire. The tension between the satisfaction of the desire and social regulations are part of the human condition. When sexual abstinence is not a personal commitment, but an external imposition, desire does not find a

¹² Zacharias, “Orientação afetivo-sexual. Para além da cultura do ‘não pergunte, não diga,’” 213.

¹³ It is worth considering the indicators of the sexual integration process as described by Milena Stevani, “Il processo di maturazione a livello affettivo e sessuale,” in *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate*, ed. P. Gambini and M.O. Llanos and G.M. Roggia (Bologna: EDB, 2017), 45–76, and the affective maturity indicators described by Paolo Gambini and Carla de Nitto, “Affettività, sessualità e vita di relazione,” in *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate*, 77–101.

satisfactory resolution, and dealing with so powerful an energy is not a matter that depends solely on the will of the person.¹⁴

Fourth, clergy and religious cannot ignore that priestly celibacy and consecrated life are not options for those who simply “want” them. This is because we are dealing with choices—choosing celibacy or living the vow of chastity—that require a certain objective condition to animate the relevant choice. Therefore, these options are for those who “can,” in the sense of renouncing to have a life partner, renouncing sex for pleasure, and renouncing the possibility of being a biological parent.¹⁵ These options are not understood only by reason or will. They originated in a divine call to which the answer demands an honest recognition of this call and, with it, a gift that enables these called individuals to provide a positive response. Clergy and religious must understand that such options are not easily sublimated. The process of sublimation, characterized by the capacity of re-orienting and re-meaning the desire,¹⁶ does not only depend on the will but also on the “capacity” to do so.¹⁷ In this sense, the formative process

¹⁴ See the important works of Ana Cristina Canosa, “Realização sexual. Para além da perversão e da tolice,” in *Formação. Desafios morais 2*, ed. J.A. Trasferetti, M.I.C. Millen and R. Zacharias (São Paulo: Paulus, 2020), 301–315; Luiz Augusto de Mattos, “Da duplicidade à integração da sexualidade. Formar para relacionamentos de qualidade,” in *Formação: desafios morais*, ed. J.A. Trasferetti, M.I.C. Millen, and R. Zacharias (São Paulo: Paulus, 2018), 151–171.

¹⁵ William C. Castilho Pereira, “Por uma compreensão da pessoa e da vivência do celibato,” in *O dom do celibato na vida e na missão da Igreja*, ed. Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2012), 129.

¹⁶ As Juan María Uriarte reminds us, “sublimation is not the transformation of genital impulses into another reality. There is no alchemy process that transforms genital impulses into socially acceptable or valid behaviors.” Sublimation is best understood as “a psychic process through which this precious potential [the sexual impulse] separates itself from its genital pole and is oriented towards other non-genital objects and ends, which are socially positive and precious. ... More than a transformation process, it is a transference process.” Juan María Uriarte, *O celibato. Apontamentos antropológicos, espirituais e pedagógicos* (Prior Velho: Paulinas, 2018), 55–56.

¹⁷ Pereira, “Por uma compreensão da pessoa e da vivência do celibato,” 134, 137. The following article also merits consideration: Mario O. Llanos and Stefano Tognacci, “Elementi antropologici dell’affettività e sessualità,” in *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per*

should help clergy and religious choose what is more meaningful for each of them, focusing much less on what must be renounced. The love of a celibate person “will always be the love of a poor and weak person, in which its expression is limited by his previous commitment.”¹⁸ In other words, the formative process must be a way to educate to love as a “poor” person, that is, recognizing that it is not possible to give to the other what was definitively given to God and accepting the sacrifice of privation from some sexual expressions of love.

Fifth, clergy and religious cannot ignore the need to recognize their own desire is an “essential condition for a responsible ministerial leadership.”¹⁹ This recognition presupposes sensitivity towards their own feelings, needs, and desires, which must be realized, accepted, and interpreted in order to be integrated. A formative proposal that does not contemplate this reality will be a fragile proposal, exposing both candidates to the priesthood or to religious life and those who will be part of their journey to great risk. There is no standardized formation, a “one size fits all” formation in matters of emotions and chastity. It would be a great mistake if clergy and religious believe that, by simply knowing the orientations from the Magisterium, they would be able to know what to do and how to deal with their own desires and fantasies. Unfortunately, some clergy and religious easily tend to idealize and spiritualize this issue, and, in so doing, find themselves with no reference point to make the more appropriate choices according to their project of life. Consequently, they will generate a negative sense of loneliness and, without realizing it, may start creating a series of

seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate, ed. P. Gambini and M.O. Llanos and G.M. Roggia (Bologna: EDB, 2017), 19–28.

¹⁸ Eduardo López Azpitarte, *Ética da sexualidade e do matrimônio* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1997), 427.

¹⁹ Cristina L.H. Traina, “Erotic Attunement: Rethinking Love Across Pastoral Power Gradients,” in *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*, ed. P.B. Jung and D.W. Stephens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 44.

circumstances that lead to the origin of behaviors that are part of the crises we are now facing as Church.²⁰

Sixth, clergy and religious cannot ignore the fact that it is not possible to separate the way of living their sexuality from their personal maturity. Sexual maturity is part of human maturity. This maturity is related to the fundamental consistency between who a person is and what they profess to be as a result of the integration between autonomous identity and mutual interdependency. Thus, their maturity becomes externally evident in their capacity to be faithful to the commitments and duties that they have freely taken on. As part of human maturity, sexual maturity is more than a state to be achieved. Rather, it should be understood as a process to be embodied. It is never healthy when obsessively pursued.²¹ This process must express the integration of clergy and religious sexuality into a project of life and the meaning that sexuality has within each person's own personality. This will lead to a coherent relationship between being and living, generating openness of the self which then becomes a gift they give to the other. This demands concrete attitudes to prevent a certain lifestyle that favors narcissistic attraction and self-absorption, or, in other words, self-referentiality.²² Clergy and religious need to educate themselves and

²⁰ Ronaldo Zacharias, "De uma crise sem precedentes aos precedentes de muitas crises. A urgência de uma nova compreensão da sexualidade," in *Francisco. Renasce a esperança*, ed. J.D. Passos and A.M.L. Soares (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2013), 62.

²¹ See López Azpitarte, *Ética da sexualidade e do matrimônio* (Brasil: Paulus Editora, 1997), 421–423; *Catechism*, no. 2342. Francisco J. Insa Gómez provides a helpful description of the obsessive-perfectionist personality and proposes a set of guidelines for formators. Francisco Javier Insa Gómez, "Dependência afetiva e perfeccionismo: uma proposta a partir da teoria do apego," in *Amar e ensinar a amar. A formação da afetividade nos candidatos ao sacerdócio*, ed. F.J. Insa Gómez (São Paulo: Cultor de Livros, 2019), 101–122.

²² According to Pope Francis, being an authentic missionary disciple means assuming discipleship as a constant imperative calling-replying in one's life. It is the most effective way to avoid self-absorption and to see oneself as a self-transcending subject, a subject compelled towards encounter with others, towards the existential, social and geographical peripheries of life. See Pope Francis, "Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting," www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html.

others in a way of being that helps them relate to others with openness, sharing, dialogue, respect, forgiveness, and reciprocity: “Sexuality and the way of embodying it are a thermometer of a person’s maturity.”²³

Seventh, clergy and religious cannot ignore the fact that not all cases of sexual abuse result from pathologies that were not previously identified. Although previous identification of a pathology during the formation process can happen, they need to understand that many instances of abuse “are a final consequence of a series of sexual and affective compensations ... of a celibate life that became mediocre: the border between mediocrity and perversion is less clear than we want to believe.”²⁴ In addition, they need to be aware that self-eroticism cannot be reduced to a physical issue, that is, the manipulation of genitals for pleasure. Little by little, clergy and religious can get used to an egocentric and narcissist lifestyle in which they focus only on themselves to the exclusion of others. Instead of a lifestyle that opens new windows, they surround themselves with mirrors that reflect only what they want to see.²⁵ A behavior can be self-erotic even when someone does not touch his/her genitals. “A person might think of his life from a self-erotic lens, that is, from what offers immediate pleasure and gratification, what makes her feel good. Consequently, the horizon and aspirations of a person are reduced to this gratification, without including the ‘other’ as the other at the center of his own life.”²⁶ It is not

²³ Cencini, *È cambiato qualcosa?*, 111. See also José Maria Recondo, *Imparare ad amare da pastori. Eros e ágape nella vita del prete* (Bologna, EDB, 2017), 29.

²⁴ Cencini, *È cambiato qualcosa?*, 24. Although I will refer to the institutional behavior that pathologizes pastoral action, it is worth considering the excellent reflection proposed by Daniel Portillo Trevizo, “Iglesia y prevención. Hacia una teología de la prevención,” in *Teología y prevención. Estudio sobre los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Maliaño, Cantabria: Sal Terrae, 2020), 9–35.

²⁵ Recondo, *Imparare ad amare da pastori*, 50.

²⁶ Recondo, *Imparare ad amare da pastori*, 28. Recondo offers an excellent approach to understanding some forms—intellectual, spiritual, liturgical and pastoral—in which autoeroticism manifests itself in priestly and consecrated life. See also Amedeo Cencini, *Quando a carne é fraca. O discernimento vocacional diante da imaturidade e das patologias do desenvolvimento afetivo-sexual* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2007); Eliana Massih, “Transtornos psicoafetivos na vivência da sexualidade. Uma interlocução com a formação para a vida

difficult to understand that when someone lives in a self-erotic way, the door to abusing others is easily opened.

Eighth, clergy and religious cannot ignore that a vocation is constantly given. The choice for a priestly or consecrated life should be understood as a personal choice “for being,”²⁷ an option for transcending themselves and abandoning their egoistic attitude to open their lives to God, to reality, and to others through love. God’s call and challenges for all of us occur in an ongoing dialogical perspective, in which we all can affirm that “vocation is constantly given.”²⁸ In other words, “as a life option, vocation ... supposes an experience of exodus of the self: departure from a ‘self-centered-I’ to receive an ‘I-called’ by God.”²⁹ This means that God’s fidelity both precedes and sustains an individual’s response to the divine calling. Only the perception and conviction of this reality can lead clergy and religious to a proper consciousness of the moral challenges of their vocation. As a result, this consciousness generates the care that they need for having their own identity defined or redefined from an “I” constantly called by the will of the Father, constantly identified by the person of the Son, and constantly moved by an action-force coming from the Spirit. Accordingly, this perspective implies that the formative process acknowledges that clergy and religious must understand their vocation as an ongoing *challenge*. One of the fundamental criteria for their discernment is not simply focusing on whether they *do or do not have* a vocation but rather that they are able *to live as a called person*.

Ninth, clergy and religious cannot ignore that a choice for priestly celibacy or for consecrated life fundamentally presupposes a desire for a meaningful relationship with God and others. This choice cannot be made

religiosa consagrada e sacerdotal,” in *Formação: desafios morais*, ed. J.A. Trasferetti and M.I.C. Millen and R. Zacharias (São Paulo: Paulus, 2018), 235–258.

²⁷ Judith A. Merkle, *O compromisso da escolha. A vida religiosa nos dias atuais* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2007), 46.

²⁸ Merkle, *O compromisso da escolha*, 48.

²⁹ Carlos Palácio, “Luzes e sombras da vida religiosa consagrada nos dias de hoje,” *Convergência* 444 (2011): 433.

simply after a consideration between the pros and cons of the choice. As this choice is a vocational answer to an eminently ministerial call, this choice is only able to sustain and strengthen authentic vocational motivations if it is grounded in a loving relationship with God and embodied as the expression of this relationship. In other words, the experience of a loving relationship with God as the one who calls challenges clergy and religious to embody this call in a meaningful relationship with others.³⁰ Ultimately, God calls them to serve those in need. The sexual scandals are telling us that we are all, with no exceptions, vessels of clay, and, because of this, we cannot follow Jesus without a radical conversion of mind and heart. The fact of publicly professing a specific lifestyle does not free someone from being inconsistent and hypocritical, especially if he/she knew that he/she could not live according to this lifestyle, or did not want to be faithful to the values professed. Because we all are vessels made of clay, our treasure is permanently at risk. It means that we all need to make a decision of caring for the treasure and for the vessels. The best way of caring for both is to remain united to the true vine in order to produce good fruit (John 15: 5). Hence, we can affirm that “a disciple is not unfaithful when and because he/she does something wrong, but when he/she does not produce [good] fruits: it is the infertility that reveals the infidelity.”³¹

Tenth, clergy and religious cannot ignore that, at the same time they are the result of some ecclesiopathologies, they also generate and sustain them when they assume elitist mentalities or structural clericalism. In this context, “ecclesiopathologies” mean “all anomalous dynamics that, within the ecclesial ambiance, foster a culture of abuse and trigger possible inappropriate sexual behavior.”³² The term makes clear the institutional

³⁰ See the important work of Luis Manuel Ali Herrera, “El ecosistema del celibato sacerdotal,” in *Teología y prevención. Estudio sobre los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Maliaño, Cantabria: Sal Terrae, 2020), 173–203.

³¹ Pascual Chávez Villanueva, “Eu sou a videira, vós os ramos,” and “A vocação a permanecer sempre unidos a Jesus para ter a vida,” *Atos do Conselho Geral* 408 (2010): 14.

³² Trevizo, “Iglesia y prevención,” 13.

(ir)responsibility of all those who are part of the ecclesial institution, the corruption of its ecclesiology and the pathologization of the centrality of the Gospel.³³ One of these anomalous dynamics can be called “clericalism” that “arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church.”³⁴ It is a matter of urgency that we undo the clerical ecclesial culture that permeates the entire process of formation. This especially the case given that such a culture is rooted in a skewed theology of ordained ministry, an outdated ecclesiological model, an outmoded way of exercising power and leadership by the hierarchy, a culture of secrecy, and a misguided theology of forgiveness. This must be replaced by an ecclesial culture that witnesses to God’s love and mercy towards those who are more vulnerable.³⁵

Conclusion

Human suffering touches the heart of God, and we can only imagine how a suffering that could be avoided would touch Him, as is the case with the sexual abuse of minors. No one is called to any kind of ministry that makes

³³ See the provocative reflection of Fabrizio Rinaldi, “Abusos, poder y educación,” in *Formación y prevención. La prevención de los abusos sexuales en los procesos formativos de la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Boadilla del Monte, Madrid: PPC, 2019), 53–70.

³⁴ Pope Francis, “Address by His Holiness Pope Francis at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment,” www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html.

³⁵ See the important works that are in *Teología y prevención. Estudio sobre los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia*, ed. D.P. Trevizo (Maliaño, Cantabria: Sal Terrae, 2020): Rafael Luciani, “La renovación en la jerarquía eclesial por sí misma no general a transformación. Situar la colegialidad al interno de la sinodalidad,” 37–63; Sandra Arenas, “Desclericalización: antídoto para los abusos en la Iglesia,” 127–143; Eamonn Conway, “Clericalismo y violencia sexual. Explorando las implicaciones para la formación sacerdotal,” 145–172.

someone else suffer.³⁶ In the context of the sexual abuse, only caring and effective proximity to the victims can free us from ideological manipulations and connect us to the depth of the human person.

This raises three moral sentiments that dignify us: solidarity, the capacity of looking at those who suffer to see the face of one in pain; *mercy*, the capacity of having a heart that feels the cause of the pain of those who suffer; and *compassion*, the response generated by indignation. Compassion and indignation do not necessarily lead us to serve the other who is in pain. Mercy provides the authentic meaning for indignation and compassion, “promoting a shift in the existential and ethical place”³⁷ to guide us to be “Samaritans” in the life of those who suffer. Thus, we understand where and with whom we want to be.

In the context of the sexual scandals in the Church, it is also necessary to continually review the existing institutional culture and structures and adjust them to eliminate what would enable abuse to occur.³⁸ Such a review must go beyond creating policies that mitigate or limit legal and economic responsibilities that the institution has to the victims of abuse. Although important, they are not enough. We need policies to ensure that seminaries and religious communities educate all the members of the community—from those in the earliest stages of formation to those who are the leaders of the community—in all areas of healthy sexuality.³⁹

³⁶ José Luis Segovia Bernabé, “*Evangelii Gaudium*: desafíos desde la crisis,” in *Evangelii Gaudium y los desafíos pastorales para la Iglesia*, ed. J.L. Segovia Bernabé; A. Ávila Blanco, J.M. Velasco, and J.A. Pagola (Madrid: PPC, 2014), 45.

³⁷ Fernando Altemeyer Junior, “Sujeitos da misericórdia,” in *O imperativo ético da misericórdia*, ed. M.I.C. Millen and R. Zacharias (Aparecida: Santuário, 2016), 97–115.

³⁸ It is worth considering the reference to the linkage formation-sexual abuse proposed by Jesús Yovani Gómez Cruz, “El abuso sexual en el ambiente formativo,” in *Formación y prevención. La prevención de los abusos sexuales en los procesos formativos de la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Boadilla del Monte, Madrid: PPC, 2019), 71–83. See also the works of Agenor Brighenti, *O novo rosto do clero. Perfil dos padres novos no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2021); Enrico Brancozzi, *Rifare i preti. Come ripensare i seminari* (Bologna: EDB, 2021).

³⁹ See, for example, Karolin Kuhn and Hans Zollner, “Enseñar teología de una manera que fomente la formación humana y la prevención,” in *Formación y prevención. La prevención de los abusos sexuales en los procesos formativos de la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Boadilla

Proactive polices oriented to the prevention of sexual abuse are also essential.⁴⁰ In other words, a change in individual behavior will not occur if there is no change in institutional behavior. This shift is essential for building a new formative culture that trains future priests and religious to be well integrated sexual persons.



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del Monte, Madrid: PPC, 2019), 85–108, and Ángela Rinaldi, “La importancia de la formación humana de los candidatos a la vida consagrada y religiosa para una cultura de la tutela de los menores,” in *Formación y prevención*, 109–133.

⁴⁰ Len Sperry, *Sexo, sacerdocio e Iglesia* (Maliaño, Cantabria: Sal Terrae, 2004), 239.

Chapter 5: Design Thinking in the Catholic Church's Organizational Structures: Responding to the Wicked Problem of the Sex Abuse Crisis

Stephanie Ann Puen

The sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church has raised so many questions regarding the church's leadership and theology. An urgent response is required in order to ensure that justice is achieved and to ensure that the abuse does not continue. This essay hopes to contribute to this response by offering a possible tool and methodology that can help identify actionable plans to reshape the organizational culture and climate of the Catholic Church by using the concepts of design thinking and wicked problems.¹ Design thinking is a methodology used by organizations in responding to wicked problems—problems that are complex and difficult to solve, due to a variety of factors. Wicked problems are called wicked because they are multi-causal and multi-factorial. They are notoriously difficult to address and solve, and any attempt to solve them is likely to yield unintended consequences.² The methodology of design thinking has been used in changing structures and operations in corporations as well as in non-profit organizations.

The concept of wicked problems, as well as the methodology of design thinking, helps to understand the nature of complex issues in the sex abuse crisis, and why they are difficult to solve. This paper argues that this methodology can help respond to the sexual abuse crisis—a wicked problem. By helping flesh out the roots of the problem and their

¹ An example of work that brought organizational studies to bear on the institution of the Catholic church is *Church Ethics and Its Organizational Context: Learning From the Sex Abuse Scandal in the Catholic Church*, ed. Jean M. Bartunek, Mary Ann Hinsdale, and James F. Keenan (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2006).

² Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973): 160.

relationship to one another by framing the sex abuse crisis as a wicked problem and by changing management and iteration when generating solutions in response to what has been identified as causing or exacerbating the sex abuse crisis, transparency and accountability can foster transparency in the structures of the Catholic Church

Sex Abuse Crisis as a Wicked Problem

The many different facets of the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church have the characteristics of what systems thinking and design thinking might call wicked problems. A wicked problem is wicked because of its complexity, making it notoriously difficult and messy to solve. The wicked problem involves “stakeholders who can’t even agree on the problem, much less the solution; and [people] who are reluctant to change behaviors and take risks, who are often rewarded for compliance rather than performance.”³ Wicked problems are often compared to tame problems. Tame problems are easy to solve and, once solved, are already finished with no other implications or repercussions.

Design theorists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber outline certain characteristics of the wicked problem, and this paper will highlight three in particular that can help us understand the sex abuse crisis. First, the way wicked problems are described varies. Choosing which way to frame the wicked problem is dependent on who is part of the group responding to the problem and will determine what possible solutions will be generated. Second, there is no immediate way to test whether a solution to a wicked problem will be helpful or not and what the full array of effects will be. Third, because there is no way to test solutions, each attempt to respond to the wicked problem is significant and will drastically change the constraints and factors in the wicked problem that will need to be considered in the next attempt to resolve the problem. I explore each of these three characteristics in the context of the sex abuse crisis.

³ Jeanne Liedtka, Randy Salzman, and Daisy Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good: Innovation in the Social Sector* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 4.

The first characteristic is that “the existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem’s resolution.”⁴ “There is no rule or procedure to determine the ‘correct’ explanation or combination of them [in the form of a hypothesis] ... [because,] lacking opportunity for rigorous experimentation [as mentioned above], it is not possible to put [a hypothesis] to a crucial test.”⁵ As a result, “attitudinal criteria guide the choice...[some] pick the explanation of a [wicked problem] which fits [their] intentions best and which conforms to the action-prospects that are available to [them]. The analyst’s ‘world view’ is the strongest determining factor in explaining a discrepancy, and. . . in resolving a wicked problem.”⁶ The particular situation and context of the people who have a voice in the group and are part of the response will heavily affect the way the wicked problem is understood and articulated as well as what possible solutions can and need to be done in response. For example, Jaisy Joseph accounts for how the Catholic Church’s leaders in India drive the narrative on the question of the sex abuse crisis through a mode of self-preservation: “When accusations of sexual violence first surface, it is not uncommon to hear dismissive questions ... or for the accusations themselves to be regarded as retaliation against the church.”⁷ Such questions thus shift the way the problem is framed. Instead of the problem being connected to the institutional culture, the kinds of questions the Church raises shift the problem towards individual behavior of the victims or accusers. Because the way the problem is defined is heavily dependent on the perspectives of the analysts and people responding to the wicked problem, solving the sex abuse crisis requires a diverse set of voices to be part of the discussion when crafting, implementing, and evaluating a response and its future iterations.

⁴ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 166.

⁵ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 166.

⁶ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 166.

⁷ Jaisy A. Joseph, “‘Responding to Shame With Solidarity’ Sex Abuse Crisis in the Indian Catholic Church,” *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 2 (2020): 388.

The second characteristic is that “there is no immediate or ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem.”⁸ Rittel and Webber point out how, for tame problems such as the math problem of $2 + 2 = 4$, “one can determine on the spot how good a solution-attempt has been ... the test of a solution is entirely under the control of the few people who are involved and interested in the problem.”⁹ However, this is not the case for wicked problems, as the full range of consequences of any solution implemented is unclear, and such consequences are generated over an extended and unbounded period of time. Because they are unclear, there may also be unintended negative consequences that may even outweigh whatever good things were accomplished by implementing the solution. The sex abuse crisis has many different facets to it: questions on clergy formation, on the ways in which sexuality, family, and gender are understood within Catholic theology, on the organizational structure of the church that can be opaque and unhelpful in the context of accountability, and many more. Implementing one solution in one aspect, such as linking a particular character trait with the sex abuse crisis, will have both intended and unintended consequences that may also affect Catholic education, clergy formation in seminaries, how the church is organized, or if justice will even be achieved. An example of this issue is the response of “linking homosexuality and pedophilia, and implicitly blaming gay priests for sexual abuse.” Not only does it unjustly condemn a particular group on unfounded claims, but it also has ramifications on such things as teachings on priesthood, sex and gender, and who are thus qualified to be leaders of the church.¹⁰ While the solution aims for some form of change to address

⁸ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 163.

⁹ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 163.

¹⁰ See Michael J. O’Loughlin, “Vatican Reaffirms Ban on Gay Priests,” *America Magazine*, December 7, 2016, www.americamagazine.org/faith/2016/12/07/vatican-reaffirms-ban-gay-priests: “The language barring gays from the priesthood first came to light in 2005 under Pope Benedict XVI, but it was crafted soon after the clergy sexual abuse scandal broke in the early 2000s. Some observers said at the time that church leaders were trying to pin the scandal on gay priests, even as psychology and law enforcement experts said there is no link between homosexuality and child abuse.” See also James Martin, SJ, “It’s Not About Homosexuality:

the problem, human finitude as well as difficulty in predicting all reactions to the solution make it difficult to account for all possible changes and all those who will be affected, whether good or bad.

The third characteristic is that “every solution to a wicked problem is a ‘one-shot’ operation; because there is no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error, every attempt counts significantly.”¹¹ Because of the difficulty in accounting for the consequences, as well as the sheer number of people affected, every trial will be crucial and most likely incomplete in totally responding to the problem, resulting in several iterations in order to improve the situation. Each attempt will also change the constraints in the wicked problem, based on the consequences of the previous attempt. Solutions that may target clergy formation or emphasize sacramental confession will certainly have lasting effects but will not totally address the sex abuse crisis as other factors such as justice and doctrinal teachings also need to be considered and responded to appropriately. Theologian Aaron Milavec identified sacramental confession as one way the United States bishops approached the sex abuse crisis, which may be healing for some, such as the perpetrator, and supposedly allow them to change with God’s grace. However, this theology of the confession “reduced any prospect that angry parents would ever hear any admission of guilt” or restitution and often did not entail penances such as never being alone with potential victims or going into rehabilitation or therapy.¹² This sacramental solution also did not have an effect on teachings of celibacy or sex and gender in the Catholic Church, which many agree are also necessary considerations in addressing this problem. Each implementation of a solution therefore

Blaming the Wrong People for the Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Huffington Post*, June 14, 2010, www.huffpost.com/entry/its-not-about-homosexuali_b_537810; Robert Mickens, “The Catholic Church is Enabling the Sex Abuse Crisis by Forcing Gay Priests to Stay in the Closet,” *The Washington Post*, July 23, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/07/23/the-catholic-churchs-sex-abuse-scandals-show-it-has-a-gay-priest-problem-theyre-trapped-in-the-closet/.

¹¹ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 163.

¹² Aaron Milavec, “Reflections on the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests,” *Asian Horizons* 4, no. 1 (2010): 187.

needs to be thought through as carefully as possible, given these limitations and very real impact on communities. Any solution “leaves ‘traces’ that cannot be undone” easily as “many people’s lives will have been irreversibly influenced, and large amounts of money will have been spent...every attempt to reverse a decision or to correct for the undesired consequences poses another set of wicked problems, which are in turn subject to the same dilemmas.”¹³

Design Thinking in the Catholic Church’s Organizational Structure

Given the complexity of responding to wicked problems such as the sex abuse crisis, how should one respond? One proposed framework in response to wicked problems is design thinking, a problem-solving framework used in response to wicked problems. Design thinking has been used by businesses to design their products and services, as well as by non-profit organizations to improve their services for various marginalized and vulnerable individuals and communities.¹⁴ The methodology has several “steps,” though design thinkers will always emphasize that it is not a neatly designed framework that acts as a silver bullet for any and all problems. Rather, design thinking helps groups of diverse people harness their creativity and organize their thoughts in order to address a problem that can seem too complex to handle because of competing claims on the good, interests, and constraints, making design thinking an appropriate methodology to respond to wicked problems. In response to the three characteristics of a wicked problem described in the first part of this paper, design thinking offers helpful tools and principles. First, design thinking’s use of system archetypes can also help increase and diversify the voices heard and taken into account when responding to the sex abuse crisis. Second, design thinking’s emphasis on change management and iteration can help those responding to the sex abuse crisis understand more deeply

¹³ Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory,” 163.

¹⁴ For more on this, see Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*.

and manage the effects of the solution attempt on the communities involved.

System Archetypes

In response to the first characteristic of wicked problems, where the description of the wicked problem as well as the solutions crafted are heavily dependent on the world views and perspectives of the people responding to the wicked problem, solving the wicked problem requires the inclusion of a diverse set of voices in order to have a more robust description of the wicked problem at hand. Design thinking encourages its practitioners to foster a deep sense of empathy and willingness to listen; an assumption in design thinking is that part of the solution is to “empathize [with the people being served], understand them, and bring them along...in the design process.”¹⁵

In relation to what was mentioned earlier in the description of iteration, engaging new voices is key in this process, as well engaging the voices of those most heavily affected. This engagement reflects the importance of solidarity as an important marker of the Catholic social vision. Solidarity, a core principle of Catholic social thought, is the conviction that all creatures, including people, are interconnected, and thus we are to engage in “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38), especially those most heavily impacted or those in vulnerable communities.

This solidarity leads to an approach informed by subsidiarity, another core principle in Catholic social thought, which, “understood *in the positive sense* as economic, institutional or juridical assistance offered to lesser social entities, entails a corresponding series of *negative* implications that require the State to refrain from anything that would de facto restrict the existential space of the smaller essential cells of society. Their initiative,

¹⁵ IDEO.org, *Field Guide to Human Centered Design* (Canada: Design Kit, 2015), 22.

freedom and responsibility must not be supplanted” (*Compendium*, no. 186). While there is debate on whether subsidiarity should be practiced within the church organizational structure, design thinking would argue in the affirmative, especially in the sex abuse crisis where there are elements that need to be addressed at the level of the universal church but also at the level of the diocese or parish.¹⁶ Such engagement and solutions will entail some form of structural change at both levels.

In design thinking, going about structural change entails an understanding of systems thinking and the concept of system archetypes in order to help clarify patterns of behavior at the structural level between related agents or groups. The basic premise is that an action will trigger some form of reaction, and these actions and reactions are called feedback loops. Certain feedback loops have become predictable ‘archetypes’ that can help those engaging in structural change projects to ensure success and avoid common pitfalls. One example of a system archetype is known as the tragedy of the commons, where the uncoordinated and solely self-interested use of a particular resource by individuals who have open access to the resources lead to the resource’s depletion.¹⁷ Once a systems archetype is identified, it is important to consider what kind of reaction or feedback happened in order to assess what needs to be improved to move closer towards a goal.¹⁸ There may also be delays, where people may perceive feedback incorrectly, which may lead to misunderstanding what is needed for the next iteration of the solution.

¹⁶ For an example of analysis done and the debate on whether subsidiarity and authentic participation can be applied to the Catholic church organizational design, see Kathryn R. Hamrlik, “The Principle of Subsidiarity and Catholic Ecclesiology: Implications for the Laity,” (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2011).

¹⁷ For more on the concept of the tragedy of the commons, see Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* 162, no. 3859 (1968): 1243–1248.

¹⁸ Radim Spicar, “System Dynamics Archetypes in Capacity Planning,” *Procedia Engineering* 69 (2014): 1351.

One system archetype is “fixes that fail,” where an easy fix simply fixes the symptoms but not the actual cause.¹⁹ The “fix” simply reinforces the problem in the long run with additional problem of delayed unintended consequences that add to the symptoms, while also creating an addiction to the easy fix because of the perceived “change.” Such fixes—for example, moving a priest accused of misbehavior to another diocese—might seem like the Catholic Church is responding to the sex abuses crises but are not enough to address root causes and instead may just address symptoms.

“Fixes that fail” may also lead to “shifting the burden,” another archetype that is similar to “fixes that fail” but shifts attention from the fundamental problem to the side effects. The focus then becomes solving those side effects rather than the fundamental problem. This creates a culture of avoidance or dependency on a particular intervention that, in actuality, may only be partially helpful or even unhelpful, such as focusing solely on celibacy without understanding the role of clergy formation and church teaching on sex and gender. Consider how Hamburg auxiliary bishop Hans-Jochen Jaschke’s quote that alleges that “celibate lifestyle can attract people who have an abnormal sexuality and cannot integrate sexuality into their lives” is misused to link celibacy alone with the sex abuse crisis and pedophilia.²⁰

These archetypes may also lead to another archetype called “eroding goals,” where the system’s community is asked to accept the way things are and settle, in the name of particular values, rather than risk and work towards justice. One of the two abuse survivors who quit the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in 2016, Marie Collins, identifies this archetype at play at the Vatican when she describes the “cultural resistance” driven by “fear of change ... or a closed mindset which

¹⁹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York, USA: Doubleday, 2006), 422.

²⁰ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 104, 110. The quote from Jaschke can be found in Tom Heneghan, “Celibacy Debate Re-emerges Amid Church Abuse Scandal,” *Reuters*, March 13, 2010, www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62B38C20100312.

sees abuse as an inconvenience, or a clinging to old institutional attitudes.”²¹

Asking the question “what system archetypes are at play?” and “what feedback has happened and how do we avoid oscillation, where a system just cycles between good and bad without permanent improvement? If there is delay or continued gaps, are there hidden agendas hindering the improvement of feedback?” can help surface whose voices are being heard and whose are not, and whose expertise is needed in the kinds of solutions required based on the archetypes present in the system. Bringing new voices and practicing active listening towards those at the margins can then shift the kinds of feedback loops happening within the system and reveal other aspects of the system that may be affecting the problem.

Awareness of system archetypes can help create structural change needed to bring in more diverse voices to contribute to the continued iteration of solutions needed to address the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. The diverse voices, particularly the voices of the victims and those at the margins, can help generate alternative ways and catalyze change in the structures within the church to foster healing and justice. Bringing in their voices also show that they are valued in the church, which includes getting them to share in the vision and the process as part of change management, in the same way that various organizations have done so using this methodology.²²

²¹ Frances D’Emilio, “Abuse Survivor Quits Pope Francis’ Panel Over Vatican Stonewalling,” *The Associated Press*, March 2, 2017, www.apnews.com/article/vatican-city-ma-state-wire-ap-top-news-pope-francis-international-news-f49acb21f4a646faa9290c56063f37fc.

²² Examples of other organizations that have used design thinking in fostering community-wide dialogue towards generating solutions for their organizations are the cases of Monash Medical Centre in Australia and the Institute without Boundaries (IwB) in Toronto, Canada in partnership with the town of Iveragh, Ireland. The Monash Medical Centre’s medical staff used design thinking to engage their patients and community by attending to “people, process, and systems, including the role of human emotion. In particular, an appreciation for the power of the larger system to drive both intended and unintended behaviors and outcomes” was key in getting buy in and redesigning their systems. The community in Iveragh, Ireland used design thinking as well to “create a community-wide conversation” on revitalizing the

Change Management and Iteration

The second way that design thinking can help in addressing the sex abuse crisis is through the tools of change management and iteration. In response to the second and third characteristics of wicked problems—that there is no ultimate test to see if a solution will work prior to its implementation and thus each attempt to respond to the sex abuse crisis counts significantly and will most likely only be a partial solution with both intended and unintended consequences—design thinking offers tools that can help manage the attempts in ways that can continue the positive benefits of an attempt. It can also help mitigate the negative consequences that may arise in relation to the different interests and concerns of various stakeholders involved in such sensitive and polarizing issues.

First, change management tools in design thinking keep church leadership and those responding to the sex abuse crisis in dialogue with the victims, the community, and other stakeholders and sectors involved, rather than revert to a “bunker mentality” where “the Church wants to resolve her problems from the inside and exclude the public dimension because she is afraid of her own reputation and the reputation of the institution.”²³ Many are rightfully upset over the handling of the sex abuse crisis, and so many of the stakeholders involved may be carrying strong emotions—anger, sadness, dejection, despair, disgust—at the situation, at the abusers, and at the institution of the Catholic Church.²⁴ Change management acknowledges the different ways that organizations change—

rural community and population, making sure that the economic success stemming from tourism reaches the population. For more on these two cases and more, see Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking*, 79–102, 125–146.

²³ Hans Zollner, SJ, “The Spiritual Wounds of Sexual Abuse,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, January 18, 2018, www.laciviltacattolica.com/spiritual-wounds-sexual-abuse/.

²⁴ Kathleen Davis, “‘Beyond Anger’: Pittsburgh Priest Says Sex Abuse Report ‘Shook’ Parishioners,” *NPR*, August 18, 2018, www.npr.org/2018/08/18/639648032/beyond-anger-pittsburgh-priest-says-sex-abuse-report-shook-parishioners; Sean Reynolds, “How Are Grassroots Catholics Responding to the Sex Abuse Crisis?” *America Magazine*, April 8, 2019, www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/04/08/how-are-grassroots-catholics-responding-sex-abuse-crisis.

structural change, process change, cultural change—and various approaches have been proposed to help organizations succeed in changing unjust or terrible systems, while helping manage the many different emotions, opinions, and interests at stake.

Business writer Richard Luecke's proposal is helpful in this context as he lists several steps in managing such highly emotional changes or transitions: 1) mobilizing commitment and energy, 2) developing a shared vision of what to work towards, 3) identifying the leadership, 4) focusing on results and not just the activities and 'fluff,' 5) starting change at the periphery and letting it spread without necessarily pushing it from the top in order to show that the change can work and reaps benefits for the people and the organization, 6) institutionalizing successes through formal policies, systems, and structures, and 7) monitoring and adjusting strategies in response to problems within the change process.²⁵

Some of these steps, such as steps 1, 2, and 5, are helpful especially in scaling smaller cultural or structural changes across the larger institution, given the size of the Catholic Church, while at the same time helping address fears, motivations, and concerns at play. Step 1, for example, calls for the organization to face the issues with honesty, calling for the involvement and commitment of all the people in the organization, in order to clarify the implications and consequences should the issues continue to go unaddressed. This is what organizations such as the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) or Rete L'Abuso demands of religious institutions such as the Catholic Church to do.²⁶ Step 2 requires a vision of the church that entails the church confronting the clericalism, sexism, and other -isms that plague its community and organizational structures. Such a vision is articulated through the work of Catholic organizations such as the Catholic Worker Movement. Step 5

²⁵ Richard Luecke, *Managing Change and Transition* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), 33–45.

²⁶ Nicole Winfield, "Italian Clergy Abuse Survivors Demand Catholic Church Inquiry," *CTV News*, February 15, 2022, www.ctvnews.ca/world/italian-clergy-abuse-survivors-demand-catholic-church-inquiry-1.5781713.

emphasizes the importance of solidarity and subsidiarity in promoting change, rather than having authorities at the top quash movements from the peripheries out of fear. The work of Esther Cameron and Mike Green is also crucial for this step, in order to assuage fears and concerns regarding change. Cameron and Green argue that in order for change to happen, “survival anxiety must be greater than learning anxiety, and learning anxiety must be reduced rather than increasing survival anxiety.”²⁷ One reduces learning anxiety through such things as increasing psychological safety through training, communicating a particular shared vision, support groups and positive models, and helpful systems and structures.²⁸

Second, design thinking's emphasis on the importance of iteration as a mindset helps manage expectations, while also keeping the process of change transparent and continuous when putting change management tools into practice. Instead of attempting one big solution and ending there, iteration helps break the process down and encourages those responding to the sex abuse crisis to think about the relationships among the various agents, institutions, and issues affecting the crisis, especially given the possible presence of certain system archetypes mentioned in the previous paragraphs. In iterating, it would be important to consider the ways in which the solution will affect those involved in terms of feedback loops and delays, and to think of what would need to be done next, given that not everyone's needs will be met in the execution of the solution. The assumption is that each solution has its own unique contours in response to the unique characteristics of the wicked problem and that the process to respond to the wicked problem will take time, resources, and effort. Iteration also “makes feedback from the people we're [working for] a critical part of how a solution evolves,” keeping in mind the work for justice and care required should include the voices of the victims and

²⁷ Esther Cameron and Mike Green, *Making Sense of Change Management: A Complete Guide to the Models, Tools, and Techniques of Organizational Change*, 5th ed. (New York: KoganPage, 2020), 52.

²⁸ Cameron and Green, *Making Sense of Change Management*, 52-54.

vulnerable.²⁹ Such feedback can help flesh out the positive benefits more clearly, as well as identify the unintended negative consequences, which may not be obvious to those who were not victims or vulnerable.

Both of these examples call for varying interventions with specialists outside of the organization in order to encourage honesty and facilitate more out of the box discussions that could help move the organization—in this case the Catholic Church—towards justice and avoid the sex abuse crisis from repeating itself. Rather than employing a process that is confusing or opaque, change management and iteration can help show the steps in the solution and how it moves towards the goal of justice and accountability. Iteration can help manage the effects of any solutions implemented, understanding that one solution is not enough to absolutely solve the sex abuse crisis. At the same time, change management can help bring people together to pull in the same direction, knowing that each intervention counts and thus requires commitment. Additionally, change management can address the concerns and interests of those affected, such as the church, the victims, the abusers, and the community. The current pope's emphasis on synodality is a welcome ground to experiment with these approaches, given Francis' openness to listening and dialogue with others.³⁰

Conclusion

Understanding the complexities and difficulties when reckoning with the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church requires a mapping out of the relationships and stakeholders involved. Design thinking as a methodology can help identify these relationships and stakeholders as well as manage a way forward both at the level of the local church, including dioceses and parishes, and the universal church. While the size of the Catholic Church, adaptability, and different interests, fears, and concerns at stake will make

²⁹ IDEO, *Field Guide to Design*, 25.

³⁰ Francesca Merlo, "Pope to Rome's Faithful: Synodality Expresses the Nature of the Church," *Vatican News*, September 18, 2021, www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-09/pope-francis-discourse-rome-faithful-synodal-process.html.

change quite difficult, further complicated by the categories of sin and grace, beginning a conversation and dialogue with the social and managerial sciences can offer models and tools for church leadership to use in improving the structures and culture within the Catholic Church.



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Chapter 6: Child Protection in the Church as a Family of God

Idara Otu

Children are invaluable treasures and precious gifts of God. The future of any nation is largely determined by the pride of place afforded to children in the present, which demands care of their inviolable dignity and protection of their inalienable rights. This basic responsibility of civil society to provide for the integral wellbeing and welfare of children cannot be sacrificed on an altar of negligence. Being part of human society, the Catholic Church cannot afford to become a passive spectator or to adopt a defensive posture to care and protect the child. It is an ecclesial moral and social responsibility to support families and civil institutions in the care and protection of minors. While most nations have constitutional norms and domesticated international charters intended to protect the child from all forms of abuses, it is only in recent decades that the Church has developed procedural norms and ethical guidelines oriented toward fostering an accountable *ecclesia* that protects children from sexual abuse, exploitation, and harassment.

The recent unprecedented number of reported cases of sexual and other forms of abuses and violence against minors in the Church indicate that the faithful, and most especially the clergy, have frequently failed to be responsible guardians of minors. In many cases, a culture of negligence and silence has been pervasive among ecclesiastical authorities responsible for the care and protection of children. Within the Church in Africa in particular, clergy have often not sufficiently recognized the pride of place of the child in the Family of God. Children are often relegated to the background in terms of spiritual and pastoral care. Yet the well-being of the child extends beyond the family, with the Family of God also sharing in responsibility for their integral well-being and development.

This chapter articulates a theology of accountability for the Church in Africa as Family of God and invites particular churches to move toward becoming a foster guardian and credible protector of minors, in response to the unheard cries and untold stories of those sexually abused by clergy. The chapter engages with the ecclesiology of the Family of God and the magisterium of Pope Francis to propose theological paradigm shifts on fostering the care and protection of minors. It unearths some of the constraints and account for strategies adopted by churches to safeguard minors. The chapter adopts a literature review and oral interview approach in delineating the place of the child in the African family and in the Family of God. I argue that the Church in Africa must give the child a special place as the Church listens to the cries of victims and embrace transparency in the Family of God.

The African Child and Sexual Abuse

Historical studies chronicle scanty African traditional experiences on the lives of children. Outside of folktale and fiction, little literature exists on how children were socialized and protected in traditional African societies.¹ The few scholarly works on children emerge during the experience of colonialism and tend more toward descriptions of child slavery, child soldiers, and child labor.² This dearth of literature diminishes the possibility of constructing a linear indigenous historical overview of

¹ In "Between Ecclesiology and Ethics: Promoting a Culture of Protection and Care in Church and Society," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 897–915, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator presents an overview of some folktale and fictions from the following African classics: Wole Soyinka, *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (London: Random House, 1962); Chinua Achebe, *Chike and the River* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Onuora Nzekwu, *Eze Goes to School* (Portsmouth: Heinemann Publishers, 1977); Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Nyamba Nene and the Flying Bus* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1986); Nyamba Nenes, *Pistol* (Nairobi: Heinemann Press, 1986).

² See Manzoor Ahmed, *Within Human Reach: A Future for Africa's Children* (New York: United Nations Children's Fund, 1985); Loretta E. Bass, *Child Labor in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004); Chinua Achebe, *Chike and the River* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

the place and worth of the child. Available literature is not equivocal in presenting childhood in traditional society as sacred, a valuable phase, and a gift from God to the community.³

Despite the diversity in the narrative of childhood, African culture holds children as blessing and a gift.⁴ A Gikuyu adage indicates this worth of the child thus—*mwana muciare ndateagwo*—once a child is born, he/she cannot be abandoned. In *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II writes, “In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God” (no. 43).⁵ Consequently, children are considered an indispensable gift, a family asset, and a fruitful blessing of marriage as well as the future of the Church and nation.

Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator contends that children were valued for who they are and what they represent, and they were valuable relative to social expectations and cultural norms.⁶ In traditional African communities, the child was accorded a special place in the family. An indispensable end of marriage was procreation, and in some communities, the procreation of males was preferred to that of females.⁷ Couples without a child, or without a male child, were considered to constitute a

³ See Ferdinand Ezémbé, *L'enfant africain et ses univers* (Paris: Karthala, 2009), 126; Mary Makamatine Lembo, “Africa and the Reality of Sexual Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Persons,” in *African Theology in the 21st Century: A Call to Baraza*, ed. Elias O. Opongo, SJ, and Paul Bere, SJ (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2021), 332.

⁴ See Khofi Arthur Phiri, *African Traditional Marriage: A Christian Theological Appraisal* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011), 75–77.

⁵ The Bishops of Zambia equally describes the African child a precious gift. See Zambian Episcopal Conference, “A Call to Love and Care—A Pastoral Letter on the Family,” in *The African Enchiridion: The Documents and Texts of the Catholic Church in the African World, Vol. IV, 1994–2004* (Bologna: Editrice Missionaria Italia, 2008), nos. 1013, 2746.

⁶ Orobator, “Between Ecclesiology and Ethics,” 902.

⁷ Phiri, *African Traditional Marriage*, 76; Anthonia Bolanle Ojo, “Family Institution under Threat in Nigeria: An Ethical and Pastoral Response,” in *African Theology in the 21st Century: A Call to Baraza*, ed. Elias O. Opongo, SJ, and Paul Bere, SJ (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2021), 262–263.

pitiable marital union, to be remedied through the marriage of a second wife. Male children were expected to act as leaders to their siblings on reaching adulthood, and the eldest male was considered to be the head of the family on the demise of the father. Childlessness diminished the worth of the man and invalidated the identity of the woman.⁸ It also robbed the dignity and respect of the man and woman within the community. Children, especially male children, were considered progenitors of future generations of families and communities. Without children, the lineage of families face extinction. Childhood, therefore, was protected by adults and the community, who acted as authentic guardians, educators, and protectors.⁹ The African child was nurtured and protected by the parents and the community, growing under the tutelage of trust in embracing cultural values, including solidarity, care, communion, respect, and integrity.¹⁰ No wonder the African proverb states: “It takes the whole village to raise a child.” In other words, the entire community is delighted whenever a child is born, and the community takes responsibility for the upbringing and protection of the child. This enabled children to learn from their parents and community without fear of abuse or harm.

Furthermore, children grew up in the community educated on “sexuality, learning mutual respect, respect for physical intimacy of the other, and self-control.”¹¹ The fundamental lessons were the respect for the dignity of the human person, and the sacredness of human sexuality. Deviation from the cultural norms and the sexual ethos of the community—such as through fornication, adultery, or incest—were

⁸ Orobator, “Between Ecclesiology and Ethics,” 902; Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor, 1959), 77–79.

⁹ Lembo, “Africa and the Reality of Sexual Abuse,” 332; Philomena N. Mwaura, “The Gospel of the Family: From Africa to the World Church,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican II*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 151.

¹⁰ Idara Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism: Between Vatican II and African Synod II* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2020), 129; Lembo, “Africa and the Reality of Sexual Abuse,” 332.

¹¹ Lembo, “Africa and the Reality of Sexual Abuse,” 333.

taboos and abominations. In most cases, perpetrators of such abominable acts were expelled from the community and a propitious sacrifice offered to appease the divine and cleanse the land.

Unfortunately, the modern utilitarian valuation of the African child has conveyed a burden on the child, not just as a gift from God but also as a means to an end for the family. Within this context, “Children have no voice; they are seen but not heard—let alone trusted—in a society where age is revered and political systems prioritize gerontocratic privileges.”¹² The African child appeared as a pawn for adults to valorize their own self-worth, identity, and dignity. No wonder the residues of all forms of abuse linger amidst declining socioeconomic order and degrading standards of living in many African nations. On the one hand, these social conditions contribute to the prevalence of child labor, child molestation, infant mortality, child trafficking, child pornography, child kidnapping, child soldiers, and child sexual abuse. On the other hand, the social ills contribute to the erosion of traditional African cultural values, thereby fermenting the grounds for violence and abuse toward children.¹³

Conscious of the diminishment of the safety and resulting increase in the vulnerability of children in the world, and the need for their protection, the community of nations promulgated the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁴ This convention was preceded by the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child by the United Nations. Child Rights conventions are globally accepted norms, grounded on the dignity of the child as a person, and directed toward the integral development of children and the common good of society. Adopted by many nations,

¹² Orobator, “Between Ecclesiology and Ethics,” 905.

¹³ Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism*, 130–131; Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, “Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa,” in *Major Trends Affecting Families: Background Document*, ed. United Nations. (New York: United Nations, 2003), 1–36.

¹⁴ United Nations Humans Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Convention on the Rights of the Child,” November 20, 1989, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

Child Rights laws recognize African children as deserving maximum protection as they grow into adulthood and from all forms of abuse. The 1989 Convention articulates rights, including survival rights, developmental rights, participation rights, and protection from abuse and exploitation. Child Rights laws designate any person who sexually abuses or exploits a child in any manner as committing an offence liable on conviction to imprisonment.¹⁵ Despite the advances in legislations, the enforcement of children's right to protection in society is undermined by a checkered history of negligence and compliance.

Clerical Sexual Abuse of Minors

Clerical sexual abuse of minors is a heinous criminal act and grievous mortal sin that violates the innocence and dignity of a child created in the image of God. Sexual abuse of minors extends beyond penetrative acts and rape to include inappropriate behavior, harassment, exhibition, fondling, manipulation, forced masturbation, and "entertainment" acts.¹⁶ Particular churches in Africa have experienced scandals of sexual abuse of minors in the recent decades. Unfortunately, according to Edward Obi, "Data that should point to the number of perpetrators and the incidence of their attacks is often not available."¹⁷ Marie Keenan argues that estimating the scale of clerical sexual abuse "raises particular difficulties, as information on perpetrators is not always available in general crime statistics, research reports, and service uptake figures, and the Catholic Church has traditionally been slow to release the relevant data."¹⁸ Cases of clerical sexual abuse not disclosed by victims or civil and ecclesiastical authorities abound in many African nations (mainly because of a culture of

¹⁵ See United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of the Child."

¹⁶ Lembo, "Africa and the Reality of Sexual Abuse," 333.

¹⁷ Edward Osang Obi, "Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults: The Moral Leadership of the African Church," Presented at the 34th CATHAN Annual Conference, Catholic Diocese of Port Harcourt Pastoral Centre, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, April 23–26, 2019.

¹⁸ Marie Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power and Organizational Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

stigmatization and shame), which stifles a proper estimate of its scale in particular churches.

The dearth of records of clerical sexual abuse does not mean that such abuse has been absent in particular churches. Clerical sexual abuse of minors, reported or not, inflicts deep wounds and indelible scars on victims, families, the Church, and society. In Ghana, a 2011 survey shows that 90 percent of children were physically or verbally abused, and over 15 percent of teenage girls aged 15–19 years were sexually abused.¹⁹ The general secretary of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Hermenegild Makoro, intimated in an interview with Catholic News Service that “the South African church defrocked three priests over sexual abuse of children in the parishes. Since 2003, 35 cases of abuse involving priests have been reported to the church in South Africa.”²⁰

In 2019, a religious sister of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Veronica Openibo, at the Vatican Summit on Protection of Minors from Clerical Sexual Abuse, described cases of abuses in Nigeria. According to her: “In the early 90s a priest told me there were sexual abuses in the convents and formation houses and that, as president of the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious, I should please do something to address the issue.”²¹ Regarding another case: “A second priest in the early 2000s said that a particular ethnic group practiced incest but I added that from personal experience incest is a world issue. A dying old man revealed to me he was acting strangely because of the sexual abuse he experienced as a teenager from the priests in his school. A thirteen-year-old girl met her

¹⁹ Rejoice E. Hoedoafia, *Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse of Minors in Ghana: Impact on the Wellbeing of Survivors: Indications for Interventions* (Rome: Université Gregorienne, 2019), 220.

²⁰ Fredrick Nzwili, “Africa is also grappling with clerical abuse, says Catholic leaders,” *Crux*, February 8, 2019, www.cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2019/02/africa-is-also-grappling-with-clerical-abuse-say-catholic-leaders.

²¹ Veronica Openibo, “Openness to the World as a Consequence of the Ecclesial Mission,” Presented at The Protection of Minors in the Church Meeting, New Synod Hall, Vatican City, February 23, 2019, www.vatican.va/resourcess/resourcess-uoropenibo-protezionemino ri20190223en.html.

priest attacker 25 years later and he did not recognize her.”²² Such undocumented and untold experiences of clerical sex abuses of minors are often shrouded by a culture of silence and negligence. Some priests in Nigeria and Kenya interviewed acknowledged the possibilities of clerical sexual of minors but at a limited scale compared to North America and Europe. They acknowledge this might be largely due to unreported cases.²³

Pope Francis has initiated ethical and pastoral reforms in matters of clerical sexual abuse of minors, abolishing any pontifical secrecy in his 2018 *Letter to the People of God*. The pope adopts a zero tolerance approach for perpetrators and has directed bishops to follow suit in their respective dioceses. In furtherance of this commitment, in 2014, Pope Francis established a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors to foster child care and protection among local churches and the universal Church. Headed by Cardinal Sean O’Malley, this commission received its mandate to propose initiatives that would protect children from pedophiles in the Church. The commission charts a renewed path for the universal Church in responding to clerical sexual abuse crisis.

Four years later, in 2018, the pope sent a message to the universal Church on this same topic. In the letter, he states, “It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable” (*Letter to the People of God*, no. 1). In 2019, the pope convened a meeting of presidents of episcopal conferences and leaders of the Curia in Rome to pray and reflect on the prevention of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. This epochal gathering brought witnesses’ testimonies from various parts of the world on clerical sexual abuse. The

²² Openibo, “Openness to the World as a Consequence of the Ecclesial Mission.”

²³ For this research, some priests in Nigeria and Kenya (who requested to remain anonymous) were interviewed between December 2021 and January 2022 on safeguarding children in their dioceses. From the interview, many child abuse cases are not reported for reasons including lack of education on what constitutes child abuse, the absence of a report desk, the protection of family name by parents of the victim, and the stigmatization of victims.

fruit of this prayerful deliberation was the issuance, *motu proprio*, of the Apostolic Letter, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*. In this letter, Pope Francis states that, “The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful” (no. 1). He also sets forth procedures to be adopted by local churches to prevent and combat clerical sexual abuse of minors. The norms are *ad experimentum* for three years.

African Episcopal Conferences and Protection of Minors

Paths to the reception of these teachings of Pope Francis in east and west African nations can be categorized into two intertwined pastoral approaches: 1) issuance and the implementation of ethical guidelines for care and protection of minors and 2) the training of pastoral agents on using the guidelines. The first pastoral approach is the implementation of guidelines for safeguarding minors from clerical sexual abuse. On this note, some episcopal conferences and particular churches in Africa and around the world have applied these provisions. However, there are some episcopal conferences on the African continent which are yet to fully comply.²⁴

Previously, some episcopal conferences established norms and procedures for dealing with clerical sexual abuse cases. In 2015, the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference issued safeguarding policies to help care for and protect minors. The Church in Nigeria’s statutory response began in 2006 with its first policy against sexual abuse and ethical guidelines, which was revised in 2012. In 2017, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria published “Guidelines for Processing Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults,” which has been domesticated in all of the country’s dioceses. Other episcopal conferences and particular churches in Africa have policies for safeguarding minors

²⁴ Some of the episcopal conferences that are yet to domesticate the guidelines for the protection of minors include Central African Republic, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan.

and vulnerable persons.²⁵ In 2019, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa issued a handbook for the protection of minors titled, “Child Safeguarding Standards and Guidelines: A Catholic Guide for Policy Development.”²⁶ This handbook has been adopted by the member dioceses. Furthermore, some male religious congregations and societies of apostolic life in east and west Africa have norms and procedures for protection of minors. Such policies set forth appropriate behavior, ethical guidelines, and procedural steps for reporting the sexual abuse of minors as well as setting penalties of perpetrators and for providing assistance and care to victims.

The second pastoral approach complements the first through workshops and seminars for clergy on the protection and care of minors. In Eastern Africa, for instance, the issuance of the handbook by the Catholic bishops was followed up with a three-day workshop for all pastoral agents. In some particular churches, clergy and religious are required to attend a seminar on care and protection of minors prior to being assigned to any pastoral responsibility. Organization of workshops and seminars for the training and ongoing formation of priests on the magisterial teachings, emphasizing the Church is not tolerating clerical sexual abuse. Such workshops are extended to seminarians in formation and integrated into their academic curriculum. In a major seminary in Nigeria (The National Missionary Seminary of St. Paul, Abuja) students periodically attend seminars on ethical guidelines for the care and protection of minors and procedures for reporting of abuse cases. Magisterial teachings on childhood are integrated into philosophical and theological studies. Similar initiatives abound in formation houses,

²⁵ See Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Nigeria, *Guidelines for Processing Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Persons* (Abuja: Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, 2017); Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, *Policy on Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Persons for Archdiocesan Personnel* (Abuja: Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, 2020).

²⁶ Association of Member of Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa, *Child Safeguarding Standards and Guidelines: A Catholic Guide for Policy Development* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2019).

religious institutes, seminaries, and Catholic universities in the African continent. In the Catholic Diocese of Malindi in Kenya, there are child protection desks and a phone help-line for supporting victims and reporting cases of sexual abuse. This is rare and commendable feat in safeguarding the African child. A challenge with such initiatives would be the culture of shame and stigmatization of victims of sexual abuse. It means that the parents of an abused child might be reluctant to come forward to report cases so as to avoid being the object of gossip, ridicule, or humiliation in the community.

Pope Francis invites episcopal conferences in Africa and indeed the world to implement the document on protection of minors and vulnerable persons. Particularly, the pope mandates clergy and religious to report incidents of sexual abuse: “That means they [priests and religious] are required to inform church authorities when they learn or have ‘well-founded motives to believe’ that a cleric or sister has engaged in sexual abuse of a minor, sexual misconduct with an adult, possession of child pornography—or that a superior has covered up any of those crimes.”²⁷ Any non-disclosure of sexual abuse keeps the wheel of abuse running. Whichever method of child protection adopted by particular churches, or chosen in a given context, a child protection desk should set in place a framework to protect the integrity and dignity of abused minors and their families. As well, the identity and confidentiality of the person making the report must be ensured. The Church loves all her children like a loving mother and cares for all with a special affection for those who are smallest and defenseless. This is the responsibility of the entire Family of God.

The African Child in the Family of God

The First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops (1994) adopted an ecclesiological model rooted in the African notion of the

²⁷ Associated Press, “Pope Francis issues ground breaking law requiring priests, nuns to report sex abuse, cover-up,” *NBC News*, May 9, 2019, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/pope-francis-issues-groundbreaking-law-requiring-priests-nuns-report-sex-n1003651.

family and modeled on the Trinity (*Relatio post Disceptationem*, no. 3). The bishops of Africa affirmed the Family of God “as an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 63). The Church in Africa’s self-understanding pertains to the religious spirituality and cultural sensibilities of Africa. The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops (2009) integrated the family ecclesiology into the social mission of the Church, particularly reconciliation, justice, and peace (*Africae Munus*, nos. 1–3, 10). These two synods underscore the ecclesiological and missiological reception of the Second Vatican Council as a way of being Church in Africa.²⁸ Within the Family of God, “There is a common dignity of members deriving their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons and daughters, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope, and undivided charity” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 32). The Church as Family of God as modeled on the Trinity is “a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 4). This expresses the bond of communion and mutual dialogue that characterizes the *ecclesia ad intra* and *missio ad extra* of the Church.²⁹

Accordingly, the intrinsic relations within the immanent Trinity serve as an analogy for envisioning the Church as Family of God as well as underscore the dynamics of the relationship between the clergy and the children.³⁰ The mystery of the Trinity underscores the unicity, the distinction and the relations of the divine persons, which serves as grounds for a theology of childhood that fosters rights and duties as well as

²⁸ Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation*, 198–201.

²⁹ Idara Otu, “African Theology of Social Development: Successes and Limitations of Methodological Approaches,” in *Faith in Action*, vol. 1: *Reform, Mission and Pastoral Renewal in African Catholicism Since Vatican II*, ed. Stan Chu Ilo, Nora K. Nonterah, and Idara Otu (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2020), 252.

³⁰ Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation*, 134.

boundaries and differences.³¹ Karl Rahner describes childhood as a “mystery” with “a beginning which is open to the absolute beginning of God who is utter mystery, the ineffable and eternal, nameless and precisely as such accepted with love in his divine nature as he who presides over all things.”³² In relating with the African child, the clergy are to recognize them as precious gifts and blessings of God, created in the image and likeness of God, and thus treat them with genuine love, respect and care. Orobator observes, “Although hitherto unexplored in regard to the care and protection of children, the theology of church as family committed to reconciliation, justice, and peace offers a rich terrain for exploring the ethical implications for how the Christian community treats children.”³³ The Family of God ecclesiology offers a basis for fostering an accountable Church, responsive to the untold stories and unheard cries of victims of clerical sexual abuse in Africa. Pope Francis reiterates the importance of being an accountable church thus: “I am conscious of the effort and work being carried out in various parts of the world to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults, as well as implementing zero tolerance and ways of making all those who perpetrate or cover up these crimes accountable” (*Letter to the People of God*, no. 2).

In safeguarding the child in the Family of God, the vestiges of paternalism, subjugation, and patriarchy in traditional African family, which tint modern African families, should not be transposed into the dynamics of protecting minors in particular churches.³⁴ In caring for the child, the traditional African family system embodied limitations precipitated by paternalistic attitudes, including the child being viewed as a nonautonomous entity, the protection of family name, and pursuance of the public face of the family. Often when a child is abused or violated, the

³¹ Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation*, 133–134.

³² Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8: *Further Theology for the Spiritual Life 2*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), 42.

³³ Orobator, “Between Ecclesiology and Ethics,” 910.

³⁴ Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation*, 131.

response of the parents may be largely influenced by the public face of the family rather than the integral wellbeing and good of the child or healing and justice for the child. These vestiges must be denounced if the protection of the minors in the Church as Family of God is to be truly realized. It means particular churches should be critical of their adopted guidelines and methods for protecting minors.

For the Church in Africa to truly be accountable in caring for and protecting minors, three paradigm shifts arise for the Family of God: a movement from the culture of negligence to the inclusion of the African child, according the African child a pride of place in the Family of God; a shift from a culture of negligence to a culture of listening to the victims; and a movement from a culture of secrecy to one of transparency in dealing with sexual predators. Stan Ilo maintains that the Church as Family of God must give account to the Lord not only of those who are with us in every sense of the word but also of the abused and violated.³⁵ Abused minors are truly the children of God and deserve pastoral care and healing, for “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). The cry of the abused child is the cry of the Church.

For the first paradigm shift the African Church’s self-understanding as Family of God draws from the notion of the family to articulate a contextual ecclesiological image. Traditional African societies recognized, as earlier elaborated, every child as a precious gift of God. In the Final Message of the Second African Synod, the bishops affirmed that the child is a precious gift of God and must be cared for by the family and the Church. Pope Benedict XVI elaborates on this cultural truth: “Children are a gift of God to humanity, and they must be the object of particular concern on the part of their families, the Church, society and governments, for they are a source of hope and renewed life” (*Africae Munus*, no. 65). The Family of God is a privileged place of belonging and

³⁵ Stan Chu Ilo, “The Church of Pope Francis: An Ecclesiology of Accountability, Accompaniment, and Action,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican II*, ed. Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 26.

inclusion, where every person experiences love and care. It is a community of God's people, where every child is part of the Family of God and the Body of Christ, the Church. According to Pope Francis, "The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful" (*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, no. 1).

Jesus treats children with great respect and dignity. He acclaims, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matt 19:14). Placing children in the midst of the apostles, Jesus acknowledges the importance of the place of the child in the kingdom of God and the character of that kingdom. Regarding the possibility of relegating the child to the clutches of those who are base, Jesus warns his disciples, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Every child must be treated with respect and accorded with a dignity that is assigned to him/her by God and not by society.

The central place of the child in the Family of God is not contestable. The Family of God ecclesiology demands the recognition of the child as having been created in the image of God and so with inherent worth and dignity. This means the faithful must be committed to providing safe environments for children in all pastoral activities so that they can grow in love, and enjoy the fullness of life. Further, the Church hierarchy must institute a necessary framework to protect children from any form of sexual abuse or exploitation. Children should be safe when they go to Church, such as for devotional prayers, catechetical instruction, liturgies, organizational prayers, and meetings with priests and other pastoral agents. Parents should be encouraged to accompany their children to Church when possible and be seated with them during the liturgy. Minors should be under the watchful eye of their parents or designated adult approved by parents and guardians.

The second paradigm shift invites the Church as Family of God to be a listening church, attending to the heretofore unheard cries and untold stories of abused minors. Listening, as a predisposition for the ecclesiology of the Family of God, is elaborated by Elochukwu Uzukwu, in his book *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. Uzukwu calls for a vision of the Church as Family “with large ears” that prioritizes mutual dialogue and active participation.³⁶ This ecclesiological predisposition precludes the hierarchy from assuming that they have the monopoly of understanding the cries of abuse victims. Pope Francis acknowledges this truth when he writes, “I desire that this commitment be implemented in a fully ecclesial manner, so that it may express the communion that keeps us united, in mutual listening and open to the contributions of those who care deeply about this process of conversion” (*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, no. 1).

The world of the sexually abused remains sacred and demands paying attention with humility and an openness to learning from victims. Sexually abused minors have lessons for the Church in an age where sexual crimes and sins are shockingly widespread. The children’s stories must be told, and their cries heard. The pains and suffering of abused minors are the pains and suffering of Christ since it is the Body of Christ that is violated and abused in the form of the innocent child created in the dignity of God. In his *Letter to the People of God*, Pope Francis acknowledges that past reports of victims of sexual abuse at the hands of priests cannot be ignored because, even though most cases belong “to the past, nonetheless as time goes on we have come to know the pain of many of the victims” (no. 1). The fact is that many ecclesial communities and faithful are oblivious of the trauma and deep scars of abused victims, which define their entire wellbeing and worldview and impact their spiritual, psychological, human, and social interactions. Experience of abuse is one that remains with the victim for life.

³⁶ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 127, 146.

Despite the many undocumented cases of clerical sexual abuse in Africa, particular churches have a duty to create a means for victims to report past cases of sexual abuse. This duty includes initiating a concrete pastoral process of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for the victims as well as for punishing clerical sexual predators. Particular churches should consider establishing a reconciliation commission or panel and supporting survivors of sexual abuse in coming forth to share their stories. The laments of survivors become part of a 'learning curve' for the Church in the training and formation of priests, in the prevention of abuse and in promulgating guidelines for the care and protection of minors. Sexually abused minors have a story that must be heard by the Family of God.

The third shift is the movement from a culture of secrecy to a culture of transparency in the handling of the cases of clerical sexual abuse in particular churches. The Family of God is a Church where every member is a first child of God and loved by God (Hebrews 12:23). The first step in the process of promoting transparency is to acknowledge that clerical sexual abuse occurs in particular churches in Africa. The denial of the possible abuse of minors by clergy without proper investigations would wish away the problem. The current clerical sexual abuse demands a transparent investigation process and procedure of all alleged suspected and reported cases. The unethical practice of cover-up is detrimental and contributed to the perpetuation of a vicious circle of abuse of African children. Veronica Openibo notes that "the normal process for clergy—in the past and still present in some areas—was and is to give support to 'one of us,' to avoid exposing a scandal and bringing discredit to the Church. All offenders, regardless of their clerical status, found guilty should be given the same penalty for the abuse of minors."³⁷ The past experiences emerging from North America and Europe with priest shuffling indicates unethical practice that the Church in Africa must learn from and not repeat. The perpetrators of sexual abuse must be withdrawn from active ministry and involvement with children.

³⁷ Openibo, "Openness to the World as a Consequence of the Ecclesial Mission."

Further, the commitment to transparency means that ecclesiastical procedures are traceable to the specific actions and decisions with regard to who, what, when, why, and how. It accounts for proper documentation of stories and evidence by the competent ecclesiastical authorities. Such documentation will enable dioceses to establish the possible causes of clerical sexual abuse and to work to mitigate reoccurrence. It is a fundamental aspect in establishing trust and confidence within the Family of God, especially in the face of betrayal of trust and abuse of power. The Family of God as a transparent and accountable Church must disclose the outcome of the investigation to the victims and their families. In cases of false allegations, sincere efforts must be made to restore the integrity and reputation of those wrongly accused of clerical sexual abuse. As a transparent Church, the family of God should be open to account for every sexually abused minor with truthfulness and sincerity of purpose that gives priority to their integral recovery. As Pope Francis writes: “It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable” (*Letter to the People of God*, no. 2).

Conclusion

The Church in Africa considers care and protection of children as an integral dimension of the mission of the Family of God. Hence, the survivors of clerical sexual abuse are treasured gifts and precious children of God. Their experiences of abuses have created an effaceable wound and scars that need healing. Though their stories may never be told or their cries heard, the Church in Africa as the Family of God must acknowledge the heinous crimes committed against African children and ask for forgiveness from the victims and God. Despite the failure of the Family of God to care and protect minors in the past, the Church must not fail to care and protect them in the future. For this reason, this chapter chronicled the priority of the child in African traditional society and the entire family of God and the responsibility of the entire faithful—the clergy, religious and

laity—to be vigilant in caring and protecting minors. Participation of the entire family of God is necessary for the abuse of the clergy to be expunged from the Church in Africa. Consequently, drawing from relevant literature and selected interviews, the essay highlights major approaches adopted by episcopal conferences and particular churches in safeguarding children. These approaches are not exhaustive, rather they indicate conscientious effort of particular churches in responding to Pope Francis’s call for the care and protection of minors. The chapter reiterates the relevance of the familial ecclesiology in the care and protection of minors in Africa. Given the unprecedented increase in the youthful demography of Catholics in Africa, the Church in Africa as a Family of God cannot afford to be complacent and complicit in being a credible guardian and protector of children.



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Chapter 7: Power versus Ministry? Recent Challenges for Priestly Formation in Responding to the Double Crisis in the Catholic Church

Štefan Novotný

The double crisis in the Catholic Church caused by instances of sexual abuse and their cover-up by the Church hierarchy calls into question the initial formation of priests and, in particular, the milieu of Catholic seminaries. The final reports from the national commissions of inquiry from different countries show similar findings and propose comparable recommendations. This paper lists the main challenges encountered in priestly formation and—after theological reflection on a paradigm of transforming the power of ministry—proposes the implementation of some preventive measures and illustrates these with examples.

Power versus Ministry

A compelling factor in this double crisis, as Faggioli has argued,¹ is a lack of courage and faith to face the stories, listen to the voices of survivors, and act responsibly. Ordained servants are supposed to use properly granted power for the good of People of God. One can see members of the Church hierarchy facing two challenges: protecting and clearing the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ and protecting and healing deeply wounded children.² Pope Francis in his *Letter to the People of God* writes, “The heart-

¹ Massimo Faggioli, “What the CIASE Report on Abuse in the Catholic Church in France (1950–2020) Says to Theology,” *Concilium*, October 18, 2021, concilium-vatican2.org/en/conversations/transforming-the-church/ciase/.

² For example, the Grand Jury of Pennsylvania mentions common strategies detected in received diocesan files which reveal failures in healing and supporting victims of abuse: “First, make sure to use euphemisms rather than real words to describe the sexual assaults in diocese documents. Never say ‘rape’; say ‘inappropriate contact’ or ‘boundary issues.’ Second, don’t conduct genuine investigations with properly trained personnel. Instead, assign fellow clergy members to ask inadequate questions and then make credibility determinations about the

wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced. But their outcry was more powerful than all the measures meant to silence it or sought even to resolve it by decisions that increased its gravity by falling into complicity. The Lord heard that cry and once again showed us on which side he stands” (no. 1).

Improper decisions and covering for abusive clergy heavily damaged not only the Bride of Christ but produced another wave of wounds for victims and survivors. Pope Francis calls for repentance and with pain cites his predecessor in the ninth station of the Way of the Cross composed for Good Friday 2005: “How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to [Christ]! How much pride, how much self-complacency! Christ’s betrayal by his disciples, their unworthy reception of his body and blood, is certainly the greatest suffering endured by the Redeemer; it pierces his heart. We can only call to him from the depths of our hearts: *Kyrie eleison*—Lord, save us! (cf. Matthew 8:25)” (*Letter to the People of God*, no. 1).³

colleagues with whom they live and work. Third, for an appearance of integrity, send priests for ‘evaluation’ at church-run psychiatric treatment centers. Allow these experts to ‘diagnose’ whether the priest was a pedophile, based largely on the priest’s ‘self-reports,’ and regardless of whether the priest had actually engaged in sexual contact with a child. Fourth, when a priest does have to be removed, don’t say why. Tell his parishioners that he is on ‘sick leave,’ or suffering from ‘nervous exhaustion.’ Or say nothing at all. Fifth, even if a priest is raping children, keep providing him housing and living expenses, although he may be using these resources to facilitate more sexual assaults. Sixth, if a predator’s conduct becomes known to the community, don’t remove him from the priesthood to ensure that no more children will be victimized. Instead, transfer him to a new location where no one will know he is a child abuser. Finally, and above all, don’t tell the police. Child sexual abuse, even short of actual penetration, is and has for all relevant times been a crime. But don’t treat it that way; handle it like a personnel matter, ‘in house.’” Office of Attorney General, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *Report I of 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury*, 2018, www.attorneygeneral.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Report-of-the-Fortieth-Statewide-Investigating-Grand-Jury_Cleland-Redactions-8-12-08_Redacted.pdf.

³ For Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s original words, see “Ninth Station: Jesus Falls for the Third Time,” www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/2005/via_crucis/en/station_09.html.

Keeping in mind the training of future clergy, it is necessary to rediscover the paradigm proven in the beginnings of the Church: to see and serve Jesus Christ in the suffering human being (cf. Matthew 25:31–46). An impressive *topos* of this paradigm is in the Johannine scene of Jesus’s crucifixion and burial (John 19). Some authors have suggested that Jesus should be identified as a victim of sexual abuse and sexual violence in a literal and historical sense.⁴ Synoptic passion narratives provide a basis for this claim, especially in terms of Jesus’s being undressed and left naked. Regarding John’s Christology, his gospel does not explicitly identify Jesus as a victim. However, as Orchard has shown,⁵ there are literary reasons to see Jesus in John’s passion narrative not only as a victor but also implicitly as the victim of an abuse of power.

The scene of the crucifixion follows Pilate’s choice to release Barabbas and to punish Jesus, who is unjustly sentenced by religious and civil authorities. The abuse of power snowballs, and soldiers graphically participate (John 19:2–3). Pilate tries to leave the burden on the shoulders of the high priests and their group, but the situation worsens. He is forced to sentence Jesus to death. Pilate’s first and last words about Jesus are that he is the King of the Jews (John 18:33; 19:19), but the derogatory meaning of the title is properly explained by Pilate himself (John 19:4–5) and his soldiers (John 19:2–3). Jesus is mocked, sentenced to death, and crucified. Previously, Jesus had been mocked (John 18:22) and sentenced to death (John 18:31–32; 19:6, 15) by the religious authorities of his own nation. The conflict of these two powers shows another more subtle abuse of power. Pilate was humiliated by the high priests, so he publicly humiliates them by the inscription on Jesus’s cross. They humiliated him at the court;

⁴ See David Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, no. 53 (1999): 89–109, hdl.handle.net/10523/6067; Elaine A. Heath, *We Were the Least of These: Reading the Bible with Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011); Michael Trainor, *Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narrative Informs a Pastoral Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

⁵ Helen C. Orchard, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

he strikes back at them publicly by proclaiming crucified Jesus as their king. Both authorities only see each other and their own agenda. They do not realize that their power comes from a number of sources.⁶

However, there is another contrast in the scene of the crucifixion. On the one hand, the high priests argue with Pilate about the inscription on the cross (John 19:19–22). On the other hand, the beloved disciple with Jesus’s mother and the other women do not care about the title on the cross because they see Jesus nailed on the cross. They do not yet have the post-Easter experience and faith, but they are present. They see a victim of human sin, narcissism, and unsatisfied desire for power. Although they do not know what to do, they are present, share his pain, and try to help and understand. They see and are seen by Jesus. Surprisingly, he in fact helps them. His mother receives a son, and the beloved disciple receives a mother.

The scene of the burial (John 19:38–42) depicts two high-ranking members of the local religious hierarchy: Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. They do not argue with their colleagues. Instead, they use their position and power to return dignity to Jesus after his crucifixion. Joseph successfully contacts Pontius Pilate and asks for Jesus’s dead body to prepare him for burial in a new tomb.⁷ As Beasley-Murray asserts, “It was therefore an uncommonly courageous act for Joseph to dissociate himself from the Sanhedrin and to show his sympathy for Jesus, who had been so ignominiously condemned and killed.”⁸ Nicodemus brings a great amount of myrrh with aloe for anointing. Both men are very generous and

⁶ Juraj Fenik. “Transfer of Power: Examples from John’s Gospel,” in *Theokratie: Exegetische und wirkungsgeschichtliche Ansätze*, ed. Peter Juhás, Róbert Lapko and Reinhard Müller, (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 181.

⁷ In *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, translation, and notes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 956, Raymond E. Brown remarks on “an interesting progression in Pilate’s responses to the requests he receives concerning the crucified Jesus.” Pilate refuses the first request of the Jews to change the title (19:22), then he quietly grants the second request of the Jews to hasten the removal of the bodies (19:32), but he explicitly grants the request of Joseph as Jesus’s disciple to remove and bury the body (19:38).

⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1999), 358.

probably do not work alone. Bassler reminds us that “no single individual could manage alone both Jesus’s body and one hundred *litras* of burial spices.”⁹

The paradigm to see and serve Jesus Christ as the suffering human being (Matthew 25:31–46) is also present in John’s passion narrative. First is what kind of action to avoid, illustrated by the high priests, Pilate, and his soldiers. Second is what to do, illustrated by the example of Jesus’s mother, the beloved disciple, the women near the cross, and the efforts of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The last two also provide an interesting case of a shift from power to ministry, which can be useful for the education and formation of future priests. Several verbs characterize the paradigm: to see, to be present, to listen, to serve, to be generous, to cooperate.

The official documents and norms of the Catholic Church on the formation of future priests repeat and develop the model of configuration to Christ as the Good Shepherd.¹⁰ In the post synodal exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the biblical model of the Good Shepherd includes, on the one hand, a permanent invitation to ministry and the care of others, especially the poor and the marginalized and, on the other hand, the configuration of the priest to Jesus Christ “in a special way as head and shepherd of his people in order to live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit” (no. 12). However, the problem of formation remains at the practical level. Slater critically writes, “Despite these wonderful exhortations, it appears that clericalism still rears its ugly head as evident in the abuses that take place in

⁹ Jouette M. Bassler, “Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 4 (1989): 641.

¹⁰ In “Seminary Education and Formation: the Challenges and Some Ideas about Future Developments,” *International Studies in Catholic Education* 9, no. 2 (2017): doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2017.1360613, David Oakley points out in *Presbyterorum ordinis* a shift of focus from the spiritual counsels directed towards personal sanctity to the virtues needed for a fruitful ministry: “The student’s spiritual life was connected to an understanding of what a priest does in the exercise of his pastoral ministry. There was less talk of the ‘sacred power’ given to the priest in ordination and more discussion of the need to be configured to ‘Christ the Servant Shepherd.’”

the church and the debilitating hierarchical priestly leadership. ... The new approaches towards seminarian formation set out in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* do not seem to have made any significant breakthrough into the hardened comprehension and impact that clericalism has on priesthood.”¹¹

The new *Ratio Fundamentalis* briefly mentions clericalism without any detailed description¹² and recalls the same model of the Good Shepherd and the constant shift from power to ministry: “The fundamental idea is that Seminaries should form missionary disciples who are ‘in love’ with the Master, shepherds ‘with the smell of the sheep,’ who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a continuous configuration to Christ.”¹³ The new *Ratio* then proposes four stages of initial formation, inserting before the configuration stage two new stages: the propaedeutic phase and the phase of discipleship. According to the *Ratio*, it is expected of the candidate that, “day after day, he will internalize the spirit of the Gospel, thanks to a constant and personal friendship with Christ, leading him to share His sentiments and His attitudes. Thus, by growing in charity, the future priest must seek to develop a balanced and mature capacity to enter into relationship with his neighbor. Indeed, he is called above all to a basic human and spiritual serenity that, by overcoming every form of self-promotion or emotional dependency, allows him to be a man of communion, of mission and of dialogue. In contemplating the Lord,

¹¹ Jennifer Slater, “The Catholic Church in Need of De-Clericalization and Moral Doctrinal Agency: Towards an Ethically Accountable Hierarchical Leadership,” *HTS Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5446.

¹² Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (L’Osservatore Romano, Vatican City, 2016), 19, www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/Ratio%20Fundamentalis/The%20Gift%20of%20the%20Priestly%20Vocation.pdf: “Consequently, future priests should be educated so that they do not become prey to ‘clericalism’, nor yield to the temptation of modeling their lives on the search for popular consensus.”

¹³ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift*, 4.

who offered His life for others, he will be able to give himself generously and with self-sacrifice for the People of God.”¹⁴

Priestly Formation and Investigations at the National Level

The temptation of clericalism and abuse of power is a permanent challenge for the Church as well as for the formation of future clergy. One factor usually pointed out in church circles as a cause of child sexual abuse in church environments is an immoral priest who trespasses moral norms and commits a sin¹⁵ or a religious person with a psychosexual disruption like pedophilia or ephebophilia.¹⁶ However, the issue is more complicated and different commissions of inquiry, which have studied specific cases in different countries, point to the cooperation of several factors. In addition to individual factors relating to the offender, there are systemic factors relating to the environment in which offenders are allowed to act and which create an opportunity for abuse. To illustrate this point, I explore findings from the Australian, German, and French official investigations into the abuse crisis.

In its final report in 2017, the Australian Royal Commission identifies individual risk factors such as a mistake in the perception of priesthood identity; immature and not internalized motivation; insecurity and confusion in one’s own sexual orientation; any personality disorder of

¹⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift*, 21.

¹⁵ This stems from an understanding of sexual abuse as a sin against the sixth commandment. The view was implemented in canonical norms on delicts: “*Normae de delictis Congregationi pro Doctrina Fidei reservatis seu Normae de delictis contra fidem necnon de gravioribus delictis*,” AAS, no. 102 (May 2010): 419–434.

¹⁶ This is also a broadly held opinion in general culture. In the 90s in Ireland, someone pled guilty to being an abusive priest and was later diagnosed as a pedophile: “Initially, he denied all charges to gardai. It was only after agreeing to take part in a programme for paedophiles run by a psychologist, Ms. Suzanne Jenkins, formerly of the Gracwell Clinic in Birmingham, that he admitted his actions. Ms. Jenkins said paedophilia was not a sickness that could be cured but something that needed to be kept under control. But one of his victims told the court that his admissions brought little comfort.” Alison O’Connor, “The Jekyll and Hyde career of a paedophile priest,” *Irish Times*, June 29, 1996, www.irishtimes.com/culture/the-jekyll-and-hyde-career-of-a-paedophile-priest-1.62917.

moderate or greater severity, in particular antisocial personality disorder; borderline personality disorders; and narcissistic personality disorder or any hidden sexual disorders.¹⁷ Except for the first two factors, all are objects of psychology and psychiatry. However, in the context of priesthood specifically, a mistake in the identity of priesthood and immature motivation are necessarily related to theology and understanding or misunderstanding it. The report states that clericalism is the main systemic factor that creates an environment in the Church which facilitates the sexual abuse of minors. Clericalism puts the priest on a pedestal and presents him as an untouchable and perfect person representing the Church and equipped with divine power. In conjunction with narcissism and uncontrolled power, this leads to a culture of secrecy and a broken relationship with the wider community and civil society.¹⁸ The report claims, that “a combination of individual and systemic factors enabled child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and contributed to inadequate institutional responses to allegations or instances of abuse.”¹⁹ The Australian final report also highlighted six factors in the selection, screening, and initial formation of candidates, which may have contributed to an increased risk of child sexual abuse: “the role of human formation and formation to live a celibate life; the challenges of sexuality and sexual orientation; the relationship between formation and clericalism; pastoral formation; previous admission to seminaries and houses of religious formation; and the issue of seminarians and candidates who have trained overseas.”²⁰

The final report of the German inquiry commission in 2018 claims a heterogeneity of attitudes and approaches in the individual dioceses but

¹⁷ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses that Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report*, vol. 16: *Religious Institutions Book 2* (Australia: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), 595, www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_16_religious_institutions_book_2.pdf.

¹⁸ Royal Commission, *Final Report*, 588.

¹⁹ Royal Commission, *Final Report*, 586.

²⁰ Royal Commission, *Final Report*, 589.

recommends: psychological counseling of clerics; better formation in aspects of sexual identity; proper formation for the high emotional demands of the priesthood; the integration of modern psychological and scientific knowledge into the training of future priests; opening the system of priestly formation to external experts; and the standardization of the selection of candidates by implementing established psychological methods.²¹ The German final report also affirms that homosexuality is not a risk factor for sexual abuse and calls for a reconsideration of the fundamentally negative attitude of the Catholic Church to the ordination of homosexual men. Celibacy is also not a risk factor for sexual abuse, but the inquiry commission claims that a celibate lifestyle requires an intensive examination of one's own emotionality, eros, and sexuality. The final report recommends lifelong professional guidance and support that is appropriate to the topic more than a predominantly theological and pastoral approach and warns that the implementation of time-limited training modules in the seminaries does not cover this need.²²

The final report of the French commission of inquiry in 2021 claims that “training is an effective way of implementing prevention by raising awareness of the patterns of abuse, by identifying situations of risk and by breaking with a culture of silence or avoidance.”²³ The report therefore recommends an improvement of formation of spiritual accompaniment; a better discernment of vocation during screening and admission of candidates; a study of human sciences and understanding of the dynamics

²¹ Harald Dreßing, Hans Joachim Salize, Dieter Dölling, Dieter Hermann, Andreas Kruse, Eric Schmitt, Britta Bannenber, Andreas Hoell, Elke Voß, Alexandra Collong, Barbara Horten, and Jörg Hinner, *Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen durch katholische Priester, Diakone und männliche Ordensangehörige im Bereich der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz. Projektbericht* (Mannheim, Heidelberg, Gießen, 2018), 16, www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf.

²² Dreßing et al., *Sexueller Missbrauch*, 17.

²³ French Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE), *Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church France 1950–2020 Final Report French Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE)*, 334, www.ciase.fr/medias/Ciase-Final-Report-5-october-2021-english-version.pdf.

and challenges in the development and affectivity of children and young people; an access to specialists with diverse profiles as well as access to “extra muros” teaching spaces for seminarians; university-backed courses and externalized training in mixed situations with members of the public and groups of students; work on the development of critical thinking, particularly with regard to questions of authority and obedience; and training sessions on the prevention of sexual violence, co-organized with victim support groups and with the participation of health professionals.²⁴ The report points out “that there is clearly no causal link between celibacy and sexual abuse”²⁵ but warns that celibacy may contribute to the overvaluation of the person of a priest as “a man ‘apart’ belonging to the category of the ‘sacred.’ This can reinforce a self-image of an almost ‘superhuman’ nature, whose ideal reaches so high that if it one day cracks, the whole personality comes crumbling down. The person may build up a self-image that is out of sync with reality and when it collapses, some cannot cope.”²⁶

All three reports recommend the implementation of proper training to live a celibate life in a mature way; preparation of a more precise and in-depth protocol of screening and admission of candidates; and prevention of clericalism and the culture of secrecy, as well as opening space for women and contact with the wider community and civil society. Faggioli’s assessment of the French final report states that a new challenge for theology is the inclusion of the voices of victims and survivors. He claims, “It is a reminder of the transformative nature, at the level of empathy but also cognitive, of any sincere effort to study and understand the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church.”²⁷ He also identifies that the recommendations challenge the Catholic Church to reform its power structure as well as

²⁴ French Independent Commission, *Sexual Violence*, 43–44.

²⁵ French Independent Commission, *Sexual Violence*, 231.

²⁶ French Independent Commission, *Sexual Violence*, 232.

²⁷ Massimo Faggioli, “What the CIASE Report Says to Theology,” *Concilium*, October 18, 2021, concilium-vatican2.org/en/conversations/transforming-the-church/ciase/.

challenging theology to “bridge the gap between academic elaboration and preparation for ministry.”²⁸

An Experience from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Košice, Slovakia

In contrast to the reports cited earlier, there is no comparable investigation at the national level in a post-communist country, except for Poland, where a short statistical report was published in 2021 without specific details about individual or systemic factors.²⁹ However, Czech theologian Tomáš Halík, while addressing an international conference on Safeguarding in Warsaw in September 2021, critically reminds us that “many seminaries (especially in post-communist countries) do not provide candidates for the priesthood with sufficient spiritual and psychological preparation for a life of celibacy. This must include an honest discussion of homosexuality, including the homosexual orientation of many priests.” In terms of intellectual formation, Halík claims that “the Church has paid the price for having resisted for too long the insights of cosmology, evolutionary theory and literary and historical criticism in biblical exegesis; it should not repeat these mistakes by ignoring the insights of neurophysiology in its approach to homosexuality and of cultural anthropology in its understanding of the development of family life.”³⁰

Another useful source of information about the situation in post-communist countries is the book *The Joy of Gospel in Slovakia II*, which

²⁸ Faggioli, “What the CIASE Report Says to Theology.”

²⁹ Sławomir Nowotny, Wojciech Sadłoń, and Piotr Studnicki, *Wyniki kwerendy dotyczącej wykorzystywania seksualnego osób małoletnich przez niektórych inkardynowanych do diecezji polskich duchownych oraz niektórych profesów wieczystych męskich zgromadzeń zakonnych i stowarzyszeń życia apostołskiego w Polsce. Raport obejmuje zgłoszenia z okresu od 1 lipca 2018 r. do 31 grudnia 2020 r. dotyczące lat 1958–2020* (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego: Warszawa 2021), episkopat.pl/prezentacja-badan-dotyczacych-wykorzystania-seksualnego-maloletnich-w-kosciele-w-latach-1958-2020/.

³⁰ Tomáš Halík, “‘With a Sorrowful Heart ...’—the Scandal of Abusive Priests,” *The Tablet*, September 29, 2021, www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/20735/-with-a-sorrowful-heart-the-scandal-of-abusive-priests.

reflects thirty years of freedom for the Church in Slovakia. In the chapter “The Church Issues,” Moravčík identifies seven important issues. First is the danger of infantilizing young clergy. He argues that a solid reevaluation of celibacy and of the institution of the seminary is needed because the safe and secure environment of seminary does not prepare candidates properly for the real challenges of pastoral work.³¹ He briefly mentions clericalism in connection with sexual abuse and abuses of power and claims that, in Slovakia, clericalism “is related to the perceived superiority of priests over laity, their judgmental attitude in confessionals, bureaucratic behavior in parish offices, as well as taking recourse into an outdated lifestyle and liturgy.”³²

Dušan Škurla studied the human formation of future priests in Slovakian seminaries using data from 2011–2012. Alongside positive trends, he uncovered problems in communication and a lack of trust among seminarians as well as towards formators. He also found insufficient levels of preparation for the celibate style of life and a low internalization of values.³³ The results of the study were confirmed later when, for example in the Archdiocese of Košice between 2013 and 2019, three out of eight priests ordained in 2011 had left the priesthood and three of twelve priests ordained in 2012 had left.

In St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Košice, a transformation has slowly begun by using an integral model to evaluate the suitability of candidates before entering the formation process. This integral model is interdisciplinary and incorporates both the natural and spiritual dimensions of personality. The integral model was first introduced to the process of candidate admission in 2008. Forgáč depicts the model on two

³¹ Karol Moravčík, “The Church Issues,” in *The Joy of Gospel in Slovakia II*, ed. K. Moravčík, J. Žuffa (Bratislava: Petrus, 2019), 52–53.

³² Moravčík, “The Church Issues,” 64.

³³ Dušan Škurla, *Ludská formácia budúcich kňazov. Požiadavky dokumentov, pohľady odborníkov a situácia na Slovensku* (Vienala pre Kňazský seminár sv. Karola Boromejského: Košice 2013), 214–217.

levels.³⁴ First is the spiritual dimension of vocation, a genesis of feeling of God's call, an ideal of priesthood, and other details such as the circumstances of practicing spiritual life. Second, the integral model focuses on detecting the psychological condition of the candidate. At this level, it is necessary to utilize common and standardized psychodiagnostic methodologies to identify whether there are serious psychopathologies in the candidate. Forgáč points out that the objective of the integral model is “to correctly interpret the interrelationship between these levels and find whether the motivation is the matter of a personal relationship to God or whether and in so far psychological factors have a significant impact on the motivation and decision of the candidate to enter the formation.”³⁵ The first seminarians, to pass through the integral model were ordained in 2013. From the ordination in 2013 until 2021, out of forty-four ordained priests only one left the priesthood.

In 2017, a study was published on how Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic seminarians managed to solve crises during their stay in seminary.³⁶ Roman Catholic and Greek (or Byzantine) Catholic priests are trained in different seminaries (Košice and Prešov) with different organizations, rituals, and legal traditions. The most well-known difference between the two rites is voluntary celibacy in the Greek Catholic rite, while the Roman Catholic rite has obligatory celibacy. The eastern part of Slovakia is a melting pot of these two Catholic rites. This study shows that, in both groups, the crises concerned the question of whether a seminarian should become a priest.³⁷

³⁴ Marek Forgáč, “Kríza povolání a nevyhnutnosť integrálneho skúmania súcosti kandidátov pre formáciu do kňazstva,” *Studia Theologica* 23, no. 1 (2021): 135–158, doi: 10.5507/sth.20.20.042634.

³⁵ Forgáč, “Kríza,” 143.

³⁶ Ján Knapík and Martina Kosturková, “Crises of Catholic Seminarians,” *Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 8, no. 2 (2018): 124–130.

³⁷ In addition, part of the crisis of the Greek seminarians was the search for the meaning of the priesthood, as if they needed a strong motive to become priests. Roman Catholic seminarians, especially in the second half of their studies, had difficult struggles with personal justification

The authors discern four stages of crisis for the Roman Catholic seminarians. The first stage starts in the first year from idealistic notions of the priesthood and life in seminary. The second one is rooted in disappointment in themselves from facing their own weaknesses. The third stage of the crisis has its origin in a more realistic knowledge of the nature of priestly ministry after recognizing the difficult and unpleasant part of priestly life. The fourth stage of the crisis begins with awakening to a state in which a seminarian more personally realizes the burden of mandatory celibacy.³⁸ The authors conclude that

the most significant contribution of this crisis is the rebirth of traditional belief as lived (experienced): the internalization of faith. This involves the transformation of the foreclosed religious identity into an achieved religious identity. Our participants were led to believe by their parents from childhood. However, conscious, lived, and living faith needs a personal decision that arises or ends during a time of personal crisis. ... Overcoming a crisis brings stronger identification with the vocation, the internalization of beliefs, spiritual growth, the knowledge of the limits which must be respected in order for the seminarian to preserve the identity of his vocation, and help in finding the meaning of his vocation.³⁹

In comparison to Škurla's previous study, this study confirmed the improvement of internalization in St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. It also revealed a phenomenon in which, after three years of formation and after a special year of pastoral placement, some seminarians reevaluated their decision to enter the seminary which had been made at a very young age. For example, five seminarians did so in 2014 and 2015.

for the acceptance of lifelong celibacy. See Knapík and Kosturková, "Crises of Catholic Seminarians," 129.

³⁸ Knapík and Kosturková, "Crises of Catholic Seminarians," 128.

³⁹ Knapík and Kosturková, "Crises of Catholic Seminarians," 129.

Conclusion

In the aforementioned lecture, Halík shares a personal experience of speaking to victims of sexual abuse:

I spent long late-night conversations with many of them. Afterwards, I often found I was unable to sleep until morning. I did not learn much more than what had already been reported. But I looked these men and women in the eye, and I held their hand when they cried. It was very different from reading their statements in court documents. I have worked for years as a psychotherapist and I know about the proximity and the interplay of mental and spiritual pain, but this was something other than mere psychotherapy; I felt the presence of Christ there with all my heart, on both sides: in the ‘little ones, the sick, the imprisoned and the persecuted’ and also in the ministry of listening, consolation and reconciliation that I was allowed to give them.⁴⁰

The paradigm taken from John’s gospel has similar features: to see, to be present, to listen, to serve, to be generous, and to cooperate. A personal experience of this shift from a position of power to ministry can empower a priest or candidate and provide a cure against the virus of clericalism. The shift from power to ministry is an important dynamic not only in the ecclesiological reflection on the administration and management of the Church, but also in the theology of the ministerial priesthood and in the initial and permanent formation of ordained ministers. The first experience of this shift has to be provided to seminarians during their formation. It could correspond to the frame of formation proposed in the new *Ratio* and respond to recent challenges detected in independent reports in the field of the formation of future priests. Priests must internalize their faith and commitment and configure themselves to Christ, the Good Shepherd. The next generation of priests will hopefully emerge from the darkness like Nicodemus and surprise modern Pilates as Joseph from Arimathea did.

⁴⁰ Halík, “With a Sorrowful Heart.”

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Chapter 8: Clergy Sexual Abuse as Moral Injury: Confronting a Wounded and Wounding Church

Marcus Mescher

Moral injury describes the harm caused by betraying a moral code, encompassing psychological trauma, emotional and embodied distress, disorientation to God and the good, diminished identity and agency, as well as damage to relationships and communities. The subject of a growing field of study, moral injury has been predominantly applied to the wounds inflicted on soldiers in combat. Today, it is increasingly being used to explore dimensions of moral anguish endured in a number of professions including law enforcement, health care, and education. Moral injury reaches beyond the harm caused by trauma or sin because it involves psychological, emotional, spiritual, religious, moral, and relational violation as experienced by perpetrators, victim-survivors, as well as bystanders and other implicated subjects.

The central argument of this chapter is that moral injury serves as a crucial interpretive framework for understanding the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal moral anguish caused by clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up. After explaining five key features of moral injury and how it applies to clergy sexual abuse and its concealment by church officials, this chapter considers how the entire church is impacted by moral injury before concluding with several strategies to promote healing.

Clergy Sexual Abuse Inflicts Moral Injury

Conceptions of moral injury vary by specialization and situation. In the experience of soldiers returning from combat, it has been described as a “sacred wound” that is related to but is distinct from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹ While much has been written about trauma—a word

¹ Edward Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 5.

that comes from the Greek word for “wound”—in reference to the mental and emotional impact stemming from a dangerous experience, the term “moral injury” indicates a violation against a person’s dignity, a profound moral betrayal that results in a loss of trust in the goodness of oneself and others.² Moral injury describes a condition of intense moral suffering by tormented souls who do not know “how to recover a shredded moral identity” after perpetuating or bearing witness to cruel or wicked acts.³ In military settings, moral injury has been defined as betrayal by a “person in legitimate authority” in “a high stakes situation” that diminishes character, undermines trust in an honor code or the chain of command, and “elevates despair, suicidality, and interpersonal violence.”⁴ Given the “unique phenomenology” of war and the false equivalence between combat and other experiences of violence, some resist extending the category of moral injury beyond soldiers and veterans.⁵ Nonetheless, moral injury is a valuable interpretive lens for the ripple effects caused by betrayal, in particular for the distortions of self-image, moral deliberation, agency, relationships, and responsibility.

The category of moral injury can be applied to clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up as a moral catastrophe caused by the abuse of sacred trust placed in clergy and the church hierarchy. Moral injury helps us understand the various dimensions of psychological trauma, emotional and embodied pain, religious and moral confusion, diminished identity and efficacy, and shattered relationships. Moral injury caused by clergy sexual abuse and its coverup can be detected in five dimensions of the

² Brett T. Litz, Nathan Stein, Eileen Delaney, Leslie Lebowitz, William P. Nash, Caroline Silva, and Shira Maguen, “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (2009): 695–706.

³ Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 42.

⁴ Jonathan Shay, “Moral Injury,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2014): 182–183.

⁵ Robert Jay Lifton, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans: Neither Victims nor Executioners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 8–9.

moral life: identity, reasoning, agency, relationships, and institutional credibility.

First, moral injury affects a person's self-image. In response to a traumatic event, perpetrators, victims, and witnesses struggle to make sense of why this happened and constantly second-guess how they responded. Moral injury applies to victim-survivors whose vulnerability was violated in the high stakes context of spiritual and sexual abuse by someone they trusted, a "legitimate authority" who represents the church or God. For people of faith, identity is often understood in relationship with God and the church, raising disorienting theological and ecclesial questions like: Where is God and how could God allow this to happen? Does God still love me and the others who have been affected? Why didn't the church protect me or come to my defense? Why do so many church members seem unfazed by the scale of abuse by some of its members against other members? Self-image is diminished by a sense of alienation from or abandonment by God. Since clergy serve as representatives for God or God's church, when clergy are perpetrators of spiritual and sexual abuse, some survivors feel like God is complicit in or responsible for their experience of violation. Insofar as priests are viewed by others as holy, respected leaders, as well as religious and moral authorities, survivors can internalize disrespect for themselves, a kind of self-suppression that can become a self-sabotage.⁶ This spiritual wound—for some, a spiritually mortal wound—leads to experiencing life in terms of loss: for some, life has been taken from them, while for others, their soul has been shattered and they feel like they have been left with nothing. Survivors describe their abuse as like the rape or murder of their soul.⁷ When they try to speak the truth of their experience and their abuse is minimized or rejected, it only compounds feelings of shame or rage, isolation or abandonment. Some

⁶ J.D. Jinkerson, "Defining and Assessing Moral Injury: A Syndrome Perspective," *Traumatology* 22, no. 2 (2016): 126.

⁷ Leslie Lothstein, "Neuropsychological Findings in Clergy Who Sexually Abuse," in *Bless Me Father for I Have Sinned: Perspectives on Sexual Abuse Committed by Roman Catholic Priests*, ed. Thomas Plante (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 59–85.

perpetrators of clergy sexual abuse wrestle with regret, guilt, shame, and anger. Others turn to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to confess their sins and complete their penance and then demonstrate a stunning lack of remorse or desire to atone for the harm they have caused, citing a “clear conscience.”⁸ Witnesses and others who become aware of abuse also experience moral injury, even if it is less acute than the experience of perpetrators or survivors. Moral injury is enduring, like a permanent scar or lifelong impediment, a radical break that changes the cognitive, affective, and volitional dimensions of the person. It fundamentally alters how people see themselves and others, putting a question mark on previous beliefs, assumptions, and values. In worst case scenarios, moral injury convinces people they are unlovable, incapable of being healed, and beyond redemption.

Second, moral injury casts confusion on moral perception and reasoning. Experiencing such an unexpected abuse of trust shatters trust in how one views and interprets oneself, others, and God: How could I do this? How could I let this happen to me—or someone else? How could God allow such evil? This undercuts confidence in one’s moral compass and judgment in the past, present, and future. Moral injury is experienced as cognitive distortion and moral dissonance, a persistent questioning of one’s ability to know, choose, and do what is right, true, good, and just. Feeling fragmented and disoriented is alienating and “can be debilitating, leading to a chronic moral disease of self-doubt and moral stasis.”⁹ The morally injured are often subject to intrusive and obsessive thinking, painful memories, persistent sadness, exhaustion, agitation, and anxiety. Moral injury is detected in those haunted by an enduring feeling of blameworthiness or the sense they have been severed from themselves,

⁸ As reported to the author by survivors of clergy sexual abuse during a research project from 2020 to 2022, “Creating a Tool for Measuring and Responding to Moral Injury Caused by Clergy Sexual Abuse,” funded by Fordham University’s Taking Responsibility Initiative, takingresponsibility.ace.fordham.edu/measuring-moral-injury/.

⁹ Larry Kent Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 87.

others, and God. Living in a state of such moral ambiguity makes it hard to rely on one's perception of self and others, how to healthfully reflect on life and glean moral wisdom, reason through moral dilemmas, and weigh what is owed to self, others, and God.

A faulty capacity for moral reflection and discernment connects with a third dimension of moral injury: diminished agency. In light of what the morally injured person has done, had done to them, or observed, it is difficult to avoid feeling numb, despondent, or a pervasive sense of futility. Struggling to cope with the violation, the resulting pain, and feeling constrained often leads to unreliable self-regulation and an "unraveling of agency."¹⁰ Feeling out of control or a loss of power can produce a variety of effects, although it frequently results in self-medication and substance abuse. For some, it can lead to reckless behavior and compulsive sexual activity while for others the capacity for romantic intimacy and sexual pleasure may be rendered impossible. Defective agency makes it much harder to deliver self-care, as shame and disgust eclipse the compassion and fortitude necessary for healing. Moral injury can lead some to believe they are deserving of a lifetime of punishment, while others might find it unthinkable to experience joy and undertake the necessary steps toward healing. Futility and despair can be a toxic combination, leading to suicide ideation and attempts; some estimates indicate that suicide rates among survivors of clergy sexual abuse are fifty times higher than the general population.¹¹ Moral injury leads people to believe they are stuck and that the scope and scale of the wounds stretch beyond the ability to redress and prevent harm.

A fourth key dimension of moral injury is the damage done to relationships. After sacred trust has been broken, it is exceedingly difficult

¹⁰ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 17–18.

¹¹ G.R. Pafumi, "Suicide Rates Among Victims of Clergy Sex Abuse Exceed 50 Times the General Population," *EIN Presswire*, November 13, 2018, www.einpresswire.com/article/467186245/victimsspeakdb-org-data-infers-suicide-rates-among-victims-of-clergy-sex-abuse-exceed-50-times-the-general-population.

to feel safe and trust others again. Broken loyalty is intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional. The morally injured have to re-learn how to trust themselves and others. Survivors of abuse are more prone to family breakdowns because this violation takes away a sense of security and confidence in others.¹² Abuse also ravages parish communities as secrecy, shame, and blame undermine respect and responsibility for one another.¹³ In secular settings, moral injury spurs distrust for institutions, which presents even more challenges to churches, which are meant to be sacred and safe spaces. When church spaces—including rectories, sacristies, and even confessionals—are settings of spiritual and sexual abuse, this desecration can lead to profound and long-lasting psychological, emotional, spiritual, religious, moral, and social deterioration. While these consequences can be acutely felt by survivors, moral injury also extends to the pain experienced by friends and family of survivors who witness the effects of this betrayal of sacred trust firsthand. Of course, this sense of betrayal extends to all who become aware of the abuse and are outraged by it, perhaps especially by church employees who feel implicated by working for and representing the church. Moral injury reveals the extent to which clergy sexual abuse and its concealment has ripped the church's moral fabric.

This torn moral fabric affects not just the social bonds among church members, but also undermines the moral credibility of the church, a fifth key dimension to moral injury caused by clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up. Revelations of clergy sexual abuse have caused millions of people to leave the church—or feel like the church left them—not wanting to be associated with the grotesque behavior of these predators and their

¹² Leslie Wind, James Sullivan, and Daniel J. Levins, "Survivors' Perspectives on the Impact of Clergy Sexual Abuse on Families of Origin," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, no. 3 (2008): 238–254.

¹³ Paul M. Kline, Robert McMackin, and Edna Lezotte, "The Impact of Clergy Abuse Scandal on Parish Communities," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, no. 3 (2008): 290–300.

enablers.¹⁴ Those who remain in the church report much lower levels of confidence in church leaders, with fewer turning to the hierarchy for guidance on moral matters.¹⁵ Less than a third of U.S. Catholics believe that priests are ethical, according to one study.¹⁶ The widespread sense of betrayal among the lay faithful has caused moral disorientation and disconnection. Not only does it mean that fewer Catholics trust the church to help inform their conscience, but it also means that fewer Catholics are sharing in the sacramental life of the church. Church officials often invoked fear of scandal as rationale for adopting habits of secrecy and protection, but the failure to confront and reveal the truth in the pursuit of justice—giving to people what is due to them—remains a scandal that stains the church.¹⁷ The moral catastrophe of clergy sexual abuse and its concealment can be considered an “abuse of conscience” by the church.¹⁸ With the loss of moral credibility among church leaders, the authority of the church to evangelize—witness the Gospel, teach dogma, serve human needs, and build inclusive and robust community—continues to erode. Moral injury is a symptom of poor moral health in the church as an institution, as a community, and as a culture.

A Morally Injured Church

Although moral injury is often used to describe psychological, emotional, or spiritual distress, its effects on the intentions, actions, and circumstances

¹⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, “Many US Catholics Question Their Membership Amid Scandal,” *Gallup*, March 13, 2019, www.news.gallup.com/poll/247571/catholics-question-membership-amid-scandal.aspx.

¹⁵ Michele Dillon, “What Do We Know about How Catholics Inform their Consciences?” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 18, 2018, www.ncronline.org/news/people/what-do-we-know-about-how-catholics-inform-their-consciences.

¹⁶ Megan Brenan, “US Catholics’ Faith in Clergy is Shaken,” *Gallup*, January 11, 2019, www.news.gallup.com/poll/245858/catholics-faith-clergy-shaken.aspx.

¹⁷ Angela Senander, *Scandal: The Catholic Church and Public Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

¹⁸ Daniel J. Fleming, “Beyond the Abuse of Power and the Abuse of Conscience: Creating a Course for Theological Ethics in Response to the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Australian Catholic Church,” *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 2 (2020): 333–346.

of moral agents remains unclear. While moral injury has been rightly associated with the moral status of the soul, it has only loosely been connected to moral conscience. Many unresolved questions remain in relation to conscience, moral reasoning, and responsibility. For example, how do we define a category for moral harm meant to encompass both perpetrators and victims, to say nothing of bystanders and other implicated subjects? How do we assess moral duty and culpability for a morally injured individual while being sure to avoid blaming the victim? How do we determine moral capacity and constraint for a morally injured individual with respect to the harm they may contribute to self and others in response to the harm done to them? As the moral center of the human person, conscience is home not only to the capacity for moral reasoning but also discernment of one's vocation as a calling from and response to God. The Catholic Church teaches that conscience is the "sanctuary" to hear the voice of God and the "Vicar of Christ."¹⁹ It is an innate capacity, ongoing activity, and life-long task of formation to interpret, order, discern, and do what is right, true, good, and just in consultation with Scripture, Tradition, reason, and experience. Insofar as the word "conscience" means "to know together," conscience may be personal but never private; just as the work of informing one's conscience is a dialogical process between the individual and the wider community of the church, so also the work of being more attentive and responsive to the effects of moral injury on the conscience is both personal and communal. In light of the moral injury present in the Catholic Church caused by clergy sexual abuse and its concealment by church leaders, as well as the church's robust teaching on moral conscience, Catholic ethicists are both duty-bound and well-positioned to help address and resolve these questions surrounding moral injury in and beyond the church.

By virtue of the sacrament of Baptism, all church members are incorporated into the Body of Christ, which means that Christian faith and discipleship comprise an essentially communal dimension. As

¹⁹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1776, 1778.

explained above, moral injury can be detected in perpetrators, survivors, bystanders or witnesses, as well as other implicated subjects. Moreover, the corporeal nature of the church means that harm to one part of the body affects the whole body, so moral injury necessarily extends from the individual to the interpersonal and the institutional levels of being church together. Paul asserts, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Thomas Merton builds on this imagery to describe the Body of Christ as a “Body of broken bones.”²⁰ Merton argues that violence, hatred, and “torture of the bodies and souls” of people all constitute ways that “Christ suffers dismemberment ... Christ is massacred in His members, torn limb from limb; God is murdered.”²¹ Clergy sexual abuse and its coverup by church leaders is a harrowing example of the desecration and dismemberment of the Body of Christ in the past, present, and future.

Although clergy sexual abuse is usually presented as anomalous by church leaders, efforts by journalists, attorneys, as well as survivors, their advocates, and support networks have revealed a much fuller picture of the truth. Across the globe, thousands of priests have abused hundreds of thousands of children and adults. In all likelihood, the reported cases of abuse represent only a fraction of the actual abuse, as many victims never feel safe enough to tell the truth of what they endured. The fact that the abused typically delay reporting their abuse for decades indicates an ecclesial and civic culture that often imposes silence, stigma, and shame on survivors of clergy sexual abuse.²² Secrecy often keeps survivors from being recognized, a disrespect that perpetuates their sense of diminished value as a form of “social death.”²³ It also keeps other affected persons—and the wider communion of the Body of Christ as a whole—from knowing the

²⁰ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 72.

²¹ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, 71.

²² For example, the Office of Assistance Ministry to survivors of clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Chicago reports that, on average, survivors wait twenty-five years before reporting their abuse to church or civic officials.

²³ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 135.

depth and breadth of the wounds caused by clergy sexual abuse. In far too many cases, the church has protected and enabled perpetrators of abuse; reports from several countries verify that church officials ignored, dismissed, or minimized allegations, failed to take adequate action to ensure safety against sexual predators, and “obsessively” concealed abuse for decades.²⁴ Church leaders consistently moved perpetrators around to avoid accountability—often in missionary settings, to communities of color, and among Indigenous peoples—to inflict harm on socially and economically marginalized communities.²⁵ This pattern reveals willful failures in fidelity that span the personal to the systemic, symptomatic of indifference if not contempt for the wounds caused by clergy sexual abuse and the layers of moral injury caused by these acts of violation and concealment. To deprive people of the truth is to deaden moral conscience. If people do not know the scope of the problem in the church or the impact clergy sexual abuse has had on its members, they cannot make accurate moral judgments about what can and should be done to bring about the necessary transparency, accountability, healing, and prevention. People who blame survivors for harming the reputation of clergy or the church, who cast doubt on survivors’ narratives, or who are

²⁴ See, for example, Dublin Minister for Justice and Equality, “Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin,” November 29, 2009, www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504; Australia’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, “Final Report,” December 15, 2017, www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/religious-institutions; Child Rights International Network, “The Third Wave: Justice for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church in Latin America,” November 25, 2019, www.home.crin.org/readlistenwatch/stories/2020/5/19/justice-for-survivors-of-child-sexual-abuse-within-the-catholic-church-in-latin-america.

²⁵ See, for example, Alessandra Rizzo and Bradley Brooks, “Predator Priests Shuffled Around Globe,” *NBC News*, April 14, 2010, www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna36523444; Tia Noelle Pratt, “Black Catholics, Racism, and the Sex Abuse Crisis,” *The Revealer*, March 2, 2020, www.therevealer.org/black-catholics-racism-and-the-sex-abuse-crisis-a-personal-reflection/; Allie Ferguson and Bill Radke, “Abusive Priests on Indian Reservations Leave ‘Profound Wound,’” *KUOW*, January 28, 2016, www.kuow.org/stories/abusive-priests-indian-reservations-leave-profound-wound.

unmoved by the suffering of survivors all evince malformed conscience due to individual, communal, and institutional failures. It also makes a number of church members responsible for secondary victimization of those harmed by clergy sexual abuse. The lack of compassion for survivors and commitment to deliver personal and structural restoration indicate that consciences have been formed without appropriate sensitivity to the demands of human dignity, our equal rights to safety and well-being, and our shared responsibilities to prevent abuse of power in religious settings.

Recalling the story of the Good Samaritan, too many members of the church are like the priest and Levite who ignore survivors, represented by the person beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the side of the road; too many of us in the church are unwilling to go out of our way and into the ditch to offer whatever assistance we can manage (Luke 10:25–37). That the robbers in this story are clergy—and other clergy aided and abetted the victimizers—raises urgent and grave concerns about how the church can be a credible moral teacher or witness to the Good News of Jesus’s teaching and healing ministry. To put unquestioning trust in an institution that inadequately forms clergy and has been slow to adopt a “zero tolerance” policy to remove predators from ministry and hold them accountable for the harm they have caused indicates a broken moral compass, one unable to feel righteous anger for the injustices of spiritual and sexual abuse. The church is infected by a sick and sinful culture that prioritizes silence and protection to shield predators rather than do everything possible to ensure a sense of safety and welcome for all, especially the most vulnerable among us. A morally injured church makes it difficult for more people to follow the example of the Samaritan: to “go and do likewise” as Jesus instructs (Luke 10:37).

A few details from this story inform a more faithful response. Since the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously unsafe, Jesus’s audience would likely have been busy judging with scorn the man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead since this was an expected outcome for traveling such a dangerous path alone. Moreover, Jesus’s audience would have been scandalized that a Samaritan—the most despised outcast they could

fathom—is the one to show mercy to the robbers’ victim. The biblical text tells us that the Samaritan’s heart was “melting” at the sight of this person in need and this visceral human connection moves the Samaritan out of his way and into the ditch where he himself could have been ambushed. It took striking courage for the Samaritan to enter the ditch, deep compassion to alleviate the victim’s suffering, remarkable generosity to heal his wounds and pay for his convalescence at the inn, and boundary-breaking solidarity to blast through the categories of “us and them” that divided Jews and Samaritans. With this story, Jesus reveals that the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” is the wrong question to ask since it implies there is a non-neighbor, someone beyond one’s moral concern. Jesus returns the question to the lawyer, “Who was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” that suggests the better question is: What kind of neighbor am I—and to whom? This Gospel passage illustrates how much more work remains before the church can be confident in its religious and moral formation in preparing people to “go and do likewise” today. A further challenge is added by the fact that the church is not only failing to adequately heal the wounded but is the cause of the wounding. Venerable Bede interprets this text as “the first story of our redemption, told by Christ” where the Samaritan represents Christ and the inn represents the church²⁶, but when the church is endangering psychological, emotional, spiritual, religious, moral, and relational wellbeing, it cannot be considered a safe place for all to experience restoration. There is ample evidence of moral injury in a church responsible for souls in anguish and a dearth of courage, compassion, generosity, and solidarity for and with survivors and all those wounded by clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up.

Clergy sexual abuse arises from an ecclesial culture marked by clericalism, hierarchicalism, and hegemonic masculinity that leave women

²⁶ James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2008), 3.

and children especially unsafe.²⁷ The church is responsible for this sinful culture as a center of malformation inasmuch as it manipulates information or encourages ignorance, fosters attitudes that revere clergy and discredit survivors and their advocates, and endorses conduct and rules that consolidate power in the hands of clergy while stripping laity of authentic equality and meaningful collaboration. This sinful ecclesial culture is intertwined with all the knowledge, dispositions, actions, relationships, and policies that shape how the church “expresses the meaning of society, the value of the patterned ways of social interaction humans construct, and the significance of the ways in which we live and order our communities.”²⁸ Moral injury pervades the entire institution; this psychological, emotional, spiritual, religious, moral, and relational harm swells *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In light of the many people who no longer identify as practicing Catholics, who feel ambiguous about their relationship with the church, or who do not feel welcome or safe to return to church spaces, this presents a number of challenges for moving toward healing in and beyond the church.

Love Resets a Body of Broken Bones

In his reflection on a divided and wounded church, Thomas Merton proposes that love is the only path to reset the “Body of broken bones” that comprise the Body of Christ. Love implies “acceptance of the pain of reunion” and “begins to heal all wounds.”²⁹ Merton recommends the practice of contemplation to experience God’s mercy as liberation from any doubt of unworthiness (whether one’s own or that of others) and expand compassion in seeking to understand, share in, and alleviate the suffering others bear. Merton explains, “If I do this, I obey God. If I refuse

²⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Sexual Violence against Women and Children: How is Another World Possible?,” paper presented at Catholic Theological Society of America Annual Convention, June 7, 2019, summarized, *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 74 (2019): 160, ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/download/11499/9659/.

²⁸ Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 16.

²⁹ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, 76.

to do it, I disobey Him. It is not therefore a matter left open to subjective caprice.”³⁰ Invoking any number of virtues—whether courage, compassion, or solidarity—will not be enough to bring individual, interpersonal, and institutional healing to the morally injured. When embraced as an individual and collective exercise of love, the church can begin to accept the “pain of reunion” by taking on “the sacrifice and sorrow that are the price of this resetting of bones.”³¹ While we cannot adequately articulate a comprehensive collection of strategies to bring about personal, relational, and structural healing in these pages, we need a more holistic approach to doing theology, developing ecclesiology, and advancing pastoral care in response to these sacred wounds and to restore the dignity, agency, and relationships of the morally injured. This is important because too often the healing process is expected to be done in private, at one’s own expense (if finances allow), confined to a patient-therapist relationship, or a support group. But as bell hooks observes, “Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.”³² To confront moral injury in the church means to provide a moral witness that all members of the Body of Christ deserve—and will have available to them—pathways to heal together.

Given the loss of safety and trust as well as the abundance of shame, guilt, and anger experienced by so many in the church, it will be far from easy to create the conditions for personal, relational, and communal healing. Experts in healing moral injury describe the long-term work necessary for creating “a culture of safe struggle” that includes “equal emphasis” on both safety and struggle.³³ To heal a morally injured church will require adopting trauma-informed practices for spiritual care, post-traumatic growth, and moral injury reconciliation. The church will have to prioritize attending to the spiritual and moral wounds left by the layers

³⁰ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, 77.

³¹ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, 72.

³² bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 215.

³³ Shay, “Moral Injury,” 190 (emphasis removed).

of betrayal that “is ungluing the glue” previously bonding people to the church and to one another.³⁴ This glue will lack all bonding power as long as people do not feel safe, respected, cared for, welcome, and willing to trust individuals and communities that represent the church. This does not mean it is their responsibility to overcome these anxious and uncomfortable feelings; on the contrary, the church needs to invest in the words, actions, shared rituals, and policy changes that signify sacrifice and sorrow as love shouldering the pain caused by their waves of betrayal. Until the church feels like a place for all to feel safe and welcome, it will need to find other partners to help advance the healing work on the local, regional, and international scales.

Sacrifice and sorrow should include ongoing efforts to lament, repent, and atone for the many crimes and countless sins committed by clergy abusers and their enablers. Lament should communicate honestly about the moral evil done to individuals and their loved ones. This means the morally injured should have ample opportunity to “make truthful assessments and give candid expression of things they’ve done, witnessed, or by which they’ve been affected” to express “personal grief and protest against unjust systems, circumstances, and betrayals” so this can be witnessed both individually and communally.³⁵ This involves centering the voices of survivors to share to the extent they feel comfortable, a radical change for a church that has often muzzled survivors with non-disclosure agreements or other ways of manipulating confidentiality to prevent people from knowing the scope of harm caused by clergy abusers and their enablers.³⁶ Too often, church officials have rushed to calling for forgiveness and reconciliation, imposing the “cheap grace” that skips over

³⁴ Avishai Margalit, *On Betrayal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 83.

³⁵ Brad E. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War’s Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 130.

³⁶ This means empowering survivors to give voice to what they require for their own healing, since financial settlements do not consistently result in sufficient compensation for ongoing treatment or complete communication of pertinent information about the abuser and his risk to others. See Theo Gavrielides, “Clergy Child Sexual Abuse and the Restorative Justice Dialogue,” *Journal of Church and State* 55, no. 4 (2008): 617–639.

remorse, repentance, and the challenging, long-term work of restorative justice.³⁷ One possibility is to initiate shared community practices of a “healing circle,” that would give space to survivors, their loved ones, and representatives from other involved parties like journalists, attorneys, and church employees.³⁸ Every effort should be made to ensure such encounters and interactions are not rendered into hollow symbols or token gestures that “check a box” but fail to garner traction toward authentic transparency, accountability, and healing.

In and beyond the church, healing moral injury will have to take place through relationships marked by mutual respect, compassion, and co-responsibility. In the face of so much silence, stigma, and shame around human sexuality and abuse at the hands of clergy, recovering a degraded self-image and re-asserting one’s own agency can feel too daunting to attempt. Peer support communities have been essential to confer recognition to survivors and organize collective action to initiate life-long steps toward recovery and healing.³⁹ Recovery and resilience are galvanized through relationships and shared rituals. These shared practices integrate the body’s autonomic functions, emotions, and perception and focus attention and thinking in a liminal space and time. Rituals also offer a different value system from clinical treatment, which handles moral injury as a psychological condition that inhibits social adjustment. This approach usually brackets the theological questions of a shattered meaning system and loss of good character. Without social support for the reconstruction of a moral identity within a meaningful system, the underlying isolation of moral injury will remain unaddressed.⁴⁰

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, tr. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 44.

³⁸ Stephen Pope and Janine Geske, “Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice in Light of Clerical Sexual Abuse and its Cover-up,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 611–631.

³⁹ Iim Halimatusa’diyah, “Moral Injury and the Struggle for Recognition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS in Indonesia,” *International Sociology* 34, no. 6 (2019): 711.

⁴⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock, “Moral Conscience, Moral Injury, and Rituals for Recovery,” in *Moral Injury and Beyond: Understanding Human Anguish and Healing Traumatic Wounds*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (New York: Routledge, 2020), 45–46.

Integrating shared practices and fostering inclusive relationships helps dissolve isolation and can model safe bonds worthy of trust. Rituals can be cathartic for strong emotions like anger, guilt, and shame. By participating in symbolic words and actions, the morally injured can experience meaning and purpose in a new and life-giving fashion. As healthy relationships form, “the present can be experienced with equanimity, appreciation, and love; and the future becomes a horizon of possibility for adventure and hope. This flexible connection to and freedom from memory and suffering is the key to what we might call self-forgiveness, a capacity for empathy for self and an expansion of it to wider and wider worlds.”⁴¹ As more people join these efforts, the moral “knowing together” of conscience formation can empower personal and social transformation.

Institutionally, the church is still so far from the transparency, accountability, healing, and prevention required to establish a safe and welcoming church for all. In the view of some, this work requires more than reform; it needs a “refounding” in the beliefs and practices that affirm the equal dignity, mutual respect, and co-responsibility of each member of the church.⁴² This will have to include changing policies and procedures, as Pope Francis initiated with *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* in 2019. But many more steps need to be taken to end the practice of shielding perpetrators from ecclesial and civic accountability. For example, lay people do not have much real power in church governance, as parish council and financial committees are “consultative,” with the pastor presiding over them; their votes are not binding.⁴³ Clericalism, hierarchicalism, and hegemonic masculinity will continue to shape church culture unless and until canon law is changed to reflect genuine equality and co-responsibility between the ordained and laity. Pedagogically, the church must confront its failure to properly form consciences. Spanning the local and universal levels of the

⁴¹ Brock, “Moral Conscience, Moral Injury,” 49–50.

⁴² Gerald Arbuckle, *Abuse and Cover-Up: Refounding the Catholic Church in Trauma* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019).

⁴³ Canon law no. 536 reads, “A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop.”

church, we need to inform, form, and transform consciences to be more attentive and responsive to oppressive exercise of power, spiritual and sexual abuse, and deception and secrecy that protect perpetrators and rob people of the truth. Consciences have to be empowered to habituate courage, compassion, generosity, and boundary-breaking solidarity to ensure our commitment to restorative justice and doing everything possible to prevent future victims. The moral demands of discipleship—especially to “Go and do likewise” in the face of so many people left in the ditch by clergy abusers and their enablers—require nothing less. When we share in these efforts together, we can begin to turn the tide against the betrayal and anger, shame and confusion, isolation and futility so pervasive in our morally injured church.



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Chapter 9: Obeying God’s Plan? The Spiritual Abuse of Nuns

Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs

The term ‘spiritual abuse’ is helpful for an understanding of systemic mistreatment experienced by six former nuns who belonged to the community “Servants of God’s Plan” (*Siervas del Plan de Dios*, or SPD) in Peru, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. None of the nuns reported sexual abuse, so unlike other chapters in this volume, the focus in this chapter is on spiritual abuse. However, when sexual abuse takes place within a religious institution, it is very common for spiritual abuse to be an enabling factor. A better understanding of spiritual abuse can therefore contribute to a better church response to sexual abuse.

One of the most nuanced and helpful definitions of spiritual abuse is offered by the British scholar Lisa Oakley,

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it. This abuse may include: manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, coercion to conform, control through the use of sacred texts or teaching, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a “divine” position, isolation as a means of punishment, and superiority and elitism.¹

¹ Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys, *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Cultures* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2019), 31. This definition builds on Oakley’s definition in Lisa Oakley, “Understanding Spiritual Abuse,” *Church Times*, February 16, 2018, www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/16-february/comment/opinion/understanding-spiritual-abuse.

Oakley frames spiritual abuse within emotional and psychological abuse but still recognizes distinctive features in spiritual abuse which deserve special attention. In this essay, these distinctive features include the significant symbols, texts, teachings, rituals, prayers, or leaders operating in the institutional context of the Servants of God's Plan. These features contributed towards a distorted understanding of obedience that contributed towards a systemic culture of abuse. Spiritual abuse is an issue in its own right, but examining it also shows how and why spiritual abuse can make members of religious institutions more vulnerable to sexual abuse.²

Servants of God's Plan

Luis Fernando Figari founded the Servants of God's Plan (SPD) community of nuns in 1998. Figari had previously founded the *Sodalitium Christianae Vitae* (SCV), or Sodalicio, in Lima, Peru in 1971. Sodalicio is a Society of Apostolic Life within the Church in which the majority of members are lay consecrated men; there are also a small number of priests. In 1991, Figari also founded the Marian Community of Reconciliation (MCR), which is a female branch made up only of lay consecrated women. The mission of SCV and MCR was to serve young people, assist the poor, and evangelize the culture. The SPD community of nuns was therefore the third community founded by Figari. SPD's charism was to serve the sick and the poor, and as a mark of their identity, they wear the traditional religious habit.³

² A particular risk factor for abuse is when nuns are not esteemed or valued for either their inherent worth or their significant contribution to the Church. See especially Anne E. Patrick, "His Dogs More than Us': Virtue in Situations of Conflict Between Women Religious and Their Ecclesiastical Employers," in *Conscience and Calling: Ethical Reflections on Catholic Women's Church Vocations* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 27–50.

³ Elise Ann Allen, "Peruvian Ex-Nuns Report Abuses of Power, Conscience Inside Order," *Crux*, November 27, 2021, www.cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2021/11/peruvian-ex-nuns-report-abuses-of-power-conscience-inside-order.

In 2010, the Peruvian journalist Pedro Salinas, a former Sodalicio member, accused Figari and other leaders of physical, psychological and sexual abuse. In 2015, after five years of investigation, he wrote the book *Mitad monjes, mitad soldados* (*Half Monks, Half Soldiers*), which contained victims' testimonies.⁴ In response, Sodalicio appointed a special commission interviewing more than fifty of their former and current members. On April 16, 2016, the commission published a ten-page report that affirmed: "The damage was perpetrated in a situation in which the superiors assumed a dominant position asking for perfect and absolute obedience achieved by the practice of extreme discipline This way of exercising power was an attempt to destroy their individual will."⁵

Figari was sanctioned by the Vatican in 2017 and is now barred from having any contact with the communities he founded. Sodalicio recognized sixty-six victims and set aside a fund of nearly 2.6 million US dollars for reparations.⁶ Yet, during the special commission, none of the nuns were interviewed about their experiences. Alejandra, who had left the order by the time we interviewed her, said, "We did not have access to the commission. The authorities of SPD did not communicate with us about the commission or whether we could ask to be interviewed. We were told by them that the SPD did not replicate the viciousness that occurred in Sodalicio and that is why we were the joy of the spiritual family in the middle of a crisis."

⁴ Pedro Salinas, *Mitad monjes, mitad soldados: Todo lo que el Sodalicio no quieres que sepas* (Lima: Planeta, 2015).

⁵ Comisión de Ética para la Justicia y la Reconciliación, "Informe Final," April 16, 2016, www.comisionetica.org/blog/2016/04/16/informe-final/.

⁶ For further information, see Rocío Figueroa Alvear and David Tombs, "Lived Religion and the Traumatic Impact of Sexual Abuse: The Sodalicio Case in Peru," in *Trauma and Lived Religion: Transcending the Ordinary*, ed. R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sreman (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2019), 157–159.

From 2016 to 2021, nearly thirty former nuns from SPD made complaints to ecclesial authorities in Peru, Chile, and the Vatican.⁷ In 2018, Juan Luis Cipriani, then the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima opened a canonical visit to SPD. However, in March 2019, Cipriani retired with the visitation still in process. The new auxiliary bishop of Lima José Salaverry was tasked with carrying the visitation through to its completion. However, the nuns who met the delegates were advised how to respond, and after their meeting, they were spoken to by leaders of the community. In June 2021, further complaints were sent to Chile's Pastoral Office for Complaints (OPADE), at the Archdiocese of Santiago, and in December 2021, the new Archbishop of Lima, Carlos Castillo, ordered a second canonical investigation of the order.⁸

Voices from the Community

In light of these issues, we wanted to hear directly from women who had been part of the SPD community. The primary goal of this study was to give voice to the women and their experiences in the community that were often painful and difficult. Six former-nuns participated in this study. They belonged to the community for a period ranging from six to seventeen years and now range in age from twenty-nine to forty years old. After receiving approval from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee, we developed and conducted structured personal interviews with each of them.⁹ Each interview was conducted in Spanish and lasted about an hour. The interviews were recorded on a digital audio system, and all information was transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English

⁷ Elise Ann Allen, "Church Authorities Order Second Inquiry into Troubled Peruvian Order," *Cruce*, January 21, 2022, www.cruce.com/church-in-the-americas/2022/01/church-authorities-order-second-inquiry-into-troubled-peruvian-order.

⁸ Allen, "Church Authorities Order Second Inquiry."

⁹ Ethics Committee Otago University, Ref. 21-125, Ethical Approval October 29, 2021. We especially thank the participants for their willingness to take part. We are also grateful to our project consultant, Dr. Tess Patterson, Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago, and the University Ethics Committee for their support for this research.

and analyzed. They describe mistreatment that took place from their novitiate to their temporary vows.

Figuroa, lead researcher for the study, was previously a member of MCR, one of the female branches of Sodalicio. Figuroa served as the MCR General Superior for 9 years (1991–1998). Since 2006, victims from Sodalicio and its branches have contacted her for support following sexual and spiritual abuses perpetrated within the communities. During this time, Figuroa developed a relationship of trust with many of the victims. The transcription of the interviews has been anonymized to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Their pseudonyms are Jessica, Maricarmen, Gabriela, Rosanna, Alejandra, and Rosa.

The participants joined the community, first and foremost, because of a strong commitment to the community's mission of service and help. Rosa and Alejandra felt attracted by the opportunity to work for the poor and give support to the needy. Gabriela says, "The mission of the Servants responded to the desire that I had since I was a kid to help others." Maricarmen talked of her motivation as a deep yearning, "When I was a little girl if someone asked me what do you want to do, I responded that I wanted to be a nurse or a doctor and help kids under the bridge." A second motivation was the appeal of life in community. Gabriela reported, "Something that attracted me was their joy. They smiled all the time. They were very approachable, and I wanted to be like that." Jessica felt that the community could become the family that she was lacking at the time when she met the nuns, "I was in a very vulnerable situation. The nuns were the support that I needed. ... I found the protection that I did not have in my family." A third motivation was the charisma of the leader. As Rosanna said, "She was spontaneous and joyful and apparently very friendly." In view of these aspirations, and their overlap with the stated mission and character of the community, we discuss below some of the institutional dynamics which served to frustrate or disappoint these hopes and, which in some cases, amounted to spiritual abuse.

God's Plan

Rosa explained that the ideal of the SPD was to become saints, but this holiness was understood as perfectionism, "I had to be perfect," Rosa said, "In everyday life, there was an enormous pressure to do things correctly and to achieve perfection. There were rigorous and millimetric demands that generated a huge inner tension in me. I had a very exaggerated fear of the slightest mistake and of being mistreated afterwards." This perfectionism was instilled by an almost military regime. Gabriela recalls how the authorities constantly mentioned the importance of being tough, "They wanted to make us strong women—a characteristic that was highly esteemed in the Servants." Rossana gives us an example, "I did not know how to swim. Those responsible for formation would ask me to jump into the pool and if I held on to the edges, they would dislodge my fingers with a stick. When I expressed my concern to another superior, I was told that if I wanted to serve God, I should be a strong woman and never question the sisters in charge. Because of this instruction in my head I let it continue." For Gabriela the goal was to "love the charism above everything else,"

I think that the way the order presented themselves attracted me: their use of the habit and their style of life was a very radical option. They made us love the charism as being better than any other charism around: we were radicals, we prayed, we were perfect. In our collective unconscious, we considered that we were the best; and to achieve that goal, the community had an excessive care for appearances: the authorities would tell sisters who were overweight to eat less and exercise in the evenings. For example, a sister was sent after dinner to do exercises at 11 p.m. at night during Chile's winter because she was too fat. It was just considered inconceivable to be fat.

Closely linked to the idea of holiness, frequent appeals to 'God's plan' could also become a means of abuse. Whilst a shared commitment to God's plan is hardly surprising in view of the name of the community, and

a strong personal commitment to God's plan was obviously appropriate and to be expected, the way that God's plan was presented could be abusive. Discerning God's plan was not something that had room for a nun's own sense of direction or discernment. Gabriela explained, "They decided what was God's plan for you: according to what I was taught by the sisters who guided my vocational discernment, God's plan was ONE, one vocation, one path and it was directly related to my happiness. I believed that if I did not become a Servant of God's Plan I would never be happy."

When Maricarmen remembers her years in the community, she said, "A problem is the way the vows were lived. The obedience was lived in a very repressive way, without freedom, without freedom of thought." This lack of freedom was also manifested during the vocational discernment. Jessica claimed that she was manipulated by the nuns in her discernment process, "In the community they never told me about discernment. On the contrary, they always repeated that they were confident that I had a vocation and that my doubts were due to my anger and rebellion, but that deep down they saw that I had a vocation."

Some of the participants revealed that they had little spiritual freedom and control over their own personal relationships with God. Jessica was obliged to pray what the authorities asked, "They sent us to pray but they gave us the specific texts of the Gospel which they wanted us to meditate on, and they also gave us specific commentaries of the Gospels. We never prayed or read anything that we wanted to. We never prayed to other saints: for example, Mother Teresa of Calcutta was forbidden." Alejandra remembers, "We would pray at our desks. Some of us had a holy card or a picture of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. We were told to remove that saint because she was not from our charism."¹⁰ Maricarmen mentioned a similar prohibition, "I was singing a song to the heart of Jesus. The superior told me it was too sentimental, and I was forbidden to sing that song."

¹⁰ St. Theresa of the Child Jesus is a name for the widely venerated French Carmelite nun Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897).

Particular phrases were also used to make the nuns identify with the community. Examples were “be holy,” “obey God’s Plan,” or “love the charism.” Jessica stated, “You arrived and they taught you catch phrases from the moment you woke up.” Rosa quotes some of the phrases, “Other favourite phrases of the sisters were ‘she who obeys is never wrong,’ ‘a servant does not set limits to love,’ ‘authority is the voice of God.’ It is impressive to see how all the sisters constantly repeated the same phrases.”

According to Jacques Poujol, spiritual abuse happens when the individual’s very expression of self is changed and a type of auto-identification with the group is demanded.¹¹ According to Poujol, in a dysfunctional group, the community becomes the necessary and only intermediary between God and the person. All relationship between God and the person is evaluated or mediated by the community. In this de-personification, spiritual freedom to create their own identity and spiritual self is denied and lost.¹²

Absolute Obedience

Strict obedience and absolute submission are two of the most important values in an abusive system. For Oakley, a common feature in spiritual abuse is the requirement of obedience to an abusive authority which is often accompanied by the belief that the abuser has a divine position.¹³ Regarding this sacralization of authority in SPD, Gabriela explained, “We were told that in the house the superiors were God.” And because the superiors had this divine position the person has no say and the authority had no limits. She continued, “They taught me not to question the authorities; we were forbidden to think badly regarding authorities. So, the point of departure was that I was wrong and that I was not seeing reality. I was the one who had to make the effort to change my thoughts.

¹¹ Jacques Poujol, *Abus spirituels. S’affranchir de l’emprise* (Paris: Editions Empreinte, 2015), 24.

¹² Poujol, *Abus spirituels*, 33.

¹³ Lisa Oakley and Katherine Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21–22.

Authorities were simply beyond any opinion we could have about them.” She continued, “I got used to the fact that an authority had my life in her hands. The authority became a kind of confessor, and she would always be right about me; in this way I lived obedience, which was nothing else than an absolute submission of my being.”

According to Jessica, “We were requested to do things that made no sense, such as picking leaves from a bamboo or to disassemble six beds and then reassemble them again for no reason, many days of fasting and everything in the name of obedience.” Rosanna described an accident when she obeyed an order from her superior, “I did not like to go down some stairs because it was dark. My superior obliged me to go down those unlit stairs to overcome my fear. I fell down them and fractured my tibia and fibula. That was the first of fifteen surgeries I had in the community. When they asked me how I fell, I said they forced me down those stairs. The superior corrected me and made me write one hundred times that she who obeys is never wrong. She told me that I could not question, and that God had allowed that accident.”

Rosa described how the emphasis on obedience could lead to abuses. She said, “They wanted to test how far we would go for the love of Jesus.” She remembers,

One day we were asked to go for a run, and we had to do it with our arms outstretched for half an hour. Then we were asked to do more exercises. I have asthma and I needed to get my inhaler, but the superior would not let me. Afterwards we went to pray the Stations of the Cross. While I was praying, I fainted and then I vomited. The superior shouted at me, “Why are you waiting to get up? A Servant is prompt, and you should clean what you did.” I was not able to get up, nor to clean up, I had no strength; I was hyperventilating.

The participants were taught that the “the superior represents God” and actually “was God in the house.” So to obey all the rules and values of the community, and obey their superiors, was a way to “test how far they could

go for the love of Jesus.” Jessica said that “your brain gets molded as they wished, and we began to normalize things that were not normal.” Likewise, Maricarmen said, “They annul your capacity to think. This generates all type of abuses because you are not critical, you will not communicate.” The problem was not obedience *per se* but the idolizing of a blind obedience without limits or conditions.

Coercive Control

In order to achieve this blind and absolute obedience religious leaders often resort to coercive control.¹⁴ Our participants reported high-levels of control in community life. According to Rossana, the authorities tracked and monitored the daily activities of the nuns. She remembers, “if we watched films in the community evenings and one of us fell asleep, we had to get into the pool late at night and swim until the superior told us to stop. We were also woken up in the early hours of the morning for exercise; it was said that this would make us stronger to be Servants of God’s Plan.”

The control extended to everyday life and the superiors scrutinized the nuns’ activities and their use of time in all its details. Rosanna explains, “The superior had a total military regime: nine minutes for the shower, extreme discipline for the fulfilment of the timetable, not a minute more, not a minute less, and if one arrived late the punishments and corrections exceeded the limits of charity with shouts and insults towards the person who arrived late.”

Coercive control also shaped their inner life. Rosa recalls how she could not complain about her tiredness or show any emotion,

The spiritual abuse was violent. I could not complain about any suffering. You know that we consecrate ourselves to the Sufferer A question of the examination of conscience was, did I show my tiredness to others? If

¹⁴ David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1991), 57. On the nature of coercive control, see especially Evan Stark, *Coercive Control: The Entrapment of Women in Personal Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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we were tired we could not show it or express it. If the sisters saw me with a grumpy face, they called it the bump face. To express any kind of emotion was seen as a sin; we were repeatedly told that we had to let the old man die and let the new man be born. I ended up blocking and freezing any emotion or feeling. Not having a healthy space to express my emotions ended up making me sick.

Coercive control often induces anxiety and undermines a person's sense of self-confidence. Alejandra speaks about the loss of her subjectivity and the loss of her emotional and spiritual freedom, "When I shared something personal and I was moved by it, I was always told that I had to be tougher. In this way I learned to keep to myself and not to express my emotions, whether they were of joy or sadness. So I came to a kind of a state of emotional anesthesia." Rosa reported, "They made us do a daily examination of conscience. They asked you: have you been moved by your emotions? Have you wasted your time instead of loving the mission? Have you had an emotional disorder seasoning the food? Did you eat what you like? It was a constant pressure. I lived eight years controlling and evaluating my eating: did I eat more? Did I put too much salt on?" Participants described how little by little this constant pressure eroded their sense of well-being in different ways. Alejandra speaks of "emotional anesthesia," and Rosa states clearly that it "ended up making me sick."

Coercive control put limits on disagreement, raising concerns, or discussing certain topics within SPD. The participants talked about emotional repression and the erosion of their critical thinking and reasoning. For Rosa, obedience was understood as always accepting the authority of superiors, "To say what I felt or to express any kind of disagreement was to be against authority and it was seen as a sin and a betrayal of the community." She says that the devil was used to discredit and reject other persons' ideas or reasoning, "We were constantly told that having doubts came from the devil; many things bothered me inside, but it was very difficult for me to express them." Rosanna remembers that anyone who left the community "was demonized." The comments were,

“She is a traitor; whoever puts her hand to the plough and looks back is not worthy of the kingdom of heaven.”

Maricarmen describes what happened when she asked questions, “I was very curious and during some classes I always wanted to understand better. One day I began asking questions and my superior got upset by my questions and said to me, ‘Are you silly? You are worse than my little nephew.’” Maricarmen added, “In the Servants there were no discussions. There were no different points of view. Perhaps about your favorite color your own view was okay, but for other topics that required thought you had to adhere to the superior.” Jessica remembers that when she was told what her new mission would be, “The superior asked my opinion (although it was not for discernment, since the decision was already made) and because I said what I thought, she corrected me saying that I should be a woman of God and trust the authorities because they know what God wanted for me.”

Differences of opinion, variety of gifts, and diversity of experiences were not accepted. Rather than being seen as a strength—in the manner described in Paul’s image of church as the body of Christ, in which each member is different but is important in its own right and works together with other members—diversity is seen as a threat to the cohesion of the group. These are signs of a unhealthy community. Homogeneity is valorized, and anyone who thinks differently faces sanction.¹⁵

The experiences reported by participants suggest that a redefinition of the vow of obedience ought to be modeled on Jesus’s own example in the Gospels, in which Jesus consistently said he was obeying his Father’s will. The obedience in the Gospel is an act of trust, an act of following God’s commandments, and following his love. It is an obedience marked by love and trust in a relationship between the Son and the Father. The rules and statutes of the community should be a means to achieve this obedience rather than ends in their own right. The vow of obedience entails obedience to the one who leads the community as someone who

¹⁵ Pujol, *Abus spirituels*, 30.

should care for both the common good and the dignity of the individual. Authority in religious life can only be exercised regarding religious sisters' external forum. Obedience should take on a stronger connotation of cooperation. Members could voice concern if they have questions about an instruction they receive. This would help to desacralize the insistence on absolute obedience to superiors and propose a more horizontal type of obedience made up of dialogue, coordination, and discernment in serving God's plan.

Secrecy and Silence

For Johnson and Van Vonderen, the most powerful rule in an abusive system is what they call the "no-talk rule" in which the problems cannot be exposed because "if you speak about the problem out loud, you are the problem."¹⁶ Maricarmen spoke of "secrecy and impenetrability" within the community. She said, "They teach you that. There is no air or light that enters the community. You feel that there are some strange things, but you don't have anyone to talk to about them." Sharing concerns with those outside the community is prohibited, "You cannot tell them to your family. Nothing is allowed." According to Gabriela, silence was pervasive even when there were good reasons for the nuns to share their thoughts, "We were living the worst crisis: the accusations of sexual abuse against the Founder. No one talked about it. I was amazed by how the crisis was hushed up and you would only talk in secret with your closest friends. They gathered us to give us the news of our new statutes and we had a big celebration. This was the *modus operandi* of the community: to silence voices by diverting attention to what was good and what was shining and silence the crises."

Secrecy was especially required in dealings with family. Rosa reported, "My formators and superiors were very insistent in this sense. I could not trust anyone else. I could tell my family absolutely nothing about what was happening to me. Several times my formation supervisor listened to my

¹⁶ Johnson and Vonderen, *The Subtle Power*, 67.

conversations with my family. She asked me to put the call on speaker. On one occasion, I told my parents that I was ill and afterwards my superior told me that I don't have to tell my family about it." When Rosanna needed a surgery because she broke her leg following the order to go down the stairs, she wanted to call her family. Her counsellor told her, "Remember that dirty laundry is washed at home. Don't give details to your family, why worry them when you are so far away, you have ten minutes to talk to them."

A common practice in spiritual abuse is to distance a person from their family and circle of friends making the person more dependent on the community. Rosa was told that she could not trust anyone, apart from the institution, and she should not even trust her own family. Gabriela was isolated from her family and expected to break contact with her friends, including her personal friends in the community. Gabriela explains, "My best friend was also a nun in the community and she was a year ahead of me. I was not allowed to share anything with her." Gabriela commented that she could rarely speak with her family,

The few conversations with the family lasted less than ten minutes, and I was generally accompanied by a sister. On one occasion, I visited my family, and I was not in good health. ... My family was concerned when they saw me and they wanted to take me to the doctor, an action that was flatly rejected by the community that did not want my family's intervention; this was inexplicable for my family, why couldn't they participate in my affairs? Why couldn't they take part when they saw my health at risk?

The isolation included restrictions on interests and educational activities. Maricarmen, for example, described how the first years they were not allowed to read the newspapers or to go online. Jessica, after her formation period, was never allowed to study what she wanted, "I was thirty years old, and I did not have a university degree since I was never allowed to study in the community. I wanted to study special education

and they did not let me. They made me study philosophy that I never liked, and my family had to pay for it. I only did one semester.”

Isolation promoted a culture of secrecy which made it less likely that abuses would be challenged. Anything that might lead to scrutiny or questioning was not allowed to be shared outside the congregation. At the same time, access to external information was restricted and controlled by the authorities.

Spiritual Abuse as a Context for Other Forms of Abuse

In view of the accounts offered by the nuns, the belief that the mistreatment was a form of spiritual abuse is justified. This judgement is based not on any one specific event or action but on what Oakley describes as “a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context,” which “can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it.”¹⁷ Spiritual abuse is especially concerning because it is closely connected with emotional and psychological abuse and can also contribute to other forms of abuse, including sexual abuse.

The emotional and psychological consequences of the abuse in SPD were profound. One of the dynamics in community life that was mentioned was frequent humiliation and shaming in public. Over time, this eroded self-confidence and undermined self-esteem. Maricarmen recalled examples of verbal abuse, “The general superior continuously yelled at me. She always made me feel stupid ... and when I entered, I had the perception of myself as a clever woman; I had good marks at school, and my parents always said that I was ahead of my age. I left the community feeling that I was silly and stupid. My superior humiliated me regarding my intelligence: ‘move your intelligence, use the only neuron that you have.’” These humiliations sometimes involved public shaming. Rosanna often stammered if she got nervous, and she was mocked for this, “When I tried to speak, they would automatically start banging the table and chanting throughout the house, ‘she’s shy, she is going to cry.’ This

¹⁷ Oakley and Humphreys, *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse*, 31.

would go on until I managed to hide the tears that this humiliation caused me.”

Gabriela remembers that the public humiliations were daily, “The dialogues at meals were very tense: they were used to make public corrections and we learned to be humble, accepting that the others were right because the opposite was a sign of pride. I was corrected many times, and afterwards, the authority and the sisters reprimanded me. I had to accept that they were right and ask for forgiveness, even though I was sure that the situation was not as they saw it.” When Jessica was in charge of the kitchen, she told the woman who cooked to mix two different types of noodles, “My superior in front of all the community said, ‘you are useless, everything you do is wrong, the sisters always have to cover your faults and negligence.’” Alejandra said that her superior criticized her severely in what amounted to verbal abuse,

You are useless. You do not do anything right. Many times, she slammed the door on my face when I did something wrong and she said that she did not want to talk to me When I moved to another community in Colombia, the superior was the same as my former superior. She shouted at me as she shouted to the dogs. Once, some keys were lost, and she threw the rubbish in front of me to find them. I had to search in the middle of the rotten food.

Although none of the participants reported sexual abuse, their experiences suggest that in other contexts—such as in Sodalicio—spiritual abuse can be a significant factor in enabling sexual abuses in church settings. Spiritual abuse makes people more vulnerable to other forms of abuse because it claims religious authority and sanction for practices which are abusive. Spiritual abuse also reinforces a culture of obedience and secrecy that makes it harder for perpetrators of sexual abuses to be held to account. When sexual abuse take place within a religious institution, it is almost inevitable that it will be accompanied by spiritual abuse.

Conclusion

In the Servants of God's Plan, a nun's loyalty to her vows can make her vulnerable to mistreatment. There is no reason to think that this problem is limited to just the SPD community. The demands on nuns to see the community's authorities as representatives of God and always submit to them does not do enough to protect either the nuns themselves or those in authority. The language of spiritual abuse is a helpful tool for understanding these dynamics at a deeper level. It brings to the fore the significant symbols, texts, teachings, rituals, prayers, and leadership roles which operate in this institutional setting. It also shows how spiritual abuses can support and sustain other forms of abuse, including the emotional and psychological abuses reported by the participants. Spiritual abuse is also an obvious risk factor for sexual abuses. Although sexual abuses were not reported in the SPD community, the accounts participants gave of spiritual abuses provide a deeper understanding of how sexual abuses can be perpetrated within religious institutions.



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The Spiritual Abuse of Nuns

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Chapter 10: Sexually Violated: A Moral Theological Response to Children's Rights

Anthonia Bolanle Ojo

Child sexual abuse is a major ethical, legal, and social problem globally. Although not a new phenomenon, the increased reports of child sexual abuse cases dominating the media, research, debates, and discussions on the topic have revealed a rise of incidences in contemporary society, which is an indication of the magnitude of the issue requiring immediate attention and intervention. According to the 2005 report of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), as many as a hundred million children alive today, especially girls, have been sexually abused.¹ Millions of girls and boys worldwide are being used in prostitution, pornography, trafficking, and other forms of sexual exploitation. Every day a large number of children are sexually abused within the sphere of their own family, school, church, etc., and many of these cases are never reported.²

Underlying all forms of child maltreatment, including sexual abuse, is the fact that children constitute an oppressed group and are still not afforded basic human rights.³ Child sexual abuse is a gross violation of the inherent dignity and rights of the child which usually involves cumulative breaches of several rights, the common being unlawful interference with

¹ UNICEF, *Changing a Harmful Social Convention: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting* (New York City, New York: UNICEF, 2005), 3, www.unicef-irc.org/publications/396-changing-a-harmful-social-convention-female-genital-mutilation-cutting.html.

² Rajeev Seth, "Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect in India," *Japan Med Association* 56, no. 5 (2013): 292–297.

³ Karen Polonko and Lucien Lombardo, "Human Dignity and Children: Operationalizing a Human Rights Concept," *Global Ethics* 18, no. 1 (2005), 18, doi.org/10.1080/11287462.2005.10800863.

family life, breaches of privacy rights, health, and leisure.⁴ In this chapter, I argue that the reality of child sexual abuse is a global challenge, noting that in Africa specifically a culture of silence has exacerbated the menace. I discuss some practical cases of sexual abuse, especially in Nigeria, and explore why some have been handled successfully and others unsuccessfully in restoring and protecting children's rights. In the concluding section, I suggest a moral theological response to the issue of sexual abuse through the lenses of the fundamental principles of inherent dignity and the inalienable rights of the human person.

Conceptual Framework

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a global and widespread phenomenon. The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined child sexual abuse as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.”⁵ According to a WHO report, sexual abuse of females before the age of 15 accounts for between 7 and 21 percent of all CSA cases, whereas figures for adolescent males ranged between 3.4 and 29.9 percent in some African countries.⁶ Furthermore, more than 41 percent of rape cases reported in South Africa involved children under age 18, and it was suggested that 25 percent of girls are likely to be raped before the age of 16.⁷ In one Ugandan study, 72 percent of

⁴ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York City, New York: General Assembly Resolution 44/25, 1989), art. 16, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

⁵ World Health Organization, *Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention* (Geneva, Switzerland: WHO, 1999), 62, apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/65900.

⁶ World Health Organization, *Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2005), whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2005/9241593512_eng.pdf.

⁷ S. Cox, G. Andrade, D. Lungelow, W. Schloetelburg, and H. Rode, “The Child Rape Epidemic: Assessing the Incidence at Red Cross Hospital, Cape Town, and Establishing the

victims who presented to a hospital were aged 12 or below.⁸ Similarly, a Kenyan study found that 50 percent of patients presenting to some sexual assault centers were under 14 years old.⁹ Likewise, an analysis of Demographic and Health Survey data on 6,351 adolescents aged 18 years or below from six countries in sub-Saharan Africa, between 2006 and 2008 showed that prevalence of CSA ranged from 1.04 percent in Liberia to 5.84 percent in Zambia, with Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, and Zimbabwe reporting a prevalence of 1.38, 2.40, 4.61, and 4.96 percent, respectively.¹⁰

In Nigeria in particular, there have been a significant number of reported cases of CSA. The Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development reported that 1,200 girls had been raped in one incident in 2012 in Rivers, a coastal state in South-Eastern Nigeria.¹¹ In a study from Maiduguri, North-East Nigeria, a sexual assault rate of 77.7 percent was reported among female child workers, with sexual assault being more likely in girls who were younger than 12 years.¹² In their research, Kunuji and Essiet recorded that approximately 14 percent and 35 percent of out-of-school adolescents in an urban slum in Lagos had been victims of rape and

Need for a New National Protocol,” *South African Medical Journal* 97, no. 10 (2007): 954, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18000577/.

⁸ Samuel Ononge, Julius Wandabwa, Paul Kiondo, and Robert Busingye, “Clinical Presentation and Management of Alleged Sexually Assaulted Females at Mulago Hospital, Kampala, Uganda,” *African Health Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2005): 51, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1831897/.

⁹ Jennifer Reddin, “Comparative Review of Child Sexual Abuse Practices and Policies in Kenya and the United States of America,” *African Journal of Social Work* 10, no. 2 (2020): 13, www.ajol.info/index.php/ajsw/article/view/198832.

¹⁰ Ismail Yahaya, Olalekan Athman, Joaquim Soares, and Gloria Macassa, “Social Disorganization and History of Child Sexual Abuse against Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Multilevel Analysis,” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 13, no. 33 (2013): 24, bmcinthealthhumanrights.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-698X-13-33.

¹¹ Vanguard News, “Hoodlums Rape 1,200 Girls in Rivers,” *Vanguard News*, February 27, 2013, www.vanguardngr.com/2013/02/hoodlums-rape-1200-girls-in-rivers/.

¹² Bala Audu, Ado Geidam, and Hajara Jarma. “Child Labor and Sexual Assault among Girls in Maiduguri, Nigeria,” *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 104, no.1 (2009): 64–67, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18954870/.

statutory rape, respectively.¹³ Manyike, et al. report a prevalence of 55 percent and 40 percent among in-school adolescents in Southwest and South-East Nigeria, respectively.¹⁴

A case of child sexual abuse which attracted international concern was that of a 13-year-old victim in Lagos State, Nigeria, who was frequently raped by a 44-year-old man, Kabiru Oke, the husband of the victim's aunt with whom she lived, between October 2018 and January 2019. Feeling uncomfortable with the act, the victim reported to her aunt, who did nothing about it. With her (the aunt's) levity or negligence, the man continued with the act of abuse until January 10 when the man's nineteen-year-old son, Farouq caught him in the act and joined in violating the minor. In the same January, the girl fled the place for her mother's house in Ogun State where she was later discovered to be pregnant.¹⁵ The perpetrators were later apprehended and jailed for the heinous act. This is one of the few acts of child sexual abuse in Nigeria that received an adequate judgment through the legal system.

Sexual abuse affects both male and female victims, with most perpetrators being the masculine gender and known to the victim.¹⁶ According to the 2015 report of UNICEF on child sexual abuse in Nigeria, one in four girls and one in ten boys are said to be sexually abused before

¹³ Michael Kunnuji and Adenike Esiet. "Prevalence and Correlates of Sexual Abuse among Female Out of School Adolescents in Iwaya Community, Lagos State, Nigeria," *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 19, no. 1 (2015): 82–90, www.ajol.info/index.php/ajrh/article/view/115808.

¹⁴ Pius Manyike, Josph Chinawa, Elias Aniwada, Udechukwu NP, Odutola Odetunde, "Child Sexual Abuse among Adolescents in Southeast Nigeria: A Concealed Public Health Behavioral Issue," *Pakistan Journal Medical Sciences* 31, no. 4 (2015): 827–832, doi.org/10.12669/pjms.314.7115.

¹⁵ Nsikak Nseyen, "Nigeria: Father, Son Rape, Impregnate 13-year-old in Lagos," *Daily Post*, April 8, 2019, dailypost.ng/2019/04/08/father-son-raped-impregnated-13-year-old-girl-lagos/.

¹⁶ Mario Adamu Bugaje, Olufemi Ogunrinde, and Jamilu Faruk, "Child Sexual Abuse in Zaria, Northwestern Nigeria," *Nigerian Journal Pediatrics* 39, no. 3 (2012): 111, www.ajol.info/index.php/njp/article/view/76848.

age eighteen.¹⁷ In Nigeria, girls, most especially those who fend for themselves either by hawking or by being employed as house maids, are more susceptible to sexual abuse. In addition to these, the children in the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) camps are at risk of being abused sexually. Besides inadequate access to basic needs, traditional protection structures, or security fears at IDPs, some women and girls have reportedly become vulnerable to sexual exploitation in the form of rape and survival sex. In late July 2016, Human Rights Watch documented sexual abuse, including rape and exploitation of forty-three women and girls living in seven IDP camps in Maiduguri, Borno State.¹⁸ Similarly, a Rapid Protection Assessment Report published in May 2016 by the Borno State Protection Sector working group comprising national and international aid providers identified sexual exploitation, rape, and other sexual abuses as a major concern in 14 camps out of 26 sites hosting IDPs in Borno State.

Child marriage, the practice in which children are married to adults, is another form of CSA common in Nigeria.¹⁹ Giving away young girls into marriage even before the onset of their menstrual cycle is a common practice in rural communities, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria, mainly for religious and economic reasons. Female children are given away in marriage at a young age to increase the wealth of family members through the payment of bride prices.²⁰ The way children are viewed makes the practice of early marriage common in the northern part of Nigeria.

¹⁷ Lorraine Radford, *Action to End Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: A Review of the Evidence 2020* (New York City, New York: UNICEF and End Violence Against Children, 2020), 27, www.unicef.org/documents/action-end-child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-review-evidence-2020.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls," *Human Rights Watch*, October 31, 2016, www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls.

¹⁹ Iyabode Ogunniran, "Child Bride and Child Sex: Combating Child Marriages in Nigeria," *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence* 2, no. 1 (2011): 98, www.ajol.info/index.php/naujilj/article/view/82389.

²⁰ Gabriel Igberase, "Harmful Cultural Practices and Reproductive Health in Nigeria," *Continental Journal of Tropical Medicine* 6, no. 1 (2012): 27, 30.

Children are regarded as the property of their parents, and this may explain the practice of early marriage. Girls are given away in marriages without their consent by relatives. This practice is founded on the belief that children have the duty to obey their parents without asking questions. Some of the children given out in marriage may argue that they are involved for economic survival and in many situations to support family members. The Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003 provides that a marriage entered into with a girl younger than eighteen years old is null and void.²¹ However, section eighteen of the Marriage Act²² provides that a child below the age of twenty-one can get married if consent is obtained from the parents. The implication of this provision is that children as young as fifteen can get married with their parents' consent, which conflicts with the clear provisions of Section 21 of the Child Rights Act of 2003.

Different research shows that children worldwide are most likely to be sexually abused by a person known to them, usually an adult or older child who is a family member, another relative, family friend, or an adult in a relationship of trust or authority such as a parent, pastor, police officer, or teacher.²³ Correspondingly, cases of child sexual abuse have been reported among Catholic priests all around the world. Such cases have drawn particular media and public attention in the past decade as revelations have grown and become the subject of worldwide academic studies, investigations, and litigation.²⁴ While some of the cases of child sexual abuse have been treated with justice by the leaders of the Church, many have been treated unjustly. Some of the priests guilty of the act of sexual

²¹ *Child Rights Act*, 2003, sec. 21, lawsofnigeria.placng.org/laws/C50.pdf. Nigeria: Child's Rights Act, (2003) (Abuja: Nigeria), July 31, 2003, www.refworld.org/docid/5568201f4.html.

²² *Marriage Act*, 1990, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, (LFN) Ch 218, sec. 18, www.commonlii.org/ng/legis/num_act/ma85/.

²³ David Southall and Rhona Macdonald, "Protecting Children from Abuse: A Neglected but Crucial Priority for the International Child Health Agenda," *Paediatrics and International Child Health* 33, no. 4 (2013): 201, doi.org/10.1179/2046905513Y.0000000097.

²⁴ Derek Farrell, "Sexual Abuse Perpetrated by Roman Clergy and Religious," *Mental Health Religion and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2009): 41, doi.org/10.1080/13674670802116101.

abuse have been sent outside of the country for further studies, while some have been seen moving about freely without a sense of guilt.

In Nigeria, there are many factors preventing the effective handling of child sexual abuse. These include cultural practices and traditions. They influence how people react or respond to violence based on the cultural norms of their society. In Nigeria, victims may not volunteer information on sexual abuse for cultural reasons. Information is often obtained with difficulty from victims or their families, who are scared of the cultural implication of their disclosure. The role and attitude of family and community continue to be cited as important factors in sexual abuse reporting, as well as the relationship between perpetrator and victim.²⁵

Child sexual abuse is a crime against children of which the true magnitude remains difficult to determine because it is largely underreported and commonly goes unpunished.²⁶ In African settings generally, and Nigeria in particular, sexual matters are not discussed in public. Parents do not discuss sex, and they likewise discourage their children from doing so. This is one of the reasons for the culture of silence in sexual abuse cases, especially when the perpetrator is a family member or acquaintance. Many believe incidents of sexual abuse are a personal and family matter. Therefore, victims choose not to report or disclose the sexual abuse to protect the perpetrators. For example, in a case of child sexual abuse in Kano State, Adara's (not the real name) daughter (eight years old) was raped by unknown men, and she knew a spiral of stigma and gossip would accompany her speaking out about such issues in the conservative community. Nevertheless, she decided to report the rape. Hours after she left the police station, her neighbors had already heard about her visit through the community grapevine. By the time officers arrived with an arrest warrant, the five suspects had fled and gone into hiding. Adara faced a backlash from her family and has been ostracized for

²⁵ Samuel Shafe and Gerard Hutchinson, "Child Sexual Abuse and Continuous Influence of Cultural Practices: A Review," *West Indian Medical Journal* 63, no. 6 (2014): 634, doi.org/10.7727/wimj.2013.246.

²⁶ Radford, *Action to End Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation*.

going to the police.²⁷ Being labelled an informer discourages victims and witnesses from cooperating with law enforcement out of fear of reprisal. Because of the community's attitude towards sexual abuse, some victims remain silent because they are afraid no one will believe their allegation of abuse.

In Nigeria, some cultural and traditional practices are responsible for ineffective handling of child sexual abuse cases. Some cultural norms such as behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts based on shared beliefs of a particular culture are highly influential in making specific populations such as female children vulnerable to violence. One major cultural norm that influences prevention policies is the stigma associated with being labelled an "informer." Studies show that the victims' apprehension is due to shame, stigma attached to sexual abuse, and fear of being labelled an informer.²⁸ Being labelled an informer could have negative implications for anyone who reports a crime to law enforcement. This cultural norm influences the handling of sexual abuse, specifically, whether the abuse is disclosed or reported. Because of the fear of being labelled an informer, victims and witnesses are afraid to step forward to disclose cases of sexual abuse.²⁹

Despite the fact that Nigeria has laws and policies to prevent sexual abuse in general, these preventative measures or the laws or the policies are inadequate and not strong enough to curtail the activities of the perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Sometimes the court process is slow, and sometimes too, the perpetrator gets away with a lot. The broken criminal justice system has direct and indirect impact on some of the victims and their families. They lose hope in the justice system. In research carried out while working on this paper, for every one hundred cases of sexual abuse reported to law enforcement, an estimated ninety-five perpetrators walk free. As a result of the high percentage of perpetrators

²⁷ M.A. Bugaje, G.O. Ogunrinde, and J.A. Faruk, "Child Sexual Abuse in Zaria, Northwest Nigeria," *Nigerian Journal of Pediatrics* 39, no. 3 (2012), 112, www.ajol.info/index.php/njp/article/view/76848.

²⁸ Igberase, "Harmful Cultural Practices and Reproductive Health in Nigeria," 30.

²⁹ Igberase, "Harmful Cultural Practices and Reproductive Health in Nigeria," 30.

who escape prosecution, victims are unwilling to disclose the sexual abuse. The research also showed that perpetrators of sexual abuse are less likely to receive prison time compared to other criminals.

From the above, it is evident that inadequate enforcement of the law in reported cases contributes to non-disclosure of abuse. In situations where the victims are empowered to report the abuse, cultural attitudes make it difficult for them to receive justice. Even within law enforcement, the police officers responsible for investigating sexual abuse offenses discredit the victims because their attitude and belief reflects those of the society.³⁰ The handling of reported cases by the police in some situations has discouraged many victims from coming forward. The victims believe that the police will do nothing to stop the sexual abuse. Thus, most perpetrators go unpunished, and the victims are left with the adverse effects associated with it, sometimes for life.³¹ How then might we address these problems? In the remainder of the paper, I put forward an approach informed by child rights and moral theology.

What are Child Rights?

Every human being, including every child, is naturally endowed with humanity and corresponding rights. Every child has rights, irrespective of his/her ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities, or any other status. The key to a human rights approach is that children must be accorded the inherent dignity of all members of the human community. Being treated with dignity and respect is not a privilege to be earned but a birth right of all members of the human community. Children and young people are human beings with the same general human rights as adults and also

³⁰ Daniel Masilo, "Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse within the Family System: Guidelines for an Educational Social Group Work Program," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 27, no. 4 (2018): 339, doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1430089.

³¹ Pooja Sawrikar and Ilan Katz, "Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in Ethnic Minority Communities: A Literature Review and Suggestions for Practice in Australia," *Australia Children and Youth Services Review* 85 (2018): 178, doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.12.028.

specific rights that recognize their special needs. The Child Rights Convention (CRC) offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognizing children's rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child.

In its preamble, the CRC begins with the statement that the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the freedom, justice, and peace in the world." Children's rights cover their developmental and age-appropriate needs that change over time as a child grows up. According to Polonko and Lombardo, the provisions in CRC may be classified into two groups: (1) those provisions that attempt to ensure social responsibility for the nurturing of human dignity in children, and (2) those that aim to prevent violations of children's dignity.³² Generally, human rights are such rights that are attached to one by the mere fact of being born as a human being. They are those rights that accrue to the human being in his/her capacity as a—*homo sapiens*. Human rights are inalienable and inherent by virtue of the human condition of existence and cannot be taken away from men and women by force. In the light of the above, human rights are the birth rights of all human beings. The most important responsibility of any government is to protect these rights of the citizens.

The idea of human rights is based on the universal principle that all human persons possess an inherent human dignity irrespective of sex, race, language, age, status, religion, or political beliefs, and human rights entitles people to respect, integrity and the capacity for self-expression and development in all aspects of their lives. Gathered from the above, a human right is a basic yardstick for fair and equal treatment of every citizen and for the protection of the sanctity and dignity of the human person. Since human rights are the birth rights of all human beings, the child, whatever

³² Polonko and Lombardo, "Human Dignity and Children," 18.

the age, has a right to the protection of his or her rights, sanctity, and dignity as a human being.

It is important to point out that the human rights perspective with the assumption that the individual has inherent dignity is not something that comes easily to some scholars who tend to have a functional or legalistic understanding of the concepts of rights and dignity of the person. Children are seen as inferior to adults in virtually every way. Dignity is not viewed as a birth right accorded all life but rather an earned right accorded certain individuals for engaging in certain activities or possessing certain qualities.³³ In explaining this understanding of human rights, Polonko and Lombardo analyze two views: an “adult-centered” perspective and a “child-centered” perspective. On the one hand, the adult-centered perspective simply assumes that children are inferior to adults, that inherent dignity does not apply to children, that it is not a birth right of all living beings but something to be earned, and that the meanings and experiences of children have little importance. This is the paradigm that dominates much of the world and is one among a number of contributing factors to the abuse of children.

On the other hand, a child-centered perspective acknowledges and challenges oppression of children and sees adults’ attempt to deny children dignity as one symptom of this oppression. It demands that we acknowledge the losses suffered from violating children and looks for ways to support children. It demands that we respect and acknowledge the value of children’s experiences. A child-centered perspective on the rights and inherent dignity of all members of the human community implies that while one can be harmed or maltreated, another cannot “take away” or “violate one’s dignity” since this is an inherent birth right independent of any given situation. From this perspective, the perpetrator demeans and degrades him or herself when he or she acts in a way that harms or

³³ Polonko and Lombardo, “Human Dignity and Children,” 18.

disregards the worth of self or others.³⁴ Child sexual exploitation and abuse, therefore, is a threat to children's rights today.

The failure to conceptualize sexual maltreatment within the existing framework of international human rights laws is distressing because sexual exploitation of children has become a way of life for several communities. It would be difficult to argue against the voluntariness of individual children's decisions when they are brought into exploitative situations by their parents and are responsible for the economic well-being of their families and villages. The global community recognizes that children possess human rights, including the right to be protected from some forms of abuse. Yet, in application, the focus of protection for children has been limited to health or economic issues.

With this as background, it is worth noting several strengths available in the prevention of CSA in the Nigerian context. The Nigerian Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights to children. Even though the Constitution does not make any distinction between the rights of adults and children, as Nigerian citizens they are expected to be able to enjoy these rights. These rights include the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty; the right to a private life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and the right to a fair hearing, peaceful assembly, association, and freedom of movement. More specifically, under Section 17(3)(f), children should be protected against exploitation, as well as moral and material neglect. Additionally, Section 18(1) provides that the government should ensure its policies provide for equal and adequate educational opportunities at all times.³⁵ The Nigerian National Assembly had set the age of sexual consent as eighteen, implying that any sexual activity involving a person less than eighteen in Nigeria is tagged child sexual abuse.

³⁴ Polonko and Lombardo, "Human Dignity and Children," 20.

³⁵ See Federal Military Government of Nigeria, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Lagos: Federal Military Government of Nigeria, 1999), ch. II, secs. 17, 18.

In 2003, Nigeria signed into law the Child Rights Act (CRA) to domesticate the international and regional child rights treaties to which it is a party. The Child Rights Act provides that children must be protected from: child marriage, child betrothal, tattoos and skin marks, exposure and use of narcotic drugs, abduction, removal or transfer of the child from lawful custody, child labor, and unlawful sexual intercourse. Despite the various provisions that have been put into place to protect the rights of children, they are continuously subject to various forms of abuse, degrading treatment, cruelty, and violence. It is unfortunate that the CRA is yet to be enacted by many States of the Federation. Hence, the human rights, even when protected on paper, are violated in practice. In addition to the federal legislations on child sexual abuse, state governments make several state laws focusing on sexual harassment. The various states laws criminalize sexual harassment with very stiff punishments. Among these laws are: The Lagos State Prohibition Against Domestic Violence Law, 2007; The Ekiti State Gender Based Violence (Prohibition) Law, 2019; and The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015; and other similar laws in states of the federation.³⁶ If these international, national, and state policies/documents/laws for the well-being of the child are implemented, children's interests would be protected and child sexual abuse would be prevented or reduced.

The Moral Theological Response to Child Sexual Abuse

The criterion for an ethical critique of sexual abuse is violence. Sexual abuse of any form is an act of violence. Unlike other sexual sins, such as fornication or incest, sexual abuse of minors is the sin of the adult person perpetrating this form of violence. It is based upon the domination of another, individual or collective. It involves the exploitation of an asymmetric relationship, and it involves the tacit acceptance of damaging

³⁶ Olaitan Olusegun and Amos Idowu, "Child Abuse in Nigeria: Dimension, Reasons for its Persistence and Probable Solutions," *Child and Family Law Journal* 4, no. 1 (2016): 14, lawpublications.barry.edu/cflj/vol4/iss1/2.

or even destroying another person's identity.³⁷ Sexual violence disrespects the other as moral agent, and potentially threatens the victim's moral agency and well-being. It perverts the very basis of sexuality, namely the trust to be recognized in one's 'nakedness.' Ethically speaking, this is why, among other things, sexual abuse by those who as leaders of a religious community have so much power over others, especially over children, is met with so much outrage and indignation. Hence, child sexual abuse in any form is always an intrinsically evil act: "By acknowledging and teaching the existence of intrinsic evil in given human acts, [as in sexual abuse of minors] the Church remains faithful to the integral truth about [all humanity], she thus respects and promotes the [persons in their] dignity and vocation" (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 83).

According to Nelson Mandela, "Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation."³⁸ Russell Pollitt and Hans Zollner add that, "The abuse of minors and vulnerable people tears at the very fabric of and weakens our ecclesial witness."³⁹ The cornerstone of Catholic social teaching is the defense of human dignity. Created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), every person has innate and infinite dignity imparted by God. The Church stands for the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings, so she condemns all sexual immorality and violence as intrinsically evil. Sexual abuse violates the principle of human dignity, the respect of any other person as an end in him/herself. Sexual violence instrumentalizes another person for one's own use without leaving any space for a trustful, reciprocal relationship. Morality is based upon the

³⁷ Brianne Jacobs, "What Does Catholic Social Teaching Tell Us about Sexual Harassment?" *America*, February 5, 2018, www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/12/05/what-does-catholic-social-teaching-tell-us-about-sexual-harassment.

³⁸ Nelson Mandela, quoted in Russell Pollitt and Hans Zollner, "Sexual Abuse and Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Hekima Review: Journal of Theology, Governance and Peace Studies* 63 (2021), 119–127.

³⁹ Pollitt and Zollner, "Sexual Abuse and Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Sub-Saharan Africa," 119.

reciprocal respect of human dignity, and thus sexual violence in practice not only destroys the victim but also destroys the normative basis of morality itself.⁴⁰

The Church teaches that sexuality is an integral part of the human person. It goes beyond genitality, and it expresses the totality of the person in his/her interpersonal and social relations.⁴¹ The Church in her wisdom teaches that its genital expression should be within the ambience of marriage and has a two-fold unitive and procreative purpose (*Catechism*, no. 2369). Sex, as the expression of one's affection, fails every time it expresses the desire to dominate rather than the donation of one's self and the acceptance of others. Temptation leads one to consider the other as an object to be used and not as the individual/neighbor with whom to come into communion. In sexual deviance, typical of sexual child abuse, the evil caused is complex. The adult does not make the child grow but rather does violence to him/her. Sexual sin, in this case, evidently is based on the fulfilment of a disordered passion.⁴²

Pope St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* validates the necessity of treating children and youth with respect, something that is profoundly missing when one is sexually abused. *Familiaris Consortio* reads, "Special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. This is true for every child, but it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more he/she is in need of everything, when he/she is sick, suffering or handicapped" (no. 26). In the same vein, the Church, considering rape as a form of sexual deviation states that,

Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect,

⁴⁰ Hille Haker, "Catholic Sexual Ethics—A Necessary Revision: Theological Responses to the Sexual Abuse Scandal," *Concilium* 3 (2011): 128–137.

⁴¹ Gerald Coleman, *Human Sexuality: An All-Embracing Gift* (New York: Alba House, 2012), 8.

⁴² Jacobs, "What does Catholic Social Teaching Tell us about Sexual Harassment?"

freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them. (*Catechism*, no. 2356)

Teaching all to respect minors and that it is their right to live in safe environments is an expression of the Church's teachings. "We must provide acceptance, love, esteem, emotional, and spiritual concern for every child that comes into this world" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 26). When implemented, these teachings provide safety for minors and the respect due to those who have already experienced the trauma of sexual abuse.

Any form of sexual violence is intrinsically evil and cannot in anyway be justified for "No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church" (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 62). Child sexual abuse violates the rights and integrity of the child and also affects the perpetrator. It is also a sin against the Creator. The Church hence teaches that:

Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27)

The Church, as a sacrament of the active presence of God in history, follows God's own behavioral model, showing its solidarity with the victims and engaging in the fight against child abuse, in the fight against all

kinds of evil present in human history, and therefore sympathizing with any victim of any type of evil, to whom it offers words of comfort and relief based on the word of God in Jesus Christ. The Church must be close to the victims of abuse but cannot fail to be close to the abusers too, now judged without mercy and in many cases considered as “scapegoats.” The ecclesial community cannot be guided simply by the adverse publicity campaigns that amplify its wrongdoings and conceal its positive aspects. The Church must always proclaim the infinite mercy of its Lord, especially towards those who repent of their sins and open up to the gift of conversion. In the grace of Christ, the sinner always finds a new chance for life, reconciliation, and peace. The emergency of the problem of child abuse at the hands of Catholic Church ministers cannot remain at the mercy of exploitation that sows division and enmity in the community. The Church is challenged with facing the scorn with sincerity and with remedying it effectively.

Conclusion

Child sexual abuse is truly a global problem, often defying myths and stereotypes, and does not appear to be decreasing over time. The plight of sexually maltreated children is perhaps the starkest example of the need to reconsider the place of children in the contemporary society. It is clear that protection against child sexual abuse is a right recognized throughout international and national instruments, but there is no solution in sight to this menace. The whole of society is affected by the pain of sexual abuse of minors. Determined efforts are required to reduce this growing evil by all the sectors of society. Relying on government machinery and policy implementation is not sufficient to safeguard children from the demons and haters of childhood. Efforts have to be made from the ground level itself by the family and parents to create a fearless and safe environment for the children. Also, the Church, in her mission of promoting the dignity and rights of the human person, has a duty to protect children from harm. The government and the Church need to be more proactive in educating children in order to know and fight for their rights. Generally, there is a

need for a child-centered perspective of human rights. This will help in a growing realization and concern for the oppression of children as a group and their rights upheld.



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Chapter 11: “Journeying Together”: Does a Synodal Church Improve Respect for the Human Person?

Daniel Bogner

This paper discusses the question of whether synodality sufficiently addresses the “systemic” causes that have led to instances of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. Therefore, we distinguish between synodality as an attitude (constitutive synodality) and synodality as a legally binding framework (constitutional synodality). I argue that strong forces within the Church prioritize a “soft” understanding of synodality as “inclusion of different voices” over substantive changes in canon law and ecclesiology. Such changes, however, would be necessary to make the desired improvements binding and effective.

The guiding premise of this paper is that “synodality” is an instrument from the socio-philosophical toolbox of late antiquity that is no longer applicable today. Democratic elements on the basis of rule of law and human rights are required for a synodally-structured Church today that effectively ensures the protection of individuals against sexual abuse and prevents its covering up. This paper outlines the challenges of the worldwide “synodal process” initiated by Pope Francis and asks the questions: “What could cause it to fail?” and “What are the prerequisites for its success?”

My argument will proceed in six steps. First, I note that power and systemic causes of sexualized violence and sexual abuse in the Church became a topic that can be openly discussed. In the second step, I work out the question of whether synodality, as it is currently being discussed and promoted in the Catholic Church, could be an effective instrument against such violence. This draws attention to the so-called “systemic causes” of abuse, which are introduced in the third section. In the following fourth step, the scheme of a specifically “Catholic synodality” is identified. This reveals two ‘blind spots,’ namely a lack of sensitivity for

the dimension of conflict that is always present in all sociality as well as ignorance of the central position of the public for social interaction in the church. In my summary, I draw some conclusions from this outcome that advise a certain caution against viewing a “synodal church” as a comprehensive remedy against the danger of sexual abuse.

The Courage to Consider a Specific Perspective on Sexual Abuse

An important lesson learnt from the crisis of sexual violence within the Catholic Church is the increasing courage to ask about the “systemic” causes of such violence. The reports of the independent committees of inquiry that have been established in two of the largest European local churches—in France and in Germany—explicitly use the term “systemic.” Both the German and French bishops’ conferences have subsequently adopted the term.¹ This development represents a hermeneutical turning point as it has become impossible to refer to the crime of sexual violence as purely individual misconduct of some “brothers in the fog.”²

The focus on the “system” of ecclesial life raises the question of power. Who holds power? What kind of power is it? How is this power used? How is its use legitimized? And, above all, are there any means to control it? For a long time, it was considered to be inappropriate to ask these questions. In the Church, a commonly held belief was that one should not speak of power but of authority that can exclusively be exerted by those belonging to ordained ministry. The continuous occurrence of sexual

¹ Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, “MHG-Studie,” September 25, 2018, www.dbk.de/themen/sexualisierte-gewalt-und-praevention/forschung-und-aufarbeitung/studien/mhg-studie; Conférence des Évêques de France, “Assemblée plénière des évêques de France, Résolutions votées par les évêques de France le 8 novembre 2021,” November 8, 2021, www.eglise.catholique.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/AP Lourdes-nov-2021-Resolutions-votees-en-assemblee-pleniere.pdf.

² Raoul Löbber, “Brüder im Nebel,” *Die ZEIT*, March 18, 2021, www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2021-03/katholische-kirche-gutachten-sexueller-missbrauch-erzbistum-koeln-kardinal-woelki.

abuses no longer permits such ways of thinking and speaking. To the contrary, it urges us to view the church as a social system with a multitude of roles, authorities, and responsibilities and with rules and processes that define the position and scope of action of its members within a fixed institutional framework. As much as the exercise of power within the church theologically claims to be of divine origin and legitimation, it has to be recognized that even such legitimized exercise of power relies on the grammar of social systems. It is and needs to be “translated” into the “language” of worldly action.

More specifically, in social contexts, generally people’s spheres of action are demarcated from one another, people are subordinated and superordinated, and freedom is both made possible and curtailed. This also happens within the Church, even if the horizon of meaning is of a completely different nature as compared to the rationale of a bourgeois society. Thus, it would be a fallacy to assume that the existence and exertion of power within the Church are negligible. The exertion of power is necessary whenever people co-operate within an institutional setting. It can be a resource for the productive, creative, and meaningful development of religious institutions. In the course of the revelations of sexual abuses, it has become clear, however, that the church is lacking sufficient mechanisms to place checks on power. The prioritization of the protection of perpetrators and the interest for their continuance in pastoral practice dramatically shows that structurally embedded rules and processes, as well as a “culture” of checks on power in general, are largely absent.

The *Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church* (2019) addressed the challenge to raise a general awareness of the problem among the bishops worldwide. It was necessary to put an end to mutual recriminations and the view of the situation that alternately blamed the problems on a “too secularized church in the West” or on a “tribally

influenced” church in the South.³ Pope Francis thus laid the foundation for openly discussing and working on the question of “systemic causes” of sexual abuse at the level of the world Church. It has become evident that answers to this question are urgently needed. These answers should not be of a purely analytical nature but also include specific proposals for a changed ecclesial practice in future.

Can Synodality be an Answer?

Democracy is considered to be the form of political rule that most effectively and systemically guarantees checks on power without completely excluding its proper, adequate exertion. In relation to the Church, however, there are some restrictions. To conceive of the church *tout court* as a democracy would misjudge its inner nature. As a community called by God, its legitimacy is not based on the sovereignty of the church members, but on the divine will of its founder. It is indebted to a higher truth that must never be subjected to the volatile decision-making processes of majorities.⁴ Instead of analyzing if and how far democratic processes could reasonably be deployed within the Church, often, a general incompatibility of democracy and Church is hastily alluded to. If there is any form of rule that can do justice to the nature of the Church, so the rationale goes, that form has to be “synodality.”

“Synodality” refers to a decision-making and decision-taking process of the old Church that originally aimed at producing the cohesion of monarchically governed and largely autonomous local churches with

³ “Theologe Halik: Kirche in Osteuropa spielt Missbrauch herunter,” *katholisch.de*, January 24, 2022, www.katholisch.de/artikel/32853-theologe-halik-kirche-in-osteuropa-spielt-missbrauch-herunter. It must be mentioned that Pope Emeritus Benedict also used this pattern of argumentation, see “Wortlaut: Der Aufsatz von Benedikt XVI. zur Missbrauchskrise,” *Vatican News*, February 24, 2019, www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2019-04/papst-benedikt-xvi-wortlaut-aufsatz-missbrauch-theologie.html.

⁴ In particular, the central texts of the Second Vatican Council have repeatedly underlined these statements. It is crucial that the hierarchical constitution of the Church is emphasized. By its inner nature, it cannot form democratic structures, see *Lumen Gentium*, chapter III.

regard to doctrine and practice.⁵ The Greek core of the term refers to the quest for a ‘common way’ and is today a criterion for processes and forms of church-building. It is a process that has its *Sitz im Leben* within a context where democracy and the rule of law in our modern understanding were largely unknown. Pope Francis uses “synodality” as a resource in his attempt to renew togetherness within the Church: “Synodality is a spiritual process not to be confused with a parliament that discusses and decides with majority votes.”⁶

If ‘synodality’ is today elevated to the leitmotif of church development, it must first of all be stated: It represents a linkage to an early line of Christian tradition that can contribute to overcoming the later heritage of absolutist narrow-mindedness. In this respect, the term has an emancipatory potential recognized by Pope Francis that must not be underestimated. His promotion of a synodal church is the positive counterpart to his criticism of all forms of clericalism. This suggests that whoever sets out together avoids the trap of clericalist interaction that is characterized by know-it-all-ism, arrogance and the presumption of authority. Horizontality instead of verticality, eye-level relation instead of subordination should be the culture of internal church communication.

Looking at the debate around the principle of synodality that has emerged over the past years, it becomes clear, however, that there is a double meaning of this term. On the one hand, the struggle for more synodality in the Church is seen as a *response to a serious crisis of faith*. The hope is that a church whose members interact in a spirit of synodality will establish a welcoming culture and witness to the good news of the gospel.

⁵ Thomas Böhm, “Der altkirchliche Weg zur Synodalität,” *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* (2020): 37–41; see also John W. O’Malley, “The History of Synodality: It’s Older Than You Think,” *America*, February 17, 2022, www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/02/17/synodality-history-john-omalley-242081; Francis Aloysius Sullivan, “Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact (review),” *The Catholic Historical Review* 92, no. 2 (2006): 268–269, doi:10.1353/cat.2006.0154.

⁶ “Papst Franziskus warnt: Eine Synode ist kein Parlament,” *katholisch.de*, September 3, 2019, www.katholisch.de/artikel/22813-papst-franziskus-warnt-eine-synode-ist-kein-parlament. Pope Francis also made “synodality” the guiding topic of the 2023 Synod of Bishops.

On the other hand, the principle of synodality is seen as a *remedy against the church's susceptibility to abuse*. The expectation is that wherever ecclesial togetherness is shaped according to a spirit of openness, respectfulness, and benevolence, the risk of hidden sexual violence can be reduced.

The decisive question now is: Can synodality, as it is possible within the Catholic Church, effectively contribute to eliminating the systemic causes of sexual violence? Is it legitimate to link together the hope for a renewed life of faith and the fight against the causes of sexualized violence? To answer these questions, we first have to define what is to be understood by “systemic causes.”

The Systemic Causes of Sexual Violence in the Church

Both the German and the French local churches have decided to address the issue of sexual violence. The MHG study that had been commissioned by the German Episcopal Conference was published in 2018.⁷ In France, it was the CIASE report, which in 2021 brought to light the extent to which people have been made survivors of sexual violence by members of the clergy in recent decades.⁸ Both studies explicitly mention “systemic” factors that have both enabled and encouraged such acts. The French and German Episcopal Conferences have both officially adopted the respective reports’ results and decided to investigate the systemic causes. The process of examination in both countries is still under way and far from being complete. Concurrently, a theological debate has started about how the theological tradition itself represents a “systemic” cause. In particular, theological debate has long failed to sufficiently question explicit and

⁷ Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, “MHG-Studie,” www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-eng-Endbericht-Zusammenfassung-14-08-2018.pdf.

⁸ Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CAISE), “Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church France 1950–2020. Summary of the Final Report,” October 5, 2021, www.ciase.fr/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/CIASE-Summary-of-the-Final-Report-5-october-2021.pdf.

implicit rules that govern ecclesial actions, thoughts and feelings.⁹ To find an answer to the question of whether more synodality could be an effective barrier against sexual violence, it is necessary to give an overview of what is understood by “systemic causes.”

Within the Church, there is a network of interrelated attitudes and ingrained practices, an organizational ‘habitus,’ to take up a theoretical concept developed by the sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁰ This densely woven web of doctrine and practice often results in disastrous effects. The toxic dimension of Catholic ecclesiality stems from various elements and factors that are intertwined in multiple ways.

The Sacralized Hull

Over the course of church history, a sheen of supposed sacrality has settled on clerical roles and structure so that, in turn, the Church’s vessel and hull are themselves regarded as sacrosanct and venerable. It is less the action than the constitution of the Church that is regarded as representing the divine word in time and history. The symbolic reinforcement of such sacralization of a role, possible and usual in liturgical rituals, contributes to this phenomenon.¹¹

An Attitude of Reverence

Sacralized forms and structures demand respect. They reinforce the sense of reverence which many believers hold towards office and office holders.

⁹ See, for example, Doris Reisinger, ed., *Gefährliche Theologien. Wenn theologische Ansätze Machtmissbrauch legitimieren* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2021); Jochen Sautermeister and Andreas Odenthal, eds., *Ohnmacht, Macht, Missbrauch. Theologische Analysen eines systemischen Problems* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2021).

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹¹ Magnus Schlette, Volkhard Krech, “Sakralisierung,” in *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, ed. Detlef Pollack, Volkhard Krech, Olaf Müller, and Markus Hero (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18924-6_17; See also Francesca Eva Sara Montemaggi, “Sacralisation: The Role of Individual Actors in Legitimizing Religion,” *Culture and Religion* 16, no. 3 (2015): 291–307, doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2015.1083455.

The differences between the “two bodies of the King,”¹² i.e., between his official role and his earthly, faulty and human personality, become increasingly blurred. The result is a mentality of subordination and dependence on official power that claims to be exerted “*in repraesentatione Christi*” representing Christ’s very own “*sacra potestas*.” How should one counter this? Who would, in this light, demand control or even participation? On the other hand, many ministers quickly and gladly get used to the tailwind that the “ordination bonus” brings with it and on which they can easily fall back in case “human” means do not suffice. This seems to be an essential part of what Pope Francis castigates as “clericalism.”¹³

A Dangerous Concept of Centralized Power

Sacralization has not only provided for an institution armored against criticism, but also for a far-reaching failure of binding control. Isn’t it a paradox to criticize an institution and to force corrections on it while believing in its sanctity? And, vice versa, why should one divide the omnipotence of an institution whose power is merely “borrowed,” stemming from a single source—Jesus Christ himself—and which one disposes only fiduciarly? Neoplatonic unity thinking and late antique court ceremonial have also contributed to the fact that a genuine division of powers, of which reform-minded bishops speak today, could not be established until now.¹⁴

¹² Ernst Kantorowicz, *Die zwei Körper des Königs. Eine Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters* (München: dtv, 1994 [1957]).

¹³ Klaus Unterburger, “Klerikalismus,” *Staats Lexikon*, July 18, 2022, www.staatslexikon-online.de/Lexikon/Klerikalismus.

¹⁴ Herbert Haslinger, *Macht in der Kirche. Wo wir sie finden, wer sie ausübt, wie wir sie überwinden* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2022); Johannes Ludwig, *System Kirche. Machtausübung zwischen Idee, Interesse und Institution* (Basel: Schwabe, 2022).

Loyalty Among Clerics

Undivided rule, armed with an aura of sacrality and supported by the “flock,” who lack meaningful ways of participation, this is only one side of the coin. The other side consists of the concrete persons and the corporatist structures that support this system: the clergy. The tradition of the Church has established a gender filter as the predominant selection criterion for clergy “membership.” This filter has led to a gender-homogeneous clergy which is at the same time and often indistinguishably a religious male-bonding system, with rituals of recognition and identification *ad intra* and isolationist tendencies *ad extra*. As an association shaped by loyalty and infused with a religious aura of determination, the clerical state lures with the promise of protection and fulfillment for deficient psychosexual habits and desires. And it carries—explicitly and implicitly—a constitutive devaluation of the other sex that is often reflected in the doctrine and practice of the Church.¹⁵

The Long-Term Legitimacy Spiral

In addition to the above-mentioned elements, there is another factor, albeit not one specific to the Church, that is of particular importance. Wherever things grow and are established over long periods of time, a confirmation bias of “tradition” and longevity emerges. Behavioral patterns, habitual role patterns, and institutional arrangements in the Church sometimes groan under the burden of multiple centuries. This burden develops what appears to be a legitimacy-infusing atmosphere. For a long time, open discussions about access to the ordained ministry, the monarchist church constitution, or the diversity of sexual identities were seen as taboo in this atmosphere, breaking the “gentlemen’s agreement” that things are good the way they are and have always been. Keeping quiet about impulses for innovation and the impetus to merely rely on long-

¹⁵ Compare *pars pro toto* Christine Büchner and Nathalie Giele, *Theologie von Frauen im Horizont des Genderdiskurses* (Mainz: Grünewald, 2020).

established scientific facts instead of curious and creative trial and error have therefore become second nature to the Church.¹⁶

A Culture that Continually Generates Victims

Even though only provisionally described, the already mentioned elements are interrelated and have consequences that go beyond this analysis. In light of such mechanisms, many people perceive a “poisoned” atmosphere within the Church. The crisis is manifest in numerous fields. Whatever topic one picks out of the intra-church reform debate (gender relations, lay participation, parish consolidation, resilience of priests), sooner or later one will encounter combinations of these toxic elements. Sexual violence and abuse is the field with the most visible and probably the most deeply wounded victims. As long as the chain reactions of these frequently emerging toxic elements are not stopped, the Church will continue to produce victims in different fields.

None of the above-mentioned elements in isolation directly leads to abusive misconduct. And, of course, many priests succeed in leading their lives in the spirit of the gospel despite the risks of clericalism. But the factors outlined above are “systemic” because their interplay allows for a culture within the Church that must be described as an opportunity structure for abuse and sexual violence. A social organization overburdened with sanctity leads to an overburdening of the actors. Since neither systemic regulation nor even the acknowledgement of its potential occurrence exists, failure needs to be covered up systematically. People with certain dispositions are susceptible to such opportunity structures: those who have a tendency toward pedophilia and ephebophilia but also those who struggle to maintain an appropriate distance from others and who tend to transgress boundaries. There is a high risk of them turning

¹⁶ Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, “Tradition und Legitimation,” in *Die Frühe Neuzeit. Revisionen einer Epoche*, ed. Andreas Höfele, Jan-Dirk Müller and Wulf Oesterreicher (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013) 47–84, doi.org/10.1515/9783110316407.47

into perpetrators. At the same time, they themselves become victims of this toxic core of the Church.

The term “victim” in this context is evasive. It is meant to say that the Church offers a culture that facilitates becoming a perpetrator and does not draw any boundaries that ensure that certain pre-dispositions do not actualize. Aren’t we all—given the abysmal pre-dispositions dormant in us as flawed human beings—dependent on mechanisms of formal and informal social control that prevent us from becoming perpetrators? This is precisely where an organization that has a dysfunctional relationship with transparency, public criticism, accountability, and gender diversity is doomed to fail. In no way does this excuse the actions of perpetrators. But it does, from another angle, shine light on how problematic the Church’s “systemic factors” are.

I begin my explanation with a comparison: The binding standards of a state governed by the rule of law and its mandatory obligations to punish violations of these standards help people resist becoming perpetrators. The Church, however, has sent very ambivalent signals for far too long. Perpetrators were pitied, and the protection of the clergy was more important than the prosecution of their deeds and greater justice. When an institution acts in this way, it sends signals to potential offenders: “You can become an offender without much happening to you.” This is also a very serious irresponsibility towards people with a paedophilic disposition. There is no institutional framework that prevents their predisposition from being acted upon. On the contrary, the framework “invites” it.

A Specifically ‘Catholic Synodality’?

Can a newly discovered “synodality” become the basis for an effective protection against sexual violence and abuse in the Catholic Church? In order to answer this question, we finally determine the meaning of “synodality.” First of all, it is noteworthy that “synodality” is not a clearly defined term but rather allows for a panoply of different interpretations. They range between ideas for quasi-constitutional structures on the one hand and loose recommendations for a certain style of action on the other

hand. How exactly is the understanding of synodality in the current debate in the Catholic Church to be classified? In this respect, it is instructive to look at the preparatory document *For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission* that was published by Pope Francis in the fall of 2021. It is both the starting point and the basis for the synodal processes of local churches that have begun worldwide and is to lead to the Synod of Bishops in 2023.¹⁷

This document refers to the main goal of synodality as an attempt to return to a dynamic of “journeying together” (no. 2) in order to overcome the opposition, disconnectedness, and lack of mutual understanding that make it difficult for the Church to bear witness to its mission. In the Vatican’s International Theological Commission’s widely cited 2018 document,¹⁸ which is referred to by the pope, synodality means the “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly, and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (no. 10). A synodal church, then, begins at a fundamental level. It is about understanding what the Church should be categorically characterized by: concord (Latin: *concordia*) in doctrine and faith. This is the antithesis of the concern for fragmentation and fracture of the body of the Church. It therefore comes as no surprise that Pope Francis, at a central point in his writing, quotes Augustine’s “*concordissima fidei conspiratio*.” (no. 11).

It thus becomes clear that the pope understands synodality primarily as what is called a “process metaphor” in contemporary cultural and social

¹⁷ Synod of Bishops, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,” September 7, 2021, press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/0540/01156.html#INGLESEOK.

¹⁸ International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” March 2, 2018, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html.

sciences.¹⁹ That is, “synodality” is about the style and attitude of a desired movement within the social body of the Church. The pope’s understanding of synodality refers to both individual and collective actions and aims at renewed collective expressions of faith. In other words, synodality first and foremost appeals to the attitude and virtue of ecclesial actors of all kinds, some of whom shall put more effort into listening to each other and some of whom are called to participate with their gifts for the common good. Synodality only subordinately refers to structures, rules, and the “constitutional” order of the Church (no. 27). The document, however, makes unmistakably clear that such constitutional implications of synodality should never go so far as to call into question the framework of the traditional “*communio hierarchica*” of the Catholic Church as a whole: the “People, gathered together by its Pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God” so that “it becomes on the part of the Bishops and Faithful a single common effort” (no. 13). Again, the word fields of “unity” and “uniformity” stand out: “It is in the fruitful bond between the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the magisterial function of the Pastors that the unanimous consensus of the whole Church in the same faith is realized” (no. 14). And this “bond”, according to the document, can exclusively be realized within a “hierarchically structured community” (no. 14).

Thus, the appeal to an attitude of synodality is authentic and credible. The appeal concurs with a faith that wants to move hearts and that relies on the creative potential of each individual. At the same time, the argumentation maneuvers into a dead end. Although it concedes that such a renewed attitude could also have institutional consequences, the traditional structural framework of the Church is presented as unchangeable. This leads us to raise two critical questions. First, is the call to openly listen to one another and to acknowledge one another’s talents

¹⁹ I am thinking in particular of the neopragmatist sociology of Hans Joas. See Hans Joas, *Im Bannkreis der Freiheit. Religionstheorie nach Hegel und Nietzsche* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag AG, 2020).

and gifts without reservation really new? And, second, is it possible that there are strong forces within the Church that understand the concept of synodality as implying a vague “inclusion of diverse voices” and hence would be unwilling to allow real changes in canon law and ecclesiology even though the dynamics of a synodal church attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit would make this advisable? If one was to make the desired improvements binding and thus effective, such structural and institutional reforms, which primarily affect the monarchist ecclesial constitution and its underlying conception of ordained ministry, would be necessary.

Two Blind Spots: Conflict and the Public

We can now draw conclusions from these observations. The debate about the conception of synodality as “constitutive” (attitude-oriented) or “constitutional” (rules-oriented) reveals two blind spots that have particular consequences for the inner culture of the Church. Both are factors that tend to facilitate an atmosphere where sexual violence and abuse are committed and covered up.

The first blind spot refers to the strong emphasis on the commitment to concord and “unanimity in faith.” Of course, it is undisputed that the fundamental articles of faith, as contained in the Creed, are the foundation of the Church and its collective practice of faith. There can be no fundamental dissent, and it is not without reason that the Creed that the faithful speak together during Holy Mass on Sundays is articulated in the mode of “confessing” (*confessio*). But while the Creed may call for unity in the form of a symbolic condensation, this does not apply to its interpretation and lived implementation in faith practice and church life. In the latter, there are necessarily different points of view, opinions, and ways of interpretation.²⁰ The consequences of the confession of the one

²⁰ Exemplary for this assessment is the importance of the term “unity” in the work of the important theologian Yves Congar; see Hervé Legrand, “Yves Congar (1904–1995). Une passion pour l’unité. Note sur ses intuitions et son herméneutique œcuménique, à l’occasion du centenaire de sa naissance,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 126, no. 4 (2004): 529–554, www.cairn.info/revue-nouvelle-revue-theologique-2004-4-page-529.htm. See also the very

God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth must be discussed and even disputed about. In light of different historical and social contexts and mental and cultural languages, the one Creed is interpreted in highly differing ways. Disagreement, dissent, and conflict are naturally associated with the practice of faith that is situated in time and history. It is a fundamental, ideological error to conclude from the required unanimity in the *Symbolon* (the Creed) that the no longer symbolic but concrete historical reality of the ecclesial implementation of this confession must be likewise unanimous.

At this point, one must critically ask: Isn't that precisely the kind of temptation the Church is constantly confronted with? Her law is declared "divine law," her hierarchical structures and the sacred ministry are considered to be a direct translation of the divine will of salvation and thus receive a sacrosanct cover. The fatal consequence is that every expression of difference and dissent is seen *a priori* critically instead of being acknowledged as a catalyst for a greater truth. This has led to a mentality and culture of consensus within the Church that is hierarchically governed. Dissent and disagreement are framed as deviance and are not valued.

This bears dramatic consequences for an inner culture of the Church that could be sensitive to the risk of sexual violence, as such a culture should instead signal to each and every one that "You are allowed, even encouraged to say 'No!'" Dissent and criticism are possible. A church, however, that stresses the requirement for ubiquitous unanimity restricts and eliminates spaces for such dissent and criticism. More precisely, one would have to say that, although contradiction and opposition in the Church are possible, there are no established procedures on how to deal with violations in such a way that consequences follow. In the context of such a culture, saying 'No!' becomes a heroic act for which one has to risk nearly everything—much more than in many other fields where sexual

instructive analysis about the heritage of medieval Catholicism given by Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912), 178–426.

abuse of children and youth equally occur, e.g., in sports clubs or in educational institutions. Considering the undifferentiated application of the image of *concordia* in the preparatory document for the Synod of Bishops, a legitimate concern arises that a merely “constitutive synodality” will not contribute to a cultural change within the Church that empowers survivors of sexualized violence and those threatened by it to publicly speak up. “Journeying together” is, no doubt, a valuable attitude. But as long as this attitude is not grounded on institutionally anchored human rights, the claim for synodality poses an even greater risk. The culture of concord could serve as a cover for the dark and toxic practice of abuse that is built on the assumption that survivors and confidants opt to remain silent rather than having the courage to speak out.

It is precisely here that the second blind spot, which is related to the discussion about “constitutive synodality,” emerges. It is the lack of a specific and differentiated public within the Church, as formulated, for example, by democracy theory in the paradigm of the public as the “fourth power.” In an ecclesiastical polity that regards itself as a hierarchical community and ensures its internal cohesion through an attitude of “constitutive synodality,” there is no room for the functioning of a critical and controlling public sphere.²¹ Such a public sphere would be a place for open and critical discussion about the conduct of Church leadership without the constant fear of sanctions. It would be a forum in which Church leadership would be obliged to explain and justify its actions, in short, a forum of transparency. Transparency, control, and accountability are, however, categories foreign to a culture of synodality. In connection with cases of sexual abuse, there has been much talk of the “*omertà*”, i.e., of mafia-like ecclesiastical spirals of silence. Such mechanisms are almost never consciously established but rather arise due to a lack of counter-mechanisms.

²¹ Karl Gabriel and Hans-Joachim Höhn, *Religion heute öffentlich und politisch. Provokationen, Kontroversen, Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008).

More synodality aims at higher degrees of participation, cohesion, and collective identification within the social body of the Church. This is, of course, a valuable goal. Such “synodal dynamics,” however, in the absence of believers’ adequate protection of personal rights, can actually increase the defenselessness of potential victims of sexual violence since the moving forces within the body of the Church are strengthened by the higher degrees of integration and cohesion. In contrast, a freely established, critical, intra-ecclesial public sphere would be an ideal place to claim believers’ rights and protection on a regular and systematic basis. However, an appreciation of the potential positive contributions of such public opinion formation is absent in all the statements of Vatican documents on the process of synodality. To the contrary, they mention only unanimity in spirit, as in, for example, “In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit” (n. 30).

Conclusion: Cautions Against a Cure-All Solution

We can now draw conclusions from the observations and considerations. The initial question was: To what extent can the current move towards increased synodality in the Catholic Church help to prevent sexual violence and abuse? The analysis has revealed that the answer to this question is multifaceted.

First of all, it must be appreciated that synodality is an attitude that aims at increasing the active and passive participation of all parts of the Church and can contribute to empowering people to become creative actors. In the best-case scenario, it will lead to increased attention and awareness among lay people and parishioners with regard to sexual misconduct. The semantics of synodality would then contribute to a general attitude where a person prioritizes their own vocation to be an active part of God’s people and to authentically witness the gospel over the respect for tradition and cultural restraints. In this positive sense, synodality could mean that each and every one may and must speak up and be heard, if inspired by the care

for an authentic testimony for the gospel. It is beyond question that sexual abuse fundamentally contradicts such testimony.

In spite of these potential positive resources with which a “synodal church” could combat sexual abuse and violence, there remain disputed aspects. These disputed aspects not only cloud the chances of synodality but are prerequisites for a synodal church in the first place because they contribute to the prevention of sexual abuse. The main points of criticism result from the considerations made regarding the two blind spots in section 5. The programmatic word “synodality” pursues the goal of a higher internal integration and cohesion of the Church through a changed attitude of all actors: all parts of the Church are called to actively participate and listen to each other in order to improve the decision-making according to the rules of a hierarchical church.

In this way, “synodality” is to be understood as a process category describing desirable changes within the ecclesial social body. It is neglected, however, that these changes remain reliant on the monarchist constitutional framework that bears a substantial share of responsibility for the fact that sexual abuse has happened and has been covered up for so long. The current agenda of synodality does not address urgently needed steps for the development of constitutional frameworks. For such a development to occur, it is key to overcome the monarchist understanding of ordained ministry that serves as the basis for the broader monarchist structure of ecclesial leadership. This would lay the foundation for the gradual establishment of a culture in which opposition, dissent, and conflict are regarded as expressions of constructive participation. A public sphere providing for control and accountability can only emerge if rule and leadership do not stem from a single source (*mon-archic*).

In other words, “synodality” is an outdated instrument from the socio-philosophical toolbox of late antiquity, a time where democratic constitutional patterns based on the rule of law and the separation of powers were largely unknown. The Church’s current emphasis on synodality as adequate constitutional framework thus reveals a fatal blind spot and a lack of awareness for the real challenges of its constitutional

reform that have dramatically become visible through sexual abuse and violence. The necessary development can be summed up in a short formula: Not “synodality instead of democracy” but “synodality as a modus of participation on the basis of believers’ guaranteed fundamental rights.” Therefore, a constitutional debate within the Church is badly needed. We’re only at the beginning!



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Chapter 12: Theological (De)Formations? The Sex Abuse Crisis in the Context of Nuptial Ecclesiology and the Theology of Priesthood

Tina Beattie

Some reports into the sex abuse crisis recommend investigating how theology contributes to clericalism.¹ I ask if postconciliar nuptial ecclesiology, influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar's idea of the Marian and Petrine Church and Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body (ToB), invites critical reflection in this context. I argue that the shift in theological symbolics brought about by ToB and its Balthasarian underpinnings constitutes a move from patriarchal to phallic theology. Whereas the exclusive masculinity of the priesthood used to be justified by an appeal to the natural, God-given authority of the male and the subordination of the female for the good ordering of society, household, and Church, now it is defended by an appeal to the symbolic significance of male sexual anatomy.² This has dangerous implications for the Church, mired as it is in the scandal of clerical abuse.

¹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report*, vol. 16 (Australia: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report; Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church, *Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church France 1950–2020, Summary of the Final Report*, by Jean-Marc Sauvé (France: CIASE, 2021), www.ciase.fr/medias/Ciase-Summary-of-the-Final-Report-5-october-2021.pdf. For the full report, see “*Commission Indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l'Église*,” CIASE, www.ciase.fr. See also Gerry O'Hanlon, “Learning from the Murphy Report: A Theological Reflection,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 408 (2013): 423–433, www.jstor.org/stable/23631196.

² Tina Beattie, “Human Dignity and Rights in the Context of Gender and the Sacramental Priesthood,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 6, no. 1 (2020): 140–157, doi.org/10.30965/23642807-00601009; Mary Anne Case, “The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Anathematization of Gender,” *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 155–172, doi.org/10.18352/rg.10124.

The Postconciliar Church

In an essay first published in 1971, Balthasar laments the loss of the “deep femininity of the Marian character of the Church,” arguing that it “has become more than ever a male Church, if perhaps one should not say a sexless entity, in which woman may gain for herself a place to the extent that she is ready herself to become such an entity.”³ After a postconciliar decline in Marian devotion and ecclesiology, the 1980s saw a resurgence under the papacy of John Paul II, when Balthasar began to displace Karl Rahner as the postconciliar theologian of choice.⁴ This heralded the turning of the tide against many of the Council’s reforms and the emergence of a more gendered and absolutist ethos under the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

While the extent of Balthasar’s influence on John Paul II is debated, it is discernible in the late Pope’s nuptial and Marian theology. Balthasar wrote a commentary on the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*,⁵ and John Paul II drew upon some of Balthasar’s ideas to offer a response to changing attitudes to human sexuality in Western culture and to the challenges posed by women in their growing demands for equal rights in the Church as well as in secular society. He adopted an irenic approach in his interventions on feminism and women’s rights, calling for a “new feminism” (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 99) and seeking to affirm the dignity of women (*Mulieris Dignitatem*), but Balthasar gives a clear sense of what was at stake: “The worldwide offensive of ‘feminism,’ which is battling for the equality of women with men, takes effect within the Church as the

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 70.

⁴ John L. Allen Jr., “Debating Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: Interview with David Schindler,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 28, 2003, www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/word112803.htm; Robert Barron, “How von Balthasar Changed My Mind,” in *Renewing Our Hope: Essays for the New Evangelization* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 65–84.

⁵ John Paul II, *Mary: God’s Yes to Man: John Paul’s Encyclical Redemptoris Mater* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). See also Brendan Leahy, “John Paul II and Hans Urs von Balthasar” in *The Legacy of John Paul II*, ed. Gerald O’Collins and Michael Hayes (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 31–50.

women's claim to the ministerial priesthood. As a whole, the battlefield presents a confusing picture, and this in turn affects the ecclesial arena, which in addition has its own special problems."⁶

ToB originated as a Catechesis on the Book of Genesis, delivered in weekly audiences between 1979 and 1984 and subsequently published as *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*.⁷ It offers an innovative approach to sexual difference based on the claim that Genesis 2 reveals the nuptial meaning of the human body, expressed in different but complementary ways in marriage and voluntary continence (celibacy and virginity). Seeking to overcome any soul/body dualism, ToB represents the body as having a sexual language, capable of expressing the truth of the human created for communion in interpersonal relationships of mutual self-giving but vulnerable to the effects of original sin in its capacity for shame and abuse. The procreative sexual love between husband and wife is analogous to the fruitful relationship of Christ the Bridegroom to his Bride the Church. This finds expression in the eschatological hope of those who commit themselves to lifelong virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, so that voluntary continence "*acquired the meaning of an act of spousal love, that is, of a spousal gift of self with the end of answering in a particular way the Redeemer's spousal love; a gift of self understood as a renunciation, but realized above all out of love.*"⁸

ToB is widely disseminated through the Theology of the Body Institute under the leadership of Christopher West, and through bishops' conferences, dioceses, universities, and pastoral and parish programmes.⁹

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture," *Communio* 22 (1995): 164, www.communio-icr.com/articles/view/women-priests; Also published as "Women Priests?" in *New Elucidations*, trans. Sr. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 79.9. Numbers refer to audience and paragraph numbers in the Waldstein translation, and all italics are as given in the text.

⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Theology of the Body Overview," www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-

It is promoted as a resource for priestly formation,¹⁰ and it enjoys popularity among conservative political groups and media outlets where it is used to challenge progressive ideas around sexuality and gender.¹¹ Contextualizing her research into young Catholic seminarians in the US, Medora W. Barnes writes: “From the 1979–1984 teachings by Pope John Paul II—collectively known as ‘theology of the body’—to within more recent writings, the Catholic Church has responded to feminism, contraception, sexual liberation, and the ongoing changes in beliefs and norms across Western society by coalescing around an ‘anti-gender’

teaching/theology-of-the-body; Theology of the Body Institute, “Providing Answers to Life’s Burning Questions,” tobinstitute.org/; Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, “Theology of the Body,” www.bbcatholic.org.au/our-faith/evangelisation/life-marriage-and-family/understanding-the-human-person/theology-of-the-body/; Pontifex University, “Master of Sacred Arts: The Theology of the Body and the New Evangelization,” www.pontifex.university/page/show/339867; University of Dallas, “Theology of the Body,” udallas.edu/ministry/academics/continuing/tob.php; Franciscan University of Steubenville, “A Foundational Vision: Theology of the Body,” franciscanathome.com/node/2158.

¹⁰ See Theology of the Body Institute, “In the Person of Christ Clergy Enrichment Programme,” tobinstitute.org/programs/in-the-person-of-christ/; Fr Thomas J. Loya, STB, “Catholic Clergy Formation and Theology of the Body,” *Ascension*, April 30, 2019, media.ascensionpress.com/2019/04/30/catholic-clergy-formation-and-theology-of-the-body/; Thomas J. McGovern, “The Spousal Dimension of the Priesthood,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 3, no. 1, (Spring 2003): 95–110, doi.org/10.5840/ncbq20033180.

¹¹ EWTN, “Theology of the Body,” www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/theology-of-the-body-21271; Andrew Cannon, “Pope St. John Paul II and the ‘Theology of the Body,’” *The European Conservative*, November 7, 2021, europeanconservative.com/articles/essay/pope-st-john-paul-ii-and-the-theology-of-the-body/; José Granados, DCJM, “The Theology of the Body in the United States,” *Humanum: Issues in Family, Culture and Science* 3 (2015): humanumreview.com/articles/the-theology-of-the-body-in-the-united-states, published by the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, DC; Michael Quinlan, “Making Progress: Dehumanizing Humanity,” *The Imaginative Conservative*, April 2, 2016, theimaginativeconservative.org/2016/04/making-progress-dehumanizing-humanity.html; The Family Science Alliance, “Lectori Salutem,” www.csaladtudomany.hu/november-2021/. See also an appeal to ToB in a campaign against the Nebraska Department of Education curriculum by the Nebraska Catholic Conference, Jeremy, “Attacking the Theology of the Body,” *Nebraska Catholic Conference*, March 19, 2021, necatholic.org/news-events/newsroom.html/article/2021/03/19/attacking-the-theology-of-the-body.

position.”¹² ToB has been criticised for its abstraction, its romanticization, its exclusive focus on sexual love without regard for other aspects of bodily expressiveness and activity, its resistance to contraception, and its method of scriptural engagement and interpretation.¹³ Luke Timothy Johnson observes that it reveals “deep disinterest in the ways the experience of married people, and especially women ... might inform theology and the decision-making process of the church.”¹⁴

Pope Francis offers a less idealistic and more pastorally responsive theology of human relationships in his 2016 post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Family, *Amoris Laetitia*, though he continues to appeal to the Marian and Petrine Church to justify the exclusion of women from the sacramental priesthood. Responding to Swedish journalist Kristina Kappellin’s question as to why the Church does not ordain women, he said, “In Catholic ecclesiology there are two dimensions to consider: the Petrine dimension, from the apostle Peter, and the apostolic college, which is the pastoral activity of the bishops; and the Marian dimension, which is the feminine dimension of the Church ... and the Church is the spouse of Christ. It is a spousal mystery.”¹⁵ Francis’s attempt to bring about a shift in the ethos of the Church’s pastoral ministry has exposed deep rifts in the Catholic hierarchy and the laity.¹⁶

¹² Medora W. Barnes, “Catholic Seminarians on ‘Real Men,’ Sexuality, and Essential Male Inclusivity,” *Religions* 13 (2022): 352, doi.org/10.3390/rel13040352.

¹³ Charles Curran, “Marriage, Sexuality, Gender, and the Family,” in *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 160–201; Luke Timothy Johnson, “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body,’” *Commonweal*, June 4, 2004, www.commonweal magazine.org/disembodied-theology-body; Christina Traina, “Papal Ideals, Marital Realities: One View from the Ground,” in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 278–279.

¹⁴ Johnson, “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body’”

¹⁵ Holy See Press Office, “The Pope Speaks with Journalists in the Return Flight from Sweden,” February 2, 2016, press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/11/02/161102a.pdf.

¹⁶ Msgr. Robert Batule, “*Amoris Laetitia* in Light of Theology of the Body,” *Crisis Magazine*, May 14, 2018, www.crisismagazine.com/2018/affirming-theology-body; Philip Lawler,

The culture wars dividing the Church in the United States and elsewhere are symptomatic of a continuing clash between those who see strict adherence to church teaching on sexual and reproductive ethics as fundamental to Catholic identity and those who welcome Francis's more holistic approach with its emphasis on social, economic, and environmental justice.

A 2021 "Survey of American Catholic Priests" finds a correlation between priests' political views and their approval of Pope Francis, with 68.9 percent of those who describe their politics as "very conservative" disapproving of Francis, while none of those who identified themselves as liberal on politics disapproved of him. The survey also produced "strong empirical confirmation of the nearly ubiquitous perception that younger priests are more orthodox in their beliefs than older priests."¹⁷ In comparison with an earlier survey conducted in 2002, this study finds greater opposition to the ordination of women and married men, and some hardening of attitudes with regard to birth control for married couples and masturbation.¹⁸

One witness quoted in The Australian Royal Commission Report, Dr. G. O'Hanlon, SJ, refers to "a resurgence of clericalism in Australia's seminaries and seminaries worldwide."¹⁹ Another witness, Dr. Thomas Doyle, OP, cites studies that "indicate that the present generation of young priests see themselves as essentially different from the laity and as men set apart by God: 'It appears from this and other indicators that Catholic

"Betraying the Legacy of John Paul II," *First Things*, August 19, 2019, www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/08/betraying-the-legacy-of-john-paul-ii.

¹⁷ Brad Vermurlen, Stephen Cranney, and Mark Regnerus, "Introducing the 2021 Survey of American Priests: Overview and Selected Findings," *SSRN*, October 2021, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3951931.

¹⁸ Vermurlen, Cranney and Regnerus, "Introducing the 2021 Survey." Priests' opposition to abortion remains high across both surveys.

¹⁹ Australian Royal Commission, Transcript of G. O'Hanlon, Case Study 50, February 8, 2017, 24993:28–24994:6, 639.

clericalism is alive, malignant and prospering.”²⁰ With this in mind, I raise some unsettling questions about how the gendered theologies that emerged during the papacy of John Paul II might have contributed to this growth in conservatism and the clericalism associated with it.

Nuptial Theology and Priestly Formation

John Paul II seeks to defend the celibacy and masculinity of the priesthood without denying what he sees as the essentially “spousal meaning of the body.”²¹ In his 1992 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, he explains his theological understanding of the law of celibacy:

The will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the head and spouse of the Church. The Church, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved her. (no. 29)

The vocation to celibacy requires self-discipline and control. Not only does it constitute an exceptional earthly condition in relation to the normativity of marriage,²² it also entails a sustained struggle against the “threefold concupiscence” identified as “concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.”²³ In a section of ToB titled “Sexual Shame,” concupiscence is cited as a particular danger: “Man has shame of the body because of concupiscence. More exactly, he has shame

²⁰ Australian Royal Commission, “Précis—Father Thomas (Tom) Doyle OP,” Case Study 50, Exhibit 50-0003, IND.0650.001.0001_R at 0044_R., 639, www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/IND.0650.001.0001_R.pdf.

²¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 13.2.

²² John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 73.4–5.

²³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 26.1–2. The scriptural reference for this is 2 John 1:6. In some translations, “concupiscence” is translated as “lust.” See Zenit news agency’s interview with translator Michael Waldstein: “Retranslating the Theology of the Body,” archive.secondspring.co.uk/articles/waldstein.htm.

not so much of the body, but more precisely of concupiscence.”²⁴ John Paul II repeatedly refers to the conflict between the purity of the heart and the concupiscence of the flesh, observing that “The ‘heart’ has become a battlefield between love and concupiscence.”²⁵ Male sexuality is undeniably vulnerable to violent and exploitative impulses, as statistics of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and trafficking make clear,²⁶ but this emphasis on the relationship between shame and the sexual appetites has implications for those celibate men who are not sufficiently integrated in their sexual self-understanding to attain to the high ideals of ToB.

The clergy offenders interviewed by Marie Keenan in her research into clerical abuse in the Irish Church offer tragic testimony to the psychological conflicts entailed in the struggle described in ToB, with its deep associations between lust or concupiscence and shame. Keenan concludes that, while her interviewees aspired to “Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity,”²⁷ with rigid attitudes towards doctrinal orthodoxy and sexual purity, underlying these were feelings of self-loathing, arrested sexual development, a fear of women and girls and/or repressed homosexuality, and an incapacity for emotional intimacy. She concludes that “Shame-based identities underpin my reflections on the link between the failure to achieve Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity and child sexual offending. ... The major thesis of my work is that sexual abuse is inevitable given the meaning system that is taught by the Catholic Church and to which many priests adhere.”²⁸

She relates this “meaning system” to “current ecclesiology [which] suggests a dual model of Church in which the Church of the clergy is superior and more ‘holy’ than the Church of the laity.”²⁹ While this allows

²⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 28.5.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 32.3.

²⁶ UN Women, “Facts and figures: Ending violence against women,” www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures.

²⁷ Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 245.

²⁸ Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, 255.

²⁹ Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, 237.

the priest abuser to experience “a dominant power position in the public realm,” the interviewees in her research indicated that “personal powerlessness, lack of autonomy, loneliness and frustration in the private sphere were very much part of daily life.”³⁰ The “clerical sexual offender” is, she argues, “someone whose clerical masculine identity and way of ‘doing’ priesthood or religious brotherhood is built on a life that is impossible to live.”³¹ There are undoubtedly many good priests who through God’s grace do achieve the renunciation demanded by celibacy, but many do not. Some are discreetly engaged in sexual relationships, others become abusers.

All reports into the sex abuse crisis draw attention to the exaggerated trappings of power invested in the priesthood. One French woman recalled how she and her sister were abused by a priest as teenagers: “We are in a condition of submission ... in a mental captivity. So, we follow this person who suddenly takes power over us. ... We are caught in a spider web.”³² Sexual abuse as an expression of power means that the subjugated and feminized other is not necessarily female but can be a child or vulnerable adult of either sex or any age. Sexual abuse is about power and not sexual orientation.

The young US seminarians interviewed by Barnes show attitudes to masculinity that are in some respects worryingly similar to those identified by Keenan. On the one hand, Barnes argues, in equating anatomical maleness with masculinity and rejecting social constructivist approaches to gender, the seminarians had a more inclusive understanding of masculinity than their secular counterparts because anatomy, not behaviour or character, is the determinant. On the other hand, they were clearly anxious to avoid being seen as gay. Barnes writes: “Between the general Catholic teachings about sexuality, the specific rules against homosexual priests, and

³⁰ Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, 237.

³¹ Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, xv.

³² Mireille, quoted in Sylvie Corbet, “French Report: 330,000 Children Victims of Church Sex Abuse,” *Associated Press*, October 5, 2021, apnews.com/article/europe-france-child-abuse-sexual-abuse-by-clergy-religion-ab5da1ff10f905b1c338a6f3427a1c66.

the context of the sexual abuse scandals, the seminarians felt pressure to project a very traditional heterosexual image, even while arguing for a biological essentialist view that is inclusive of all men regardless of behaviour.”³³ This is the context in which I reflect on the ecclesiology that continues to shape the theology of priesthood in its more conservative forms. Delving beneath the comparatively benign language of John Paul II, I consider the theological bedrock upon which postconciliar nuptial theology was constructed.

Priestly Purity and the Sinning Flesh

The failure of the Catholic hierarchy to deal effectively with sexual abuse is repeatedly attributed to a misplaced desire to protect the reputation of the Church. This is not just a concern for the institution because it relates to the eschatological purity of the Church as Bride of Christ. To what extent must the sins of priests be understood as separate from the transcendent purity of the Church, and how far should senior clergy go to protect this purity from public scandal?

The Australian Royal Commission report includes a section titled “The Catholic Church as a ‘Perfect Society,’” which several witnesses describe as a return to an older, pre-conciliar model of the Church since the 1980s. Giving evidence to the Commission, Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen describes clericalism as “a by-product of the ‘perfect society’ model of the Catholic Church” which operated under John Paul II and Benedict XVI.³⁴ This model can be traced back to the medieval Church or even earlier, but I focus on a theological debate that emerged in the years leading up to Vatican II, on whether or not the Church’s intrinsic purity was affected by the sins of her members.³⁵

³³ Barnes, “Catholic Seminarians,” 8.

³⁴ Australian Royal Commission, Transcript of V Long Van Nguyen, Case Study 50, February 21, 2017, 25779:26–35, 621–622.

³⁵ Stephen D. Lawson, “The Apostasy of the Church and the Cross of Christ: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Mystery of the Church as *Casta Meretrix*,” *Modern Theology* 36, no. 2 (2020): 259–280, doi.org/10.1111/moth.12522.

In 1961, Balthasar published an essay in which he sought to resolve this debate by reclaiming the medieval idea of the Church as *casta meretrix* (“chaste harlot”).³⁶ He drew on the biblical and post-biblical tradition of the *casta meretrix* to lend historical legitimacy to his argument that, paradoxically, the Church is both holy and sinful until the end of time. The spousal union between Christ and the Church is so intimate that they are one flesh, but this entails a continuous struggle between Christ as Bridegroom and sinful humankind as Bride. The Marian Church is the eschatological hope of the Virgin Bride, but this does not transcend the sinful reality of the earthly Church. Stephen D. Lawson explains, “The image of the *casta meretrix* is ultimately an image of the Incarnation of God into utter humiliation and indeed to the full depths of sin and hell. The image points to ‘the extreme humiliating essence of the incarnation of God.’”³⁷

Balthasar quotes extensively from biblical and medieval sources, including Old Testament prophets, “You had a harlot’s forehead; you would not blush” (Jeremiah 3:3), and the words of Isaiah, “Babylon, my beloved, has become an abomination to me” (Isaiah 21:4). He quotes William of Auvergne’s description of this “abomination”: “For God himself she has become an abomination. ... We are no longer dealing with a bride but with a monster of terrible deformity and ferocity.”³⁸ He paraphrases this same author’s condemnation of the clergy, who “prostitute Holy Church, because for squalid gain they invite all and sundry to shame her. And so her nipples are cracked and her breasts torn out, in a word.”³⁹

³⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “*Casta Meretrix*,” trans. John Seward, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2: *Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 196, first published in *Sponsa Verbi (Skizzen zur Theologie II)* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 203–305.

³⁷ Lawson, “The Apostasy of the Church and the Cross of Christ,” 269, quoting Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “*Casta Meretrix*,” in *Skizzen zur Theologie*, 250 (Lawson’s translation).

³⁸ Balthasar, “*Casta Meretrix*,” 197–198, referring to H. Riedlinger’s transcription in *Hobeliedkommentare des MA* (1958), 255f.

³⁹ Balthasar, “*Casta Meretrix*,” 196.

Biblical scholar J. Cheryl Exum asks why Old Testament scholars (predominantly male), overlook “the ethical problems raised by passages in which a male deity is pictured as sexually abusing a female victim.”⁴⁰ Challenging Robert Carroll’s argument that women in the prophetic texts are “metaphors, not persons”⁴¹ and that these violent metaphors are addressed to “essentially a male community,”⁴² she writes, “Already inscribed in the metaphors themselves is a whole range of negative views about women and about female behavior and female sexuality, as well as about power in gender relations: men dominate and women submit.”⁴³

Balthasar belonged to an era when theology was written by men, for men.⁴⁴ His metaphors of the Church as a mutilated harlot are directed towards “modern leaders of the Church”⁴⁵ at a time when we now know that clerical sexual abuse was endemic. The report on the French Catholic Church estimates that 3,000 Catholic teachers and leaders, two thirds of whom were priests, had abused at least 330,000 children in the years between 1950 and 2020. The final summary of the report refers to this sexual violence as a “massive phenomenon, long covered by a shroud of silence and difficult to ascertain the size of.”⁴⁶ When Balthasar used violent images of sexual humiliation to describe the sins of the Church’s members, these were more than an ecclesiological metaphor. We now know that they were all too literal descriptions of the behaviour of many priests.

⁴⁰ J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 102.

⁴¹ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 120, quoting Robert C. Carroll, “Desire Under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets—a Response,” in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Later Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 285.

⁴² Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 120, quoting Carroll, “Desire Under the Terebinths,” 292.

⁴³ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 120.

⁴⁴ It is outside the scope of this essay to consider Adrienne von Speyr’s influence on Balthasar.

⁴⁵ Balthasar, “*Casta Meretrix*,” 197.

⁴⁶ Sauv , “Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church,” 7.

Another of Balthasar's texts, *Heart of the World*, first published in 1945 as *Das Herz der Welt*, is a passionate dialogue depicting the relationship between Christ and the Bride as a violent struggle, with Christ battling to defeat and overpower his reluctant Bride. The Bride (speaking in various narrative voices constituting the human condition) is imprisoned in the ego's "bitter pleasure-seeking"⁴⁷: "I lie upon my bed of pleasure and this pleasure disgusts me, and I would like to break loose and stand up."⁴⁸ This sense of entrapment and self-loathing erects a wall of loneliness that separates the believer/Bride from the freedom that Christ offers: "Externally I put on an appearance of careless mirth and experienced resignation; within, however, in the deep cavern of despair, there swarms a putrid rabble that hates the light; wasted opportunities, rejected graces, invincible dejection—the smell of putrefaction."⁴⁹

The chapter titled "Conquest of the Bride" describes how Christ finally breaks down this resistance to purify and redeem the body of his harlot Bride. Christ addresses the Bride: "A slap in your face can elicit nothing from you but an embarrassed smile. Disgrace covers the length of you, all the more poignantly as you try to deny it, pretending nothing is amiss."⁵⁰ Balthasar depicts Christ being locked in mortal battle with "my Body, my Church," having been weakened and "wounded to the death" by yielding to the temptation of "delivering myself up to the obscure chaos of a body, of plunging below the shiny surface of the flesh": "I dared to enter the body of my Church, the deadly body which *you* are ... No wonder you realized your advantage over me and took my nakedness by storm! But I have defeated you through weakness and my Spirit has overpowered my unruly and recalcitrant flesh. (Never has woman made more desperate resistance!)"⁵¹ This is a description of rape.

⁴⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), 136.

⁴⁸ Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 135.

⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 138.

⁵⁰ Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 192.

⁵¹ Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 194–196.

Olivier Savignac was abused as a thirteen-year-old boy. In an interview he said, “I perceived this priest as someone who was good, a caring person who would not harm me. ... But it was when I found myself on that bed half-naked and he was touching me that I realized something was wrong. ... It’s like gangrene inside the victim’s body and the victim’s psyche.”⁵² The good priest and the gangrenous victim—there is a shocking dissonance between what those words mean in Balthasar’s theo-pornographic fantasies of the Bridegroom entering the putrefying body of the Bride and what they mean for the victim of priestly abuse. Keenan makes clear that the abuser hides from himself the suffering of his victim, while also experiencing intense shame. She writes, “I began to wonder if the clerical perpetrators became ‘violent’ and cruel to children (even if not in many cases overtly so), because of the systemic ‘violence’ and cruelty that was done to their bodies and spirits in the course of their lives as young clerical males. I wondered if in being hurt, they had become hurters.”⁵³ The abusive priest is both Bride and Bridegroom, Christ and the Church, trapped in that battleground of shame between love and lust, hurting and being hurt without mercy or relief for himself or his victims.

From Patriarchy to Phallocentrism

In Balthasar’s post-conciliar writings, the rhetoric of rape and conquest is replaced by an appeal to the masculine sexuality of the priestly role. In a reflection on Ephesians 5 in the context of *Humanae Vitae*, he makes repeated references to the analogy between the fertile sexual relationship in marriage and the fruitful relationship of Christ with the Church, including an explicit reference to the kenotic significance of the male orgasm: “Unlike the man in the act of intercourse, Christ does not give away just a little of his substance. No, Christ gives away his entire substance.”⁵⁴ In an essay titled “The Christian and Chastity,” Balthasar

⁵² Oliver Savignac, quoted in Corbet, “French Report: 330,000 Children Victims of Church Sex Abuse.”

⁵³ Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, 243.

⁵⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “A Word On ‘*Humanae Vitae*,’” in *New Elucidations*, 217.

asks, “What else is his eucharist but, at a higher level, an endless act of fruitful outpouring of his whole flesh, such as a man can only achieve for a moment with a limited organ of his body?”⁵⁵ He writes with his customary extravagance about what it means for Christ to give his flesh “prodigally” in the Eucharist, by way of a comparison with sexual intercourse in marriage: “The man, even and specifically in the sexual act, must show perfect, loving self-giving, which at the same time takes up the self-giving of the woman and gives it form; the wife is the one who allows herself to be formed, without setting inner limits on the love which she has received.”⁵⁶ This conjugal love is, claims Balthasar, “taken up” into the “nuptial love” of Christ for the Church: “Human sexuality is precisely created by and for such love.”⁵⁷ Again, I can only ask what might go on in the mind of an abusive priest, if he deceives himself into believing that he is offering spiritual love to his victim, who should set no “inner limits” on how that love is received. Many victims of abuse report how their abusers explained their behaviour as a form of spiritual or mystical love. One woman who described being abused by Jean Vanier said that he told her, “This is not us; this is Mary and Jesus.”⁵⁸

The explicitly sexual aspects of Balthasar’s theological rhetoric are often ignored or denied by those who engage with him.⁵⁹ Some even suggest that he offers a theological resource for tackling sex abuse. In the essay cited above, Lawson acknowledges the issues raised by myself and others in relation to Balthasar’s problematic use of gendered language, but he defends the significance of the *casta meretrix* image in the context of the

⁵⁵ Balthasar, “The Christian and Chastity,” in *Elucidations*, 150.

⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Elucidations*, 149.

⁵⁷ Balthasar, *Elucidations*, 149.

⁵⁸ Quoted in John J. Conley, SJ, “My Conversations with Jean Vanier Raised Many Questions. I Have No Answers,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, March 13, 2020, www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/03/13/my-conversations-jean-vanier-raised-many-questions-i-have-no-answers.

⁵⁹ Elisabeth T. Vasko, “The Difference Gender Makes: Nuptiality, Analogy, and the Limits of Appropriating Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology in the Context of Sexual Violence,” *The Journal of Religion* 94, no. 4 (2014): 504, doi.org/10.1086/677290.

sex abuse crisis. He contends that “the central claim of Balthasar’s essay, that we must find a way to speak about how the church *qua church* sins, is theologically significant. ... The time has come for this essay to be re-evaluated and re-received.”⁶⁰ Aristotle Papanikolaou suggests that Balthasar’s idea of *kenosis* could be a healing theological resource for victims of abuse. He argues that “far from being meaningless in situations of abuse, Balthasar’s understanding of *kenotic* personhood is the most adequate way to account for the healing of abused victims.”⁶¹ I am perplexed as to how a theologian can claim that images of the divine *kenosis* as rape or male orgasm could be healing for a person abused by a priest.

Balthasar’s phallic theology of priesthood and *kenosis* finds popular expression in many contemporary interpretations of ToB, in ways that constitute a significant departure from the more restrained language of John Paul II. Christopher West is widely promoted on diocesan and parish websites.⁶² In a video titled “Why Women Cannot Be Priests,”⁶³ West appeals to the capacity of the male body to produce sperm as the justification for restricting priestly ordination to men: “Unless priesthood has something to do intrinsically with the fact that only men produce sperm and only men can be fathers then it is a matter of unjust discrimination to say women can’t be priests.” The “essential act of the priesthood” is, claims West, “the conferring of the Eucharist and, as Saint John Paul II says, the Eucharist is the sacrament of the bridegroom and the

⁶⁰ Lawson, “The Apostasy of the Church and the Cross of Christ,” 276.

⁶¹ Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Person, Kenosis and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation,” *Modern Theology* 19, no. 1 (2003): 42, doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00209.

⁶² There has been debate around what some see as West’s excessive sexualization of John Paul II’s theology. See McLean Cummings, “Theology of the Body: A Vigorous Discussion,” *Faith Magazine*, May–June 2010, www.faith.org.uk/article/may-june-2010-theology-of-the-body-a-vigorous-discussion.

⁶³ Christopher West, “Why Women Cannot Be Priests,” YouTube video, *Theology of the Body Institute*, October 15, 2021, youtube.be/hGUmkDPmg7s. The video is based on Christopher West’s book, *Good News About Sex and Marriage: Answers to Your Honest Questions about Catholic Teaching* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2018), with a Foreword by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

bride. You need a bridegroom to give the seed that leads to new life, and you need a bride to receive that seed to conceive the new life.”

Barnes’s interviews with young seminarians suggest that such ideas have a significant impact. One twenty-year-old interviewee responded to her question about what defines masculinity: “I think a lot of what defines us as a male is the fact that we do have certain body parts, certain sexual organs that really make us different from a female. ... I think a lot of it has to do with just our sexual organs and it just makes sense that, we have this natural complement of male and female.”⁶⁴

There is an abundance of material online and in publications which encourages this kind of thinking. It may be a distortion of John Paul II’s theology, but in linking of the priesthood so closely to the married sexual relationship and the essential heterosexuality and spousal meaning inscribed into the human body “in the beginning,” it was perhaps inevitable that this kind of theology would develop, particularly as arguments against women priests are being chiselled away so that only anatomical difference remains.

Conclusion

As long as young men are indoctrinated into a theology that makes anatomical maleness and nuptial love the defining characteristics of their priesthood, we should expect some of them to fail in their aspirations to attain to the kind of “Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity” described by Keenan and encountered by Barnes in her research. As Keenan shows, the result of such failure is catastrophic for those who become victims of these priests’ confused and “shaming” desires but also for the priests themselves. A vocation initially understood as a lifetime of obedience to God expressed in loving service to humankind is consumed in a deadly vortex of uncontrollable appetites, uncontrollable behaviour, and deep self-loathing.

⁶⁴ Barnes, “Catholic Seminarians,” 6.

Pope Francis has set the Church on a trajectory towards a more life-affirming and liberating ecclesiology. However, unless and until women are full and equal dialogue partners in discussions about the theology and practice of priesthood, including the symbolics of gender that inform it, I fear there will be no end to clericalism. The dysfunctional and often abusive dynamics of masculine clerical power will continue to distort the sacrament of ordination and turn ordinary, good men into frustrated and lonely sexual predators.



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Chapter 13: 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

Konrad Glombik

The response to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church follows a set of general rules and is influenced by each region's specific characteristics. In Poland, the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church has historically been contextualized by the existence of the Church under the Communist rule after the Second World War, by the folk characteristics of the Church; and by its strong hierarchical and clerical interpretations. The sexual abuse crisis is a permanent topic in the media and is often presented bluntly, giving the impression that the Church should be sent to the pillory for punishment and humiliation. On the other hand, the media has an important contribution to make by detecting sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Poland.

In this essay, I analyze the role of the media in response to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in Poland. First, the problem of the kind of pillory treatment that the Church receives in the media is presented. Next, I explore the contribution of the media's reliable clarifications. Both kinds of treatment of this problem in the media identify the reactions of the Church and have impacted the position of the Church in Polish society. Both of the ways in which the media treat the problem of the sexual abuse crisis in Poland present a challenge for the Catholic Church in seeking the correct way to respond to the actual problems. There is also a challenge in identifying the role of the media and the responsibilities it holds in regards to this matter.

The Pillory Treatment of the Church by the Media

Initially, the treatment and reaction of the Catholic Church in Poland regarding the sexual abuse crisis was primarily concerned with protecting the image of the Church and its position in society. The discussion was dominated by rhetoric about sexual abuse in the churches of the western countries of Europe and silence on the cases in Poland, while in practice guilty priests were transferred to other parishes or to other places of service. The problem of the clergymen who committed sexual abuse against minors, the proceedings undertaken by bishops and superiors, their reactions to this problem, and their relations to the victims at the beginning of this crisis were a taboo subject in the Catholic Church in Poland.¹

As a consequence of the Church's treatment of and reactions to this crisis, the media began to describe cases of sexual abuse of clergymen against minors and the ways the proceedings were dealt with by bishops and superiors. One of the most famous cases was the Polish Archbishop Józef Wesołowski, who was a nuncio in the Dominican Republic, among other places. He was punished by the Vatican and had his position altered to the status of a layperson.² All the cases of pedophilia by Polish clergymen were associated with the Church's strategy of protecting the institution, a strategy which was critical towards the position taken by the liberal media.

As a counter-narrative, Church authorities claimed that such media was seeking to destroy the Church and to discredit its impact in Polish society and the heritage of Saint John Paul II. Some of the statements made by bishops and clergymen in this regard reveal this belief. For example, one states that there are other "more serious questions," while another shifts the blame, saying that "a child clings, looks for, gets lost by themselves and

¹ Adam Żak, *Wierchołek góry lodowej. Kościół i pedofilia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2019), 13–24.

² Paulina Guzik, "An Unfinished Story of Conversion: Clerical Sexual Abuse in Poland. A Communications Case Study on Betrayal, Healing and Trust Recovery," *Church, Communication and Culture* 5, no. 3 (2020): 427–428; "Józef Wesołowski," *Wikipedia Wolna encyklopedia*, January 4, 2022, wikipedia.org/wiki/Józef_Wesołowski.

even involves the other man.” These scandalous statements testify to the ignorance of the representatives of the Church towards the perception of the victims.³

Journalists and society became indignant about the lack of reaction and sheer inactivity of Polish bishops and superiors towards the sexual abuse against minors by clergymen, the hiding and covering up of cases of sexual violence against minors, the ignorance of the effects on children, and the failure to protect minors. The media became the guiding spirit throughout the process of bringing to light the sexual abuse cases and critiquing decisions by ecclesial leaders in cases of pedophilia. The problem of pedophilia among clergymen became increasingly present in all types of media. This happened to such an extent that the way in which sexual abuse was reported in the Polish media gave the impression that clergymen were the only group which commits abuse against minors.⁴ Furthermore, cases relating to pedophilia as committed by clergymen were consistently present in the media. This repetitiveness, one-sidedness, and presentation ultimately created an impression that pedophilia only exists in the Catholic Church. Cases of sexual abuse among other social groups and professions were not presented in media sources in a consistent manner, including the case in which some sections of the media defended the Polish film director, Roman Polański, who was accused of sexual abuse against a minor.⁵ This context of the pillory treatment of the media contrasts with the response of the Catholic Church in Poland to the sexual abuse crisis.

Within Catholic media, the problem of sexual abuse among clergymen is increasingly discussed. However, Church media generally does not disseminate information about any local histories of child abuse and limits the news to reports on pontifical statements and general information

³ Józef Kloch and Monika M. Przybyś, “Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii w Kościele katolickim w Polsce,” *Symposium* 18, no. 2 (2014): 94–98.

⁴ Marian Machinek, *Nowy tęczyowy świat. Próba diagnozy* (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2021), 166–167.

⁵ Kloch and Przybyś, “Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii,” 102–103; Machinek, *Nowy tęczyowy świat*, 168–169.

about problems in other countries. The Catholic media tends to focus on events which report on the role and activity that the Church plays in protecting children. The narration of the Catholic media is dominated by texts about clergymen, who feel unfairly attacked and struggle to understand why they are the ones suspected of evil, since many more cases of sexual abuse against minors occur in other professions than in the Church.⁶

The lack of a multidimensional picture in relation to sexual abuse and the manipulated information found in the media, which only shows cases of pedophilia among clergymen, does not serve the protection of children and, in turn, strengthens the myth that all priests are pedophiles. The cases of sexual abuse described by the media do not protect the privacy of children and regularly expose children to graphic descriptions of pedophilic acts. One example of this violation of journalistic ethics is the paper entitled *Father Jack's Cherubs*,⁷ which contains enough identifying characteristics of the minors that the children and their close relations can easily be identified. The author of this paper cited fragments from the victims' and offender's intimate testimonies and text-messages, meaning that children can read about the particular details of the case as described in media publications.⁸ Many media reports contained factual errors and unauthorized conclusions, which fostered misconceptions in public opinion regarding the scale of sexual abuse of minors by clergymen in Poland, especially as regards the contemporary scale of the phenomenon. Many media reports failed to mention that most of the accusations of sexual abuse of minors concerned incidents from, on average, thirty years ago.⁹

⁶ Ewa Kusz, "Kościołe—jaki jesteś? Kryzys Kościoła w świetle skandalu wykorzystania seksualnego," in *Kryzys w świecie. Kryzys w Kościele*, ed. M. Lis (Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictwa Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2020), 102.

⁷ Helena Kowalik, "Cherubinki księdza Jacka," *Wprost* 41 (2013): 26–30.

⁸ Kłoch and Przybysz, "Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii," 103–104.

⁹ Wojciech Sadlon and Sławomir Nowotny, "How to Study Child Sexual Abuse Within the Institutional Framework? The Experience of the Catholic Church in Poland," *The Person and the Challenges* 12, no. 1 (2022): 113.

Furthermore, the one-sided presentation of the sexual abuse of minors in Polish media largely omits the Catholic Church in Poland's initiatives and activities focused on and directed against abusive acts. Most of these initiatives are similar to the suggestions made by the Polish Episcopate from 2009: the establishment of a coordinator in relation to the protection of children, training courses for clergymen and seminarians, and a change of strategy for the Catholic Church in Poland.¹⁰ These matters have received reference mainly in the Catholic media, while the public and liberal media sparingly and critically relay news on these initiatives. Moreover, the public news focuses on the actual cases and criminal trials of priests who allowed the sexual abuse of minors.¹¹ The disproportionality, the almost exclusively negative way that the Polish media presents the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergymen, and the omission of news on the activities and initiatives of the Catholic Church against these criminal acts evidence how the Polish media puts the Church in the pillory. However, this characterization does not exhaust the role of media in the Polish Church, which has also played an important role in uncovering the evil of sexual abuse by clergy.

The Media as the Truth-Teller of the Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church

Any critical examination of the Polish media and its role in the detection of sexual abuse cases of minors in the Polish Church should not omit the media's contribution to combating the criminal acts carried out by clergymen on minors and exposing the hidden proceedings of bishops and superiors. Most of the cases of sexual abuse which were taken up and presented by the media were ultimately resolved through a civil court judgment. The majority of the cases presented in the media included the

¹⁰ For more on actions which the Church in Poland has taken in order to counteract the abuse of minors by clergymen, see Marcin Przeciszewski, "Counteracting Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: The System in Poland," *The Person and the Challenges* 12, no. 1 (2022): 137–159.

¹¹ Kloch and Przybysz, "Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii," 104–107.

ecclesial procedure by the Dioceses and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Some Polish bishops were accused of concealing cases of sexual abuse by clergymen and were penalized by the Vatican with various punishments, such as retirement, prohibition of participation in public celebrations, requirement to give financial support to the Foundation of St. Joseph helping the victims of sexual abuse by clergymen, and, in one case, prohibition from being buried in a cathedral.¹²

A crucial piece in the Catholic Church in Poland's approach to this problem was made with the contribution of the media: three popular films on the topic of the sexual abuse of minors by clergymen. The 2018 film *Kler (Clergy)*, directed by Wojciech Smarzowski, focuses on clergymen who were both perpetrators and victims of sexual abuse of minors. The movie presents a fictional story with a mocking, journalistic, and moralistic character and depicts the Catholic Church in Poland as a dirty, immoral, and superficial community, which ultimately lacks any spirituality or God. Two other full-length movies, namely, the 2019 documentary *Tylko nie mów nikomu (Tell No One)* and the 2020 documentary *Zabawa w chowanego (Hide and Seek)*, both directed by Tomasz Sekielski and his brother, show the victims and perpetrators of clerical sexual abuse and accuse specific Polish bishops of errors and hidden crimes.¹³

For some Catholics in Poland, the movies were perceived as part of attacks against the Church, bishops, and clergymen. However, in an official statement by the Polish bishops, the films were cited as inspirations to change the strategy and the approach of the Church as it addressed the problem. Polish bishops admitted that the protection of children—not the protection of the institution—should guide the activities against sexual abuse by clergymen.¹⁴ In the word to believers *Sensitivity and Responsibility* from May 2019, the bishops wrote:

¹² Machinek, *Nowy tęczyowy świat*, 160.

¹³ Marek Lis, "Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy in Cinematography: Unrecognized Signs of the Times," *The Person and the Challenges* 12, no. 1 (2022): 299–300; Guzik, "An Unfinished Story of Conversion," 434–437, 441–442.

¹⁴ Guzik, "An Unfinished Story of Conversion," 442–445.

A lot of us have watched the movie “Tell No One.” This documentary is above all about the shocking relationships of adult persons, and how childhood is treated by clergymen. It contains examples of lack of sensibility, the sin of negligence, and distrust towards the victims which consequently protected the perpetrators. Having the film accept the perspective of the aggrieved made all aware of the enormity of their suffering. Everyone who is sensitive towards many aggrieved persons feels pain, sensitivity, and sadness towards their suffering. We thank all who had the courage to speak up about their suffering. We are aware that no words are able to compensate for the harm which they have endured. We admit that as pastors of the Church we did not do everything that we could to prevent such damage. ... All, both clergyman and laypeople as a community, must create the proper space to restore to the aggrieved as much as possible a normal life and to rebuild trust in the priests and bishops.¹⁵

In this context, the main Polish weekly opinion magazines of 2018 and 2019 wrote about the problem of the sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church from the perspective of particular persons (i.e. the pope, bishops, victims, and perpetrators). In the left-liberal magazines, the bishops and superiors were presented mainly as non-reactive to cases of abuse committed by clergymen. These elements of the Polish press wrote more often about the negative actions of representatives of ecclesial elites than about clergy criminal activity which would have been unknown to the public. On the other hand, the right-conservative weekly *W Sieci* did not seek to evaluate the actions of bishops and superiors towards perpetrators. It undermined the sincerity of Smarzowski and Sekielski, arguing that their movies include narrative attacks against the Catholic Church. In particular, the right-conservative magazines accused the creators of the movie *Tell No One* of omitting the fact that the Security

¹⁵ Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, “Wrażliwość i odpowiedzialność. Słowo biskupów do wiernych w związku z problemem skandali seksualnych z udziałem duchownych,” *Opoka*, May 22, 2019, opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/dowiernych_22052019.html.

Service of the Communist era cooperated with pedophile clergymen. In previous years, the left-liberal magazines used the cases of pedophilia under clergymen to create a narrative of the Catholic Church as an institution which hides pedophiles within its structure and conceals the scale of the abuse.¹⁶

Even if these Polish movies and documentaries do not take into consideration all the dimensions of this problem nor inspire wider reflection for the Church and its structure, we should still acknowledge the good intent of the writers who seek to highlight cases of abuse in the Church in contrast to the Polish bishops, superiors, clergy, and laypeople who were all silent against this evil. As such, it is worth opening dialogue with the writers who treat the Church so seriously and critically. The Church should recognize the media's voice as a reflection of the biblical story of Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:21–34), in which the donkey rescues the man of God, who is deaf to God's warnings and blind to the dangers of punishment. The Catholic Church should hear critically, creatively, and definitely the voices which speak about the condition of faith resounding in the media, inasmuch as these convey truths about the Church. "Uncomfortable" news can become a *locus theologicus* for the Church and a sign of the time which leads to reflection on and fidelity to the Gospel. Non-Christian media can inspire the Church to examine its conscience and remember the warning which Jesus directed to those who cause the little ones to stumble (Matthew 18:6). In this way, the voices of the secular media can serve as tools in the prevention of sexual abuse against minors and provide the opportunity for aggrieved people to speak.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rafał Leśniczak, "Personalizacja wizerunku medialnego instytucjonalnego Kościoła katolickiego w kontekście nadużyć niektórych duchownych wobec nieletnich. Analiza polskich tygodników opinii (2018–2019)," *Studia medioznawcze* 21, no. 2 (2020): 564–566.

¹⁷ Marek Lis, "Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy in Cinematography," 305–306.

Challenges for Relevant Theological Reflection

In June 2019, after the release of the movies by Smarzowski and Sekielski, surveys collected data on the reaction of the public to news reports on cases of pedophilia by clergymen in Poland. According to this research, the majority of respondents made a critical evaluation regarding the position of the Catholic Church in this regard. Half of the respondents maintained that the reaction of the Church was incorrect and insufficient. The majority of interviewees felt that the Church underestimated rather than overestimated the scale of the pedophilia cases. The idea that the media is actively attacking the Catholic Church is, for the majority, incredible. The majority of respondents support the limitation of the activity of clergymen who commit sexual abuse against minors, including expulsion from the clergy. The majority supports the creation of a state commission to examine cases of pedophilia in all areas and not only in the Catholic Church. In contrast to the majority, respondents who have more right wing politics and practice their religion more regularly have expressed opinions more favorable to the Catholic Church.¹⁸

Public opinion expects much more than merely verbal reassurances from the Church hierarchy. This is revealed by Rafał Leśniczak's analysis of the effectiveness of the communications of Polish bishops in the crisis situation and the disclosure of cases of sexual abuse of some clergymen. Even if the Polish bishops have expressed regret and apologized to laypeople for the evil caused by clergymen, society seeks to hold ecclesial superiors responsible for hiding the perpetrators of these crimes. Although the Polish bishops have communicated about the condition of the Church organization based on real numerical data, effective communication demands pinpointing the real scale of the problem of pedophilia by clergymen and identifying ways to punish criminals and ways to aid the victims of sexual abuse. The general declarations of bishops are insufficient

¹⁸ Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, "Komunika z badań. Reakcje opinii publicznej na informacje o przypadkach pedofilii wśród księży," ed. Antoni Głowacki, July 2019, www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_088_19.PDF.

for the public to accept the actions taken. The research on public opinion shows that the statements of bishops do not contribute towards building a positive image of the Catholic Church and do not fulfill the conditions of effective communication in a crisis.¹⁹

The actual crisis in the Catholic Church in Poland—as so well described by the media and so inaccurately perceived by ecclesial leaders—is an important challenge for theology and for the Catholic Church. The first problem concerns the identity of the Church given what has been uncovered, and the other concerns what the Church might become when it ceases hiding and belittling the fact that children and young people experienced harm at the hands of people who should have protected them.

With regard to the identity of the Church, we can observe that the Church has lost its status as a protector of faith in God and has become a “political apparatus” whose initial reaction to the crisis of sexual abuse of minors was seeking to maintain the *status quo*. The problem is a lack of care for all people: for victimized people, people who are close to them, the community of believers, and the persons who committed criminal acts. The ecclesial leaders do not think about hiding the evil but about protecting the priesthood, which results in the problem being identified not so much as the evil deeds but as the knowledge about them, which will damage the image of the institution and the priesthood. In this mentality there is no concern for the aggrieved person and their dignity. Instead, the priority is the institution as a “political apparatus,” which should function correctly, keep its influence, and enjoy the recognition of public opinion.

Using this strategy, the Church stops acting as a community of sinners redeemed with the Blood of Lamb and seeks to become a well-functioning institution. This utilitarian method of confronting the crisis of sexual abuse of minors is based on the assumption that we will lose all if we admit to mistakes and errors²⁰ and so determines the attitude of the Church

¹⁹ Rafał Leśniczak, “Komunikowanie polskich biskupów w kontekście kryzysu pedofilii. W trosce o zasady skutecznej komunikacji,” *Kultura—Media—Teologia* 42 (2020): 70.

²⁰ Kusz, “Kościoła—jaki jesteś?,” 99–101; for more on the structure of the Catholic Church and the sexual abuse on minors by clergyman see: Andrej Saje, “Abusi sessuali e spirituali nella

toward the media as a hostile subject that seeks to destroy an important institution.

The role of media in the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church should be limited to informing about cases perpetrated by clergymen or acts of negligence committed by bishops and superiors. However, the response to the crisis is a matter of the Church. In this regard, it is very important to create efficient systems of aid and protection for children, but it is only one side of the coin. Such an effort may be enough for the Church if it is understood as an institution, but it is not enough for the Church as a community of faith for which “humankind is the way.”

In the Church in Poland, there are some places where the problem is downplayed and even denied. In some dioceses and religious communities and pastoral areas of the country where organized training exists, prevention strategies are implemented, and victims are provided for. Due to the history of Poland and its cultural condition, the Polish Church’s strategy of protecting the institution is strong, but the vision of the Church as a community of faith and as a people of God is languishing.²¹ Consequently, the vision of the Church which exists in Poland idealizes the clergyman as an “anointed person,” who has an undisputed position of authority. The need to overcome various forms of clericalism makes reform difficult and increases the risk of sexual abuse against minors.²²

The response to the cases of sexual abuse against minors by clergymen in the Catholic Church in Poland is at the stage of “moral panic.” The media’s focus on sexual abuse in the Church and the insufficient response of the ecclesial leaders caused responsibility to be passed on to others, leading to a search for a quick response. This strategy favors a short-lived solution and does not serve the interests of the victimized people, of the society, or of the perpetrators. Consequently, the analysis of the phenomenon and structural factors, such as the methods of management

Chiesa Cattolica. Dilemmi e questioni aperte,” *Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego* 40, no. 2 (2020): 69–85.

²¹ Kusz, “Kościołe—jaki jesteś?,” 103–104.

²² Kusz, “Kościołe—jaki jesteś?,” 107–108.

and reaction towards irregularities in the Church, lose importance. Actions taken are designed to satisfy public opinion. The Catholic Church in Poland lacks a readiness to endorse psychological and sociological research about specific ecclesial risk factors and the causes of sexual abuse against minors. There is a lack of theological analysis on the consequences of this crisis for the theology of the sacrament of ordination, of celibacy, and of the problem of power in the Church. “Moral panic” results in a lack of real aid for the perpetrators of sexual abuse and the solution proposed, which is transferring clergymen to the lay state, assuming that being a lay person is worse than being a clergyman. The Church searches for a place where the perpetrators can be hidden from the media spotlight and public opinion. The fear of paying high compensations prompts the Church to treat victims as patients to be put in order and not as children of God for whom the Church is mother. In these ways, the Church acts as an institution and not as a community of faith and place of the presence of God.²³

During a press conference in March 2019, bishops and clergymen reacted to movies presented on the sexual abuse of minors. Their reactions contained mistakes and revealed three visibly different concepts of approaching the problem. Ultimately, they escalated the crisis. The published report was a disunified compilation which lacked a clear discussion of the methodology of data collection and failed to delve deeper into the problem of the study, instead consisting of rhetoric of defending the Church and showing mercy to the perpetrators. This confirms that the Church in Poland not only struggles with a response to the matter of the crisis but with communication about it too.²⁴

²³ Kusz, “Kościołe—jaki jesteś?,” 110–112; see also a proposal by the German theologian Thomas Schärtl who postulates the rethinking of ecclesiology against clericalism as a cause of the sexual abuse crisis in the Church in “Amerikanischer Albtraum. Die perfide Interpretation des Missbrauchs,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 11 (2018): 753–768.

²⁴ Monika Przybysz and Józef Kloch, “Crisis Communication in the Context of Child and Youth Protection—Diagnosis, Problems, Challenges. The Case of the Catholic Church in Poland,” *The Person and the Challenges* 12, no. 1 (2022): 162–163; for more critical analysis of the press conferences of the Polish Bishops, which held the subject of pedophilia in the

In the context of this crisis, the Catholic Church in Poland should utilize communication based on three ethical principles: truthfulness, openness, and partnership. The response of the Church in the media should not be the result of speculation but its official position. The principle of rapid response is crucial. The second principle of openness deals with the credibility of the message and the response of the community. A community which believes in the entity's information, good intentions, professionalism, and desire to resolve the problem responds with support. Every kind of lie and attempt to manipulate or to hide the problem results in a lack of trust, condemnation, judgment, and attribution of guilt. The third ethical rule concerns the recipient in the communication process and demands that the dialogue be conciliation-oriented. The method of communication cannot be based on a position of infallibility or superiority. The emotional character of the recipient's message and the recipient's feelings, even irrational, should be taken into account. Crisis communication will be effective in heading toward positive solutions, when the source of information is reliable, honest, composed, emotionally subdued, and cooperative.²⁵

Church authorities must prioritize transparency as one of the principles which needs be put into practice in responding to and to dealing with the scandal of sexual abuse by clergymen, as well as any issue in general. The Church's leadership should understand journalists not as enemies, but as people whose mission is to exercise and defend the right to truth-based information to do justice. Effective communication about sexual abuses of minors is a fundamental duty because of the way that it could prevent people from committing other abuses. The lack of trust between Polish bishops and reporters must be remedied and give rise to the mindset of

Church to account, see Dariusz Tworzydło, Sławomir Gawroński, and Marek Zajic, "Catholic Church in Poland in the Face of Paedophilia: Analysis of Image Actions," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 5, vol. 1 (2020): 168–170; and Guzik, "An Unfinished Story of Conversion," 431–433.

²⁵ Przybysz and Kloch, "Crisis Communication in the Context of Child and Youth Protection," 166–167.

understanding the need to inform society, openness to discuss concerns, proper media training, and instructions on how to communicate sexual abuse cases to victims, local communities, clergy, and media. The starting point in this regard should be the conversion of heart and mind to prioritize the needs of victims and to fulfill the duties of being good pastors.²⁶

About Media Responsibility

The crisis of pedophilia in Poland and the response to it has become not only an important challenge for the Church and theology but also for the media and its responsibility for its treatment of this problem in the public sphere. The media has played a very important role in the detection of cases of sexual abuse against minors by clergymen and has contributed to the change in strategy of the Church in Poland. The media coverage about pedophilia in the Polish Church reveals some of the aspects of the responsibility of the media in this regard.

If one of the fundamental ethical principles of the media is respect for the dignity of the human person, then such communication of news is unacceptable when it violates the interests of victims and their right to privacy and to a good name. Disseminating information about the intimate matters of individual persons in specific cases in the news must as a baseline respect their private lives and present the information in such a way that does not allow victims to be identified. Otherwise, the news becomes sensationalistic, fails to lead to conversation on the problem, and instead results in re-traumatizing the aggrieved people and their relatives. The rights of aggrieved people should be an overriding factor in their treatment by the media.²⁷

The media is in service of the common good and must protect it and contribute to its respect. One of the fundamental elements of the common good is truth, which the media should proclaim in their communication

²⁶ Guzik, "An Unfinished Story of Conversion," 448.

²⁷ Kloch and Przybysz, "Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii," 108–109.

about sexual abuse. In this regard, the media fulfilled an important function by detecting cases of sexual abuse of minors while the Church was silent or hid the crimes. Because the media's tone influences the overarching social debate, respect for the common good must extend to the language of communication by the media too, which should not be brutal.²⁸

The powerful emotions and moral condemnation caused by learning about the phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors by clergymen are one of the reasons why this problem maintains a high position in public debates and media culture. Accusations of sexual abuse directed toward different groups or institutions carry important political weight. The fact that the accusation mostly concerns the intimate sphere, which is normally hidden from the sight of the audience, adds the danger of sensationalism as it is valued by the media for its "sales power." The focus on highly emotive aspects, often deliberately provoked by the media, is not conducive to thinking about what sexual abuse is actually referring to. The media discourse can do without a precise definition of the phenomenon or even benefit from blurred meanings. However, the real problem of clergy sexual abuse of minors is much more complicated than the media depiction. In order to develop a policy to counteract this abuse and its evil and damaging effects, a multi-dimensional understanding beyond the media depiction is required.²⁹

Polish journalists imitating foreign media are interested in achieving compensation paid by the Church to the victims of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy. The media asserts that cases of pedophilia are problems stemming from the clergymen of the Catholic Church and assumes that this is the only group of pedophiles. However, the principles of journalistic ethics demand a focus on the protection of children, providing aid to victimized people, and the sensitization of society to the problem of

²⁸ Kloch and Przybysz, "Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii," 109.

²⁹ Sadlon and Nowotny, "How to Study Child Sexual Abuse Within the Institutional Framework?," 133.

pedophilia in all social and professional groups. It is unacceptable for media communication to omit the efforts of the ecclesial institutions in combating sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is a part of society which contributes to the common good in various ways and cannot be reduced to a criminal organization due to the actual crisis of the sexual abuse of minors by clergymen.³⁰

Conclusion

The media in Poland plays an important role in the process of detecting sexual abuse of minors by clergymen. Journalistic publications have contributed not only to recognizing the criminal acts committed by representatives of the Church but also to a change of strategy in which the Church prioritizes the protection of children and the prevention of crimes before the interests of the institution. Strategies of prevention, the protection of children, and clear procedures in cases of sexual abuse are vital in the process of responding to crimes in the Church, but it is not enough when confronting this painful problem. The Church must undertake a deeper reflection in relation to its identity and its structure, especially in the form of clericalism, which precipitated the crisis. In turn, the Church must search for ways to be a community of faith respected by each person, especially by children on their way to God. The media serves a very important role and responsibility in communication about the Church and its ecclesial problems and can promote inspiration for renewal. However, theological reflection on the actual crisis must be taken on by the Church. The strong clerical and hierarchical Catholic Church in Poland now begins this long and tedious process.



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³⁰ Kloch and Przybysz, "Medialny przekaz problematyki pedofilii," 110.

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Chapter 14: A Clergy Abuse Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Kate Jackson-Meyer

How can the Roman Catholic Church foster healing for survivors of clergy sexual abuse? And how can the church stand in solidarity with survivors and heal from the wounds of cover-up and betrayal? These questions remain looming as the worldwide church continues to reckon with these crimes and sins. I suggest that the episcopacy should embrace a visible and global response that makes way for accountability, restitution, change, and reconciliation. To do this, I propose a Clergy Abuse Truth and Reconciliation Commission.¹

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are political tools used to sow peace in conflict areas.² Truth-telling is the basis of this restorative justice model because reconciliation cannot begin until survivors' stories are heard and their hurt publicly acknowledged. The Clergy Abuse TRC I propose would be distinct in its approach because it would be used in an ecclesial context and with theological grounding. This could unlock untapped healing potential of TRCs, as well as harness the

¹ I am not the first to suggest this, but I have not found a sustained treatment on the idea to date. Jennifer Haselberger presented the idea at a 2014 conference of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests; see Brian Roewe, "Haselberger: South Africa's Post-Apartheid Commission a Way Forward for Church on Accountability," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 7, 2014, www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/haselberger-south-africas-post-apartheid-commission-way-forward-church; Daniel Philpott and Katharina Westerhorstmann have also proposed this; see Inés San Martín, "Scholars Seek to Establish 'Truth and Reconciliation' Structures for Clerical Abuse," *Crux*, July 28, 2020, www.cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/07/scholars-seek-to-establish-truth-and-reconciliation-structures-for-clerical-abuse/; and Heal Our Church in Seattle proposes a lay-led TRC; see Heal Our Church, "Mission and Vision, 2020–2021," www.healourchurch.org/mission-and-vision.

² For an important read, see Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Catholic theological tradition to address the problems of abuse. This TRC could be headed by a global leadership team that coordinates work done by regional chapters across the world, which in turn, guide the work of local churches. Public hearings and healings could be executed by the global team and informed by the work of regional chapters. Given the extent of the harm of clergy sexual abuse, there will be diverse views on whether truth and reconciliation are the best ways forward. Whatever one's position is, it seems undeniable that it is necessary for the episcopacy to listen to survivors and to create pathways for reconciliation and healing should some desire to explore those options.

In this chapter, I explain why a TRC is a fitting mechanism to address the harms of clergy sexual abuse. I then offer a theological understanding of the work of the proposed Commission. Finally, I identify crucial questions and offer suggestions to frame the potential work and scope of a Clergy Abuse TRC. In sum, the TRC should provide: 1) much-needed accountability through a visible process of truth-telling, 2) an avenue for healing for survivors, 3) and a report that identifies patterns of sexual abuse and makes suggestions for structural changes to prevent future abuses. This sketch is meant to be general enough to be adopted globally and flexible enough to be adapted to specific cultural contexts by regional chapters and local churches.

Why a Clergy Abuse TRC?

A TRC is a fitting response to clergy abuse because it provides a mechanism that is able to both unify the current ad hoc institutional response to the crisis as well as attend to the severe personal and institutional harms of clergy abuse in a spirit of healing and rebuilding. Generally, TRCs are convened to address political crimes and injustices that occurred over a specified time, and while their charters vary according to the expectations of the governing bodies that initiate them, they often involve public hearings and usually submit a written report articulating their findings. They have been used across the globe in places such as Chile

(1990), El Salvador (1992), Guatemala (1994), and Ghana (2002).³ South Africa's TRC is arguably the most well-known, commissioned in 1995, and led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to address the human rights violations of apartheid.⁴ It has been both critiqued and praised for mingling religion and politics, illustrating that, as political tools, TRCs are both lauded and limited.⁵ TRCs use principles of restorative justice so that those who have been directly or indirectly harmed by a political regime can find a way to live peacefully in a redesigned nation-state where the perpetrators are part of society as well. Some are called Truth Commissions and others Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, but whatever the name, truth-telling is the basis of this restorative justice model.

A Clergy Abuse TRC could provide a coordinated, global approach for investigation, accountability, and healing. This is necessary because, currently, the church around the world is at different stages in terms of transparent and comprehensive responses to the clergy abuse crisis. For instance, after abuse revelations in the US, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops introduced the 2002 "Dallas Charter," which provided guidelines for responding to allegations, introduced safeguarding protections, and initiated a nation-wide investigation and report by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice that was released in 2004.⁶ Despite

³ Year indicates when commission began. For an overview of these and others, see Priscilla B. Hayner, "Truth Commissions: A Schematic Overview," *International Review of the Red Cross* 88, no. 862 (2006): 295–310.

⁴ For an indispensable read, see Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

⁵ Megan Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009); and Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶ Spotlight Team, "Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years," *The Boston Globe*, January 6, 2002, www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/06/church-allowed-abuse-priest-for-years/cSHfGkTlrAT25qKGvBuDNM/story.html; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," 1st ed., June 2002 (revised in 2005, 2011, and 2018); and John Jay College of Criminal Justice, "The Nature and

this seemingly comprehensive approach, the US church was rocked later by allegations against Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick in 2017, and then the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report of 2018 that brought to light over one thousand previously hidden cases of abuse.⁷ Similarly, numerous reports have come out of Ireland over the years, each offering new information.⁸ The Catholic Church in Australia was part of a wider government-based investigation into institutional child sexual abuse, and France is still processing its recent devastating report that was commissioned by the bishops.⁹ Yet, other countries have significant work ahead. For instance, a group commissioned by the Portuguese bishops is in the midst of their investigation, while the Swiss bishops and the Spanish parliament have recently launched investigations.¹⁰ Elsewhere, there are

Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950–2002,” February 2004, www.loc.gov/item/2019667266/.

⁷ Secretariate of State of the Holy See, “Report on the Holy See’s Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick (1920–2017),” November 10, 2020, www.vatican.va/resources/resources_rapporto-card-mccarrick_20201110_en.pdf; and Office of the Attorney General, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, “Report I of the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury,” July 27, 2018.

⁸ Reuters Staff, “Factbox: Reports into Abuses in the Irish Catholic Church,” *Reuters*, January 12, 2021, www.reuters.com/article/us-ireland-church-abuses-factbox-idUSKBN29H1JJ.

⁹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, “Final Report,” December 15, 2017, www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report; and Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE), “Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church France 1950–2020: Summary of the Final Report,” October 5, 2021, www.ciase.fr/medias/Ciase-Summary-of-the-Final-Report-5-october-2021.pdf. For more on the situation worldwide, see James Keenan, “Hierarchalism,” *Theological Studies* 83, no. 1 (2022): 86–89. For a list of reports see Bishop Accountability, “Reports,” www.bishopaccountability.org/AtAGlance/reports.htm.

¹⁰ Comissão Independente para o Estudo dos Abusos Sexuais contra as Crianças na Igreja Católica Portuguesa, www.darvozaosilencio.org; “Swiss Catholic Church to Open Secret Files to Sexual Abuse Investigators,” *Le News*, April 8, 2022, www.lenews.ch/2022/04/08/swiss-catholic-church-to-open-files-to-sexual-abuse-investigators/; and “Spanish MPs Approve Investigation into Sexual Abuse within Catholic Church,” *AFP* and *Euronews*, March 11, 2022, www.euronews.com/2022/03/10/spanish-mps-approve-investigation-into-sexual-abuse-within-catholic-church.

calls for more robust responses where little has been done institutionally, such as in India, Italy, and throughout Latin America.¹¹

Reparations and healing approaches also vary worldwide in terms of who runs them and what reparations are offered. For instance, Catholic congregations in Ireland contributed to the government Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002, that offered monetary reparations for child abuse occurring within numerous institutions.¹² German bishops set-up a standardized “recognition” payment of about €5,000 per survivor in 2011 that has since been reconfigured, while the Dutch church has compensated over €30,000 per survivor, and the Polish bishops have resisted paying any compensation at all (but this has been challenged in court).¹³ Survivors in Australia can choose a government-sponsored monetary reparations program, the National Redress Scheme, which is open to survivors of child sexual abuse within numerous institutions, and they can also opt for the pastoral approach of *Towards Healing*, which is sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia and addresses the holistic needs of each person, including possible payments.¹⁴ The US church has given billions of dollars to survivors in

¹¹ Shaji George Kochuthara, “The Sexual Abuse Scandal and a New Ethical Horizon: A Perspective from India,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 931–949; and Adalberto Méndez López, “The Time is Ripe for a Clergy Abuse Inquiry in Latin America,” *Aljazeera*, March 29, 2022, www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/29/the-time-is-ripe-for-a-clergy-abuse-inquiry-in-latin-america.

¹² James Gallen, “Jesus Wept: The Roman Catholic Church, Child Sexual Abuse and Transitional Justice,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10 (2016): 346–347.

¹³ Gallen, “Jesus Wept,” 346–347; Geir Moulson, “German bishops set up system for larger sex abuse payments,” *Associated Press*, September 24, 2020, www.apnews.com/article/religion-europe-sexual-abuse-by-clergy-sexual-abuse-germany-e20f1819d791ee04cbfef533bed28420; and Daniel Tilles, “Catholic Diocese in Poland Ordered to Pay Compensation to Victim of Child Sex Abuse by Priest,” *Notes from Poland*, May 23, 2022, www.notesfrompoland.com/2022/05/23/catholic-diocese-in-poland-ordered-to-pay-compensation-to-victim-of-child-sex-abuse-by-priest/.

¹⁴ Australian Government Department of Social Services, “National Redress Scheme,” www.dss.gov.au/national-redress-scheme-for-people-who-have-experienced-institutional-child-sexual-abuse; and Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Catholic Religious Australia, *Towards Healing*, 2021, www.catholic.org.au/professional-

total, while some individual lay groups or bishops have launched creative healing approaches, such as a Healing Circle in Milwaukee.¹⁵ Legal prosecutions are, arguably, rare worldwide.¹⁶ And while there have been numerous papal apologies, survivors and church members are waiting for sufficient accountability, truth, and justice.¹⁷ This seemingly uncoordinated approach prevents the global church from fully determining the scope of the problem, and it thwarts healing because the church is unable to heal together.

Furthermore, a TRC is a fitting global response to the problem of clergy abuse because TRCs seek to heal harms that people endure under bodies that were entrusted to protect them. However, the contexts are distinct because, unlike political harms that TRCs seek to redress, clergy abuse was neither encouraged nor sanctioned by the Magisterium. Nevertheless, assessing the harms of clergy abuse through a political lens both illuminates the nature of the harms and makes evident the need for a robust, politically-inspired response.

Wounds of clergy abuse resonate with many of the “primary wounds of political injustice” that political theorist Daniel Philpott describes.¹⁸ According to Philpott, these occur when “a political injustice ruptures right relationship within or between political communities and diminishes

standards/towards-healing. Thanks to Tanja Stojadinovic and Ulrike Marwitz who shared with me their work with *Towards Healing*. Importantly, they highlighted the importance of a trauma-informed approach, which I stress later.

¹⁵ Gallen, “Jesus Wept,” 346; *The Healing Circle: Victims of Sexual Abuse by Clergy Share Their Stories* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Law School, 2009); and for current practices on lamenting the crisis, see M. Cathleen Kaveny, “Anger, Lamentation, and Common Ground,” *Theological Studies* 82, no. 4 (2021): 681–684.

¹⁶ Gallen, “Jesus Wept,” 345–346.

¹⁷ For an example of a papal response, see Pope Francis, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God,” August 20, 2018, www.press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/08/20/0578/01246.html#ted.

¹⁸ Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33–41.

the human flourishing of those who are involved in that injustice.”¹⁹ Philpott identifies human rights violations as the first primary harm, which can also describe clergy sexual abuse crimes.²⁰ Philpott’s second harm is also pertinent as it involves “harm to the victim’s person, in body and soul.”²¹ This is evident in Brian Clites’s exploration of the phenomenon of “soul murder,” which Clites relays through a series of clergy abuse survivor testimonies, including this one by Max, “I could feel my soul being destroyed as I let him [the priest] have his way.”²² And Thomas P. Doyle reveals the depths of the “spiritual trauma” of clergy abuse, wherein, among other damages, survivors “often exclaim that the sexual abuse robbed them of God.”²³ In these ways, clergy abuse involves profound soul harms.

Another dimension of clergy abuse harm is properly described by what Philpott identifies as the political harm of “lack of acknowledgement of the suffering of victims” by the government.²⁴ According to Philpott, this undermines dignity and is another way that right relationship is undermined. This persists when clergy abuse has been, and may still be, covered up. This harm and the subsequent rupture between a survivor and the church is evident in the case of Marie Collins, who shares the painful effects of her abuse being dismissed by those in charge, “The mishandling of my case by the Church leadership led to a total collapse of my trust and respect in them and in my Church.”²⁵ For survivors of clergy abuse,

¹⁹ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 31. Philpott gives this overarching definition and then distinguishes between primary and secondary wounds. I am focusing on primary wounds.

²⁰ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 33; For sexual abuse and rights of children, see United Nations General Assembly, “Convention on the Rights of the Child,” art. 19 and 34, UN Doc. E/CN.4/RES/1990/74, November 20, 1989, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf.

²¹ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 34.

²² Brian J. Clites, “Soul Murder: Sketches of Survivor Imaginaries,” *Exchange* 48, no. 3 (2019): 273.

²³ Thomas P. Doyle, “The Spiritual Trauma Experienced by Victims of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 3 (2009): 250.

²⁴ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 37.

²⁵ Marie Collins and Shelia Hollins, “Healing a Wound at the Heart of the Church and Society,” in *Toward Healing and Renewal: The 2012 Symposium on the Sexual Abuse of*

acknowledgement is crucial, for as therapist Shelia Hollins explains, “being believed is in itself healing.”²⁶ Philpott observes that harm also extends to the perpetrators themselves.²⁷ This illuminates how priests who perpetrated these crimes and those who covered them up are also hurting themselves by acting contrary to God’s desire for them. Thus, their sins harm others and themselves.

Importantly, Philpott explains that injustice lingers over survivors and the community until it is properly overcome, thus creating another wound.²⁸ In the church, there exists a lack of trust between the clergy and laity who feel betrayed by the horrific events and the cover-up by moral and spiritual guides.²⁹ Philpott’s insight indicates that survivors’ wounds and the broken bonds within the church will persist until there is a strong renunciation of clergy abuse manifesting as visible accountability and justice.

Theological Grounding for a Clergy Abuse TRC

A Clergy Abuse TRC could provide a global restorative justice-based response to these harms in a way that is fitting for a worldwide church and necessary for comprehensive changes and shared healing. Reconciliation between clergy abuse survivors and perpetrators, survivors and the institutional church, and healing for the whole church ought to be primary objectives of the episcopacy because reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. For as Paul proclaims, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). So then, through God’s love and goodness, we have been reconciled to God through Christ, and in turn, reconciliation is our

Minors Held at the Pontifical Gregorian University, ed. Charles J. Scicluna, Hans Zollner, David John Ayotte, and Timothy J. Costello (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2012), 24.

²⁶ Collins and Hollins, “Healing,” 25.

²⁷ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 39–41.

²⁸ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 38.

²⁹ Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 262.

mission as Christians. Joshua Snyder defines reconciliation in the Christian view: “Authentic reconciliation understood as the reestablishment of right relationship with God, oneself, and one’s neighbor requires the triple dimension of truth, justice and forgiveness.”³⁰ Following this, the hope for reconciliation after clergy abuse is built on a commitment to restoring right relationships through unearthing the truth, upholding justice, and fostering forgiveness.

Forgiveness is prior to reconciliation as it is letting go of hurt, while reconciliation rebuilds the relationship.³¹ Both can partner with justice. Forgiveness is fundamental to Christianity as it is embodied by Jesus on the cross and central to the disciples’ mission (Luke 23:34; John 20:23). We receive God’s gift of forgiveness and so we are encouraged to forgive (Matthew 6:9–15; Luke 11:2–4). Archbishop Desmond Tutu recognizes Jesus’s model of forgiveness as instructive and he defines forgiveness in this way: “Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin.”³² This is powerful and humanizing in Tutu’s view, for “[forgiveness] gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.”³³ Forgiveness is a gift that is freely given.

Relating Christian forgiveness to clergy abuse and its cover-up, Stephen Pope and Janine Geske argue that a Thomistic view of *caritas* illuminates that “forgiveness is the resumption of goodwill toward a wrongdoer.”³⁴ According to them, this embodiment of goodwill goes along with justice for clergy abuse and may involve justified anger, proper punishment for the perpetrators, and accountability.

³⁰ Joshua R. Snyder, “Should Transitional Justice Promote Forgiveness? Insights from Guatemala’s Recovery of Historical Memory Project,” *Journal for Peace & Justice Studies* 29, no. 1 (2019): 7.

³¹ Forgiveness without reconciliation may be appropriate in some cases, especially when a relationship is harmful.

³² Tutu, *No Future*, 272.

³³ Tutu, *No Future*, 31.

³⁴ Stephen J. Pope and Janine P. Geske, “Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice in Light of Clerical Sexual Abuse and Its Cover-Up,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 622.

Pope and Geske, as well as Hans Zollner, warn against “cheap forgiveness” in responding to clergy abuse, arguing against an easy form of forgiveness that does more to ignore problems than address them.³⁵ Zollner lifts up John Paul II’s assertion that forgiveness does not preclude reparations or justice, and he raises the need for accountability for both the perpetrators and the church. Importantly, he clarifies that “a confession does not replace a judicial inquiry.”³⁶

Aquinas’s conceptualization of the relationship between truth and justice further illuminates this. According to Aquinas, “justice is a habit whereby a man [*sic*] renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will” (ST II-II q. 58, a. 1). Truth is related to justice, for Aquinas, because both truth and justice are “directed to another” and both “se[t] up a certain equality between things” (ST II-II q. 109, a. 3). While both concern what one is due, in the case of justice it is what one is due according to “legal debt,” and in the case of truth it is what one is due according to “moral debt” (ST II-II q. 109, a. 3). Truth is a moral demand and related to justice because “one man [*sic*] owes another a manifestation of the truth” (ST II-II q. 109, a. 3). This demand will only be fulfilled when survivors are afforded the space to tell their stories and when their truths are acknowledged by the episcopacy.

Finally, reconciliation should be understood in light of Jesus’s solidarity with, and commitment to, the marginalized, as affirmed by Catholic social teaching’s notion of solidarity and preference for the poor and vulnerable (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38; *Compendium*, nos. 182–184). As it relates to clergy sexual abuse, the emphasis on the marginalized impels us to focus on the needs of the survivors of abuse.

³⁵ Pope and Geske, “Anger,” 612; Hans Zollner, SJ, “The Child at the Center: What Can Theology Say in the Face of the Scandals of Abuse?,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 699–702.

³⁶ Zollner, “Child at the Center,” 702.

Framing Questions for a Clergy Abuse TRC

I now turn to the task of envisioning how a Clergy Abuse TRC could work. To do this, I offer initial reflections organized around some crucial framing questions that build on lessons from prior TRCs, especially the work of TRC expert Priscilla Hayner.³⁷

Who would the Clergy Abuse TRC serve and who would run it?

A Clergy Abuse TRC would serve, first and foremost, survivors of clergy sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. This effort would center survivors as well as serve to restore trust between the episcopacy and church members. I suggest the Commission is a joint lay-clerical endeavor so that laity and clerics can work together in the pursuit of healing. I suggest a global leadership team that steers the process and holds public hearings and public apologies, while regional chapters guide local churches to gather testimonies, report on their area, address legal matters, and offer context-specific healing opportunities.

How might the Commission be culturally sensitive?

The framework I am proposing could be implemented worldwide by local churches in culturally-specific ways, as determined by each regional chapter, in order to ensure a cohesive global response that is attentive to particular situations and locations. The importance of a culturally-adaptive response to trauma is evident in Hayner's appeal to the work of psychiatrists Cécile Rousseau and Aline Drapeau who explain that "culture provides the tools for grieving."³⁸ In addition, different regions will have specific practices, languages, dialects, and traditions that should be woven into how each regional chapter and local church does its work.

³⁷ Many of the following questions are modeled on Hayner's insights and her extraordinary work synthesizing lessons from numerous past commissions; see Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*.

³⁸ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 146.

How could testimonies be collected and heard publicly?

I propose that regional chapters guide local churches in acquiring testimonies, and then public hearings could be held by the global leadership team for a smaller number of representative cases that would be investigated further (and only for survivors involved who desired this). This is inspired by the model set-up by the government of El Salvador in partnership with the UN where they gathered a large number of testimonies to illuminate what Hayner describes as “the overall patterns of violence,” and then they extensively investigated a small number of those.³⁹

The regional/local efforts to gather testimonies could follow the model of the Recovery of Historical Memory Project in Guatemala which relied on “reconciliation facilitators”—individuals trained in mental health and in the historical situation of Guatemala who traveled to villages to perform interviews.⁴⁰ Similarly, Clergy Abuse TRC “reconciliation facilitators” could go to people’s homes or local sites. The regional chapters could also partner with local organizations to gather testimonies, akin to how many TRCs have partnered with NGOs in various capacities.⁴¹

Hayner also warns against not adequately preparing commissions’ staff, which can be harmful to both survivors and staff. She explains that those taking statements must be prepared to procure information in light of how trauma might affect survivors’ ability to recall or to articulate traumatic events.⁴² Those taking statements and inputting the data must also be supported because those roles can be taxing.⁴³ Thus, I suggest that statement-takers be trained in trauma-informed approaches that would ensure they are able to sensitively gather information in a way consistent

³⁹ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 73.

⁴⁰ Snyder, “Should Transitional Justice Promote Forgiveness?” 14. Thank you to Josh for suggesting this.

⁴¹ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 234–239.

⁴² Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 148–149.

⁴³ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 149–151.

with the needs of the survivors.⁴⁴ Furthermore, members of the Commission would need outlets for processing their experiences.

Which stories would the Commission corroborate and would it publicly name the guilty?

It will be impossible to corroborate every instance of abuse.⁴⁵ Thus, the Commission should devise standards of evidence, perhaps relying on insights from scholars at Catholic universities who are knowledgeable on both international legal statutes and canon law.

It may seem unfair for the Clergy Abuse TRC to name perpetrators for, as Hayner points out, this is not appropriate when they are not an official judicial body and the guilty haven't had an opportunity to defend themselves.⁴⁶ On the other hand, as Hayner explains, "Telling the full truth requires naming persons responsible for human rights crimes when there is clear evidence of their culpability."⁴⁷ While this is impossible in all nations, some clerical orders and dioceses in the US, for instance, have already revealed the names of abusers.⁴⁸ Thus, it seems reasonable to name the perpetrators when legally possible as determined by the regional chapters.

Would forgiveness or reconciliation be required?

Many TRCs are criticized for their inability to promote reconciliation between perpetrators and survivors. For instance, Richard Wilson

⁴⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Quick Guide for Clinicians Based on TIP 57: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services," HHS Publication, www.store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma15-4912.pdf.

⁴⁵ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 230–233. For example, the French report uses a sociological methodology to extrapolate number of cases, see CIASE, "France 1950–2020."

⁴⁶ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 107.

⁴⁷ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 107.

⁴⁸ For examples, see Archdiocese of New York, "Update on the Sexual Abuse Crisis," May 28, 2021, www.archnyc.org/ministries-and-offices/child-protection/list/; and Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province, "List of Jesuits with Credible Accusations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor," February 2020, www.jesuitscentralsouthern.org/about-us/protecting-children/province-statements/list-of-jesuits-with-credible-accusations-of-sexual-abuse-of-a-minor/.

criticizes South Africa's TRC for limiting reconciliation possibilities by rarely providing opportunities for perpetrators and survivors to meet one-on-one but also for being heavy-handed about forgiveness by forthrightly asking survivors if they forgave the perpetrators.⁴⁹ This raises the point that a Clergy Abuse TRC ought to be an apparatus to encourage reconciliation by creating the conditions of the possibility for reconciliation without forcing it. Reconciliation is ultimately the choice of survivors. Thus, a Clergy Abuse TRC should make space for individuals who would like to meet their perpetrators for a public or private apology. In the event that the perpetrator cannot meet with the individual, it is crucial that a church leader with significant power meet with survivors who desire such meetings. This is modeled in Australia's *Towards Healing* program.⁵⁰ The optional public meetings could be part of the proceedings of the global TRC head so the whole church could witness the apology.

What would reparations and healing look like?

Reparations and restitution often involve monetary compensation that tries to repair damage done as well as cover any legal, medical, or mental health needs incurred by the harm.⁵¹ In Chile, for instance, the governmental TRC's reparations included money, health benefits, and paid education.⁵² This is not always feasible. In the case of South Africa, Megan Shore explains that the religious discourse that infused the TRC was unable to persuade the government to spend significantly on reparations.⁵³ Hopefully, the theological foundations of a Clergy Abuse TRC ground its work sufficiently so that its recommendations would be taken seriously by the episcopacy. Reparations are consistent with the notion of "penance" in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, "to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Politics of Truth and Reconciliation*, 153–155, 119.

⁵⁰ ACBC, *Towards Healing*.

⁵¹ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 170–182.

⁵² Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 172–174.

⁵³ Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution*, 102–104.

habits befitting a disciple of Christ” (*Catechism*, no. 1494). I suggest that the reparations recommended by a Clergy Abuse TRC should be a consistent global reparations program that supports the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of survivors. The program could be implemented by regional chapters and local churches in appropriate ways. Reparations could include offering educational services, such as tuition remission at Catholic schools and colleges for survivors and their families. It could also include employment opportunities at various Catholic non-profits and institutes.

How could a Clergy Abuse TRC promote structural changes?

Like political TRCs, a Clergy Abuse TRC would establish the truth and make suggestions for changes.⁵⁴ The recommendations should arise from patterns revealed by the Commission and in conversation with prior work on the structural causes of clergy abuse.⁵⁵ In order to ensure appropriate changes, the Commission should possess the institutional power and financial support to follow through with the changes they deem necessary. This is a formidable task, as past political commissions have been critiqued for being unable to implement their recommendations for structural changes.⁵⁶

What liturgical and ritual aspects could be involved?

In order to stand in solidarity with survivors, it is necessary that testimonies of abuse are recognized as part of the story of the church and brought into our liturgical reality. Thus, a Clergy Abuse TRC should open and close its global and regional proceedings with expressions of lament and hope. Bryan Massingale, writing from the context of racism in the US, explains

⁵⁴ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 154–169.

⁵⁵ For instance, using Bettina Böhm, Hans Zollner, Jörg M. Fegert, and Hubert Liebhardt, “Child Sexual Abuse in the Context of the Roman Catholic Church: A Review of Literature from 1981–2013,” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 23, no. 6 (2014): 635–656; Keenan, “Hierarchicalism”; and Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*.

⁵⁶ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 180–182.

that “laments are cries of anguish.”⁵⁷ In Massingale’s view, lament engenders hope because it is in faith that one can enter the depths of sufferings, and in doing so, this is an act of hope. Massingale explains that lament can also bring about change because oppressors can see the harm they cause.⁵⁸ The church can lament clergy abuse and hope for change through, what Cathleen Kaveny calls “Liturgies of Lamentation.”⁵⁹ According to her, these recognize the importance of apologies. Modeled after the lessons of the Book of Lamentations, such liturgies insist that the People of God “lament brokenness” and admit that not all brokenness will be healed. They are thus making an effort “to *see* the devastation, to really *see* it” and “nurture hope in God’s care, not to count on the vindication of optimism by inexorable future progress.”⁶⁰

A Clergy Abuse TRC could be a path for healing rooted in the hope of reconciliation and understood according to theological commitments to truth, justice, and forgiveness where survivors’ needs and stories are central and where accountability could be ensured through a visible process. A Clergy Abuse TRC could make way for perpetrators or episcopal representatives to apologize to survivors and usher in an era of concrete efforts for restitution and change.⁶¹



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⁵⁷ Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 105.

⁵⁸ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 111–114.

⁵⁹ Kaveny, “Anger,” 678–684.

⁶⁰ Kaveny, “Anger,” 682, 683.

⁶¹ Thanks to Jim Keenan and the Virtual Round Table for feedback on this idea, Lisa Cahill for commenting on an early draft, Joshua Snyder for conversing about this, and Amber Herrle for help with factchecking and proofreading an early draft.

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Chapter 15: Abuse, Cover-Up, and the Need for a Reform of Church and Theology

Werner G. Jeanrond

In this article, I examine the relationship between the Roman Catholic conviction to possess, proclaim, and administer unchanging and infallible doctrinal interpretations of divine revelation and faith and the corresponding climate of administrative power, system and submission that has helped to facilitate and to cover up abuse of children and vulnerable adults in the church. The fact that the doctrinal self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Magisterium knows of no *systemic* possibility to err, to fail, and to abuse has made church failure a structural “impossibility” (*Catechism*, nos. 888–896). This doctrinal self-understanding and its proclamation by a male clerical hierarchy found its strongest expression in the First Vatican Council (1869–1870). Hence, even some genuinely intended ecclesial admissions of failure—beyond merely regretting abuse by individual office holders and church members—have often not been taken seriously. If the church as such cannot err or fail, it cannot meaningfully ask for forgiveness either. Nor can it expect to be able to restore lost trust without transparent channels of critique and self-critique. Individual expressions of shame in view of thousands of atrocious crimes against children and vulnerable adults are not enough to re-establish credibility in the institutional church, in its mission to proclaim the gospel, and in its leadership. The perceived gap between gospel and church has thus widened dramatically.

This systemic inability to err and to fail has made it especially difficult for victims and survivors of abuse to have their experiences reported, listened to, and acknowledged. Their accounts of abuse have pointed to a feature of the institution, in which their experience was considered impossible or possible only with regard to individual perpetrators. Individuals can fail, the church as such cannot. Accordingly, official

reactions to emerging accounts of abuse first displayed a rush to individualize abuse and to protect the institution against any attempt to identify *systemic* dimensions of clerical failure in the church. This eagerness to maintain the image of an unblemished institution further aggravated the situation of the victims and survivors of abuse in the church.

However, the sheer number of abuse cases recorded and publicized over the last twenty years by a series of commissions of inquiry in many countries, including Australia, the United States of America, Canada, Germany, Ireland, France, the United Kingdom, and Poland, has made it impossible not to pursue and discuss potentially *systemic* dimensions of abuse in the church. Acknowledging and discussing *systemic* failure might help to open up new and vital spaces for victims and survivors to seek healing and to relate afresh to the church in the future.¹

I first attend to the need to hear the voice of victims and survivors in the church and to place their voices at the center of church and theology. Second, I discuss the clergy-laity divide in the church and how overcoming this divide might help in restoring trust in the church and its mission. Finally, I point to the primacy of the Christian praxis of love as the appropriate framework for recognizing the wounds of the victims and survivors of abuse and for responding to God's coming reign.

The Voices of Victims and Survivors of Abuse in the Church

In recent times, theological publications have begun to focus on the *systemic* nature of physical, sexual, spiritual, and administrative abuse in the Roman Catholic Church.² In addition, ever more statements by

¹ Tomáš Halík, "With a sorrowful heart," *The Tablet*, October 2, 2021, 8–11.

² Magnus Striet and Rita Werden, eds., "Preface," in *Unheilige Theologie! Analysen angesichts sexueller Gewalt gegen Minderjährige durch Priester* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 7–14. See also Hans Zollner, SJ, "Kirchenleitung und Kinderschutz: Theologie im Kontext des Kinderschutzgipfels 2019," in *Nicht ausweichen: Theologie angesichts der Missbrauchskrise*, ed. Matthias Remenyi and Thomas Schärtl (Regensburg: Pustet, 2019), 189–200, 190f; and Klaus Mertes, SJ, "Vorwort," in Doris Wagner, *Spirituellem Missbrauch in der katholischen Kirche*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2020), 6.

survivors and victims of abuse have become publicly available.³ However, an in-depth reflection on the place and role of victims and survivors in any future dispensation of the Roman Catholic Church is still outstanding. Understandably, initial attention in church and society has focused on strategies of preventing abuse and on identifying possible causes and manifestations of abuse. Prevention, of course, is of the utmost urgency. However, the impression persists that the very children, women, and men who have suffered and survived abuse have largely been ignored in ongoing reflections on prevention and related measures of church reform. Yet, it seems to me that we must ask how, without proper regard for the victims and survivors of abuse, any discussion of more appropriate models of church could ever be truthful and just. What kind of a church would it be, in which the victims and survivors of abuse do not receive central attention, urgent recognition, necessary care, restitution, and compensation? Why would anyone wish to bypass the victims and survivors of abuse when planning for church reform? Why this ecclesial amnesia instead of engaging in an appropriate culture of remembrance that would acknowledge and respect the victims and survivors of abuse in the church?

With this in mind, it is worthwhile considering how theology has dealt with other large-scale atrocities. With regard to the Holocaust—a unique and incomparable phenomenon—it has been argued that there is no way forward for society, culture, church, and theology (in and beyond Germany) without the victims.⁴ Johann Baptist Metz called for the establishment of an “anamnetic culture” in which all the victims of the

³ See, for example: Barbara Haslbeck, Regina Heyder, Ute Leimgruber and Dorothee Sandherr-Klemp, eds., *Erzählen als Widerstand: Berichte über spirituellen und sexuellen Missbrauch an erwachsenen Frauen in der katholischen Kirche* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2020). See also the definition of “abuse” by Haslbeck, Heyder and Leimgruber, 15: “Abuse is a complex web of individual and systemic factors, of theological, psychological and traditional-stereotypical ways of reading [*Lesarten*] places, spaces and acting persons.” My translation.

⁴ See the respective discussion and references in Werner G. Jeanrond, *Reasons to Hope* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 103–107.

Holocaust and of Nazi murder and oppression receive proper acknowledgement and restoration of their human dignity.⁵ In general terms, Metz argued for the need to engage with painful memories when approaching the human future.

People's subjugation begins when their memories are taken away. Every colonization takes its principle here. And every resistance to oppression is nourished by the subversive power of remembered suffering. This memory of suffering is always standing up against the modern cynicism of power politics.⁶

Similarly, there is no way forward for church and theology without remembering the victims and survivors of abuse, without listening to their voices and taking their experiences seriously, without inviting them to consider and to comment on the proposals for abuse prevention and for church reform, and without reviewing and readjusting the structure of the church through the lens of their experience.

The various attempts to bypass or silence the victims and survivors of abuse disclose the systemic unease of a church and its leadership that are now facing a group of people that by their very existence challenge any image of and claim to institutional purity, traditional infallibility, mere apostolic continuity, and moral innocence.⁷ Initially, those victims and survivors of abuse who, after much suffering, anxiety, pain and shame, eventually found the strength to raise their voices and to reveal the nature of their respective abuse did not encounter a listening, empathetic and loving church. Rather, many church authorities saw them chiefly as

⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie 1967–1997* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1997), 149–155.

⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. and ed. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 106.

⁷ For discussions of different efforts to bypass or silence the voices of victims and survivors of abuse in the church, see, for instance, Doris Reisinger and Christoph Röhl, *Nur die Wahrheit rettet: Der Missbrauch in der katholischen Kirche und das System Ratzinger* (Munich: Piper, 2021), esp. 211–221.

troublemakers: after all, these people have been pointing to serious failure and systemic breakdown in the church. Instead of engaging with the victims, church hierarchies rushed to attend to the actual abusers, that is to those office holders who, it was argued, now most seriously require forgiveness for their shameful deeds.⁸

These deeds were identified in terms of a breach of the promise of clerical celibacy rather than in terms of what had been done to the actual victims. In line with this hierarchical assessment, the Holy See formulated sharper rules and regulations in order to restore the sanctity of clerical life and clerical performance of the sacraments, such as the *Moto Proprio Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* (2001).⁹ Action was considered necessary to protect the systemic order of hierarchy, clergy, and laity in the church. The victims and survivors were, at best, witnesses to the need to tighten up and to restore the existing power structure in the church: pope, bishops, and priests, whereas the laity remains a largely passive group to be guided, instructed, and protected by their self-appointed shepherds.¹⁰

Systemically this makes “sense”: by attending to and forgiving the perpetrators, the church system hoped to maintain its traditional structure and public image, whereas listening to the accounts of the victims and survivors might lead to destabilizing the public image and internal order of the church. Hence, according to this logic the real threat to the prevailing system does not originate with the abusers but with the very victims and survivors of abuse.

⁸ See, for example, the reflections by victims and survivors of abuse, such as Kai Christian Moritz, “Theologie—es geht weder mit ihr noch ohne sie,” in *Nicht ausweichen*, eds. Remenyi and Schärtl (Regensburg: Pustet, 2019), 32–37.

⁹ Pope Benedict’s insistence, in the context of reflecting on the sexual abuse of a young woman by her local priest, that “we must do everything to protect the gift of the holy Eucharist against abuse,” gave occasion to many questions. Jan Feddersen and Philipp Gessler, *Phrase unser: Die blutleere Sprache der Kirche* (Munich: Claudius, 2020), 79f. (my translation).

¹⁰ Doris Reisinger, “Religiöse Eigenlogik und ihre Konsequenzen: Eine Analyse der katholischen Mehrdeutigkeit des Missbrauchsbegriffs,” in *Gefährliche Theologien: Wenn theologische Ansätze Machtmissbrauch legitimieren*, ed. Doris Reisinger (Regensburg: Pustet, 2021), 58–76.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, in the first instance, not the abusers but their victims and survivors as well as their respective families and support groups have lost trust in the church, in its authorities, in its structures, and in its proclamation of eternal truths. Moreover, the mission of the church in the world has been deeply compromised for many others in and beyond the ecclesial community. The trust of the victims, of the survivors of abuse, and of the public can only ever be regained by a radically different way of being church. Hence, it is of vital importance for the church of the future that the victims and survivors of abuse and all affected environments are actively encouraged to participate in the process of reviewing Christian discipleship, in the exercise of power in the church, and in the ensuing reform process. Mere rhetorical strategies of pacifying the victims in particular and the laity in general will no longer do.¹¹

Even for theology, the massive abuse of human beings in the church marks a clear shift of epochs. In view of the horrific abuse of children, men, and women in the church, theology simply cannot revert to its old agendas and traditional ways of thinking. Instead, as explicitly called for by some victims and survivors, theology must self-critically reflect on its own seriously delayed involvement in the very church in which sexual, spiritual, physical, and theological abuse has become a widespread reality in direct contradiction to the central demands of Christian discipleship.¹²

A story from my personal experience illustrates the significance of these points. Some time ago, I had occasion to talk to a Roman Catholic priest and convicted child abuser. He had been condemned and punished in a public court of justice for an offense, which, while on night duty at a boarding school, he had committed upon a minor. However, this monastic priest and teacher could not accept that the mere touching of a sleeping child's genitals represented a sexual act in the first place. The theology

¹¹ For a discussion of the recent history of rhetorical strategies of pacification, see Norbert Lüdecke, *Die Täuschung: Haben Katholiken die Kirche, die sie verdienen?* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2021).

¹² See Wolfgang Beinert, "Gottesmissbrauch," in *Nicht ausweichen*, eds. Remenyi and Schärtl, 203–215.

which he had been taught considered sexual acts only in terms of intercourse between a man and a woman. Therefore, for this abuser, touching a boarding school boy at night did not amount to a sexual activity at all and, in his judgement, should never have been considered a crime. Thus, this priest failed to grasp the fact that he had violated the human and sexual integrity and right to self-determination of a young person. The priest's conscience, theology, and sexual ethics remained largely intact in spite of the boy's complaint, the ensuing police action, and the public court's judgement. Clearly, the theology and sexual ethics informing this priest and his thoughts and actions had not provided any protection against his sexual urges. This abuser's story, then, is intimately linked with an obsolete and false sexual morality proclaimed by the Magisterium and taught in Roman Catholic seminaries and faculties.¹³

Thus, when articulate victims of clerical sexual abuse now call for a radical improvement of Roman Catholic theology in general and of moral theology in particular, it is hard to argue otherwise.¹⁴ They demand placing the human being at the center of theological reflection on abuse in the church rather than defending and maintaining the existing ecclesial system and its doctrinal integrity and infallibility. Moreover, victims and survivors summon self-critical theologians to a radical shift away from obsessions with doctrinal purity toward a deeper appreciation of the good news which the gospels portray Jesus Christ to have announced to victims and sufferers alike.¹⁵ Finally, they wonder how trust can ever be restored without a new opening in the church to God's gift of love, which, however, first requires a genuine and truthful confession of guilt.¹⁶

¹³ See also the related reflections by Hans-Joachim Sander, *Anders glauben, nicht trotzdem: Sexueller Missbrauch der katholischen Kirche und die theologischen Folgen* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2021), 84–86.

¹⁴ Moritz, "Theologie," 35.

¹⁵ Moritz, "Theologie," 36–37.

¹⁶ Moritz, "Theologie," 37. See also Klaus Mertes, *Den Kreislauf des Scheiterns durchbrechen: Damit die Aufarbeitung des Missbrauchs am Ende nicht wieder am Anfang steht* (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2021).

Therefore, theologians and church leaders ought to stop sacrificing the victims and survivors of abuse once more on the altar of ecclesial integrity and purity of a male hierarchy. Instead, they should change the system of patriarchal power in the church by promoting necessary measures of transparency, co-operation, justice, and critique in the spirit of the gospel.¹⁷ Rather than believing in the God-given priestly vocation to structure and organize the church in the world, theologians might wish to concentrate on a praxis of love in response to the demands of the priesthood of all the baptized.¹⁸ Moreover, a critical and self-critical theology would need to remind Christians of their collective hermeneutical responsibility to interpret divine revelation in the church. Any officeholder in the church, clergy and lay, is charged with co-exercising this hermeneutical responsibility in a transparent, cooperative, critical and self-critical spirit. The formation of an absolutist power structure in the church, then, ought not to be justified with reference to a God-given instruction or revelation to a select group of people in the church. Although this is not the place to trace and discuss in any detail the invention of the laity in the church, a few aspects of this development need to be recalled here.¹⁹

Overcoming the Clergy-Laity Divide in the Church

The term “lay-person” (Greek *laikos*) appears for the first time around 100 AD in Clement of Rome’s letter to the community in Corinth. Here, the term refers to one of the “ordinary faithful” as distinct from a deacon or a

¹⁷ Cf. Ute Leimgruber, “Frauen als Missbrauchs-betroffene in der katholischen Kirche? Wie Missbrauch tabuisiert und legitimiert wird,” in *Gefährliche Theologien*, 119–136, esp. 131.

¹⁸ The Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, remains highly ambiguous about the significance and implications of the “priesthood of all believers” (LG 10), and it repeatedly reemphasizes the hierarchical structure in the Church in which the shepherds minister to the laity (LG 37).

¹⁹ For reflections on the emergence of “laity” in the Christian church, see Alexandre Faivre, *Les laïcs aux origines de l’Église* (Paris: Centurion, 1984); and Werner G. Jeanrond, “One Church: Two Classes? The Lesson of History,” in *Pobal: The Laity in Ireland*, ed. Seán MacRámoinn (Dublin: Columba Press, 1986), 22–34.

presbyter. However, it comes into general usage only in the third century when particular structures of ministry are well established in all the Christian communities. The continuing differentiation of a threefold special ministry—bishop, presbyter, and deacon—during the first four centuries had consequences more implicit than explicit for all those Christians who did not hold any specific office. They constituted the general body of the faithful. That, however, does not mean that they had no function in the ministerial organization of the church. Much, if not most, early missionary work was done by the normal working or traveling Christian.²⁰ Christian women were responsible for most of the spiritual education of the children, and all baptized Christians had functions in the liturgical life of the church and in its organization, like the election of the community leader, the bishop.²¹

Yet, “laity” came to identify more and more those who had no particular work or service—or were no longer allowed to have one. Thus, the emergence of “laity” is the implicit result of the explicit development of clerical ministry and self-understanding. However, because of the clergy’s and especially the bishop’s election by all the people, the two emerging groups of clergy and laity were in fact not separated from one another. Leadership was an authority given by the Christian community.²² “Absolute ordinations,” i.e., ordinations outside a community context, remained theologically and ecclesologically unthinkable for a long time. They were first introduced in the Middle Ages.

Christianity did not develop in a vacuum. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jewish and Graeco-Roman images and organizational models influenced the shape of the Christian churches. Thus, the clergy came to adopt the rank and status of civil servants. Their status further increased as they often represented the only educated and influential group left after the upheavals following the demise of the Roman Empire. Under the

²⁰ Norbert Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1986), 38.

²¹ Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*, 96f.

²² Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*, 100.

influence of philosophy in late antiquity, ontological distinctions were used to separate the clergy not only in terms of their *function* but also in terms of their ordained *being* from the rest of God's people. The notion of a cultic priesthood further added to this separation between the two groups in the church, not least in the light of the spiritualities created by the emerging monastic movements. The legal imagination of the medieval world completed the development of a church ordered according to hierarchical lines with the pope and bishops on top and the masses of uneducated men and women at the bottom.²³

The changing understanding of the Eucharist from a community worship towards the ritual activity undertaken by an individual priest went hand in hand with the development of the community leadership to a ritualistic priestly office. It is no longer the Christian community that celebrates, but the priest alone with a community now reduced to the status of spectators. While in the Early Church ministry was a function of the people of God, the people have now become a function of the ministry. While in the earlier communities all gifts arose from the same Spirit, now only the clergy are believed to possess the Spirit in fullness.²⁴

The point here is not to claim that the prevailing clergy-laity-structure in the church was merely the result of ever-increasing clerical ambition, suitably supported by sophisticated theological arguments. Rather, I wish to emphasize the complexity of a development in which administrative and liturgical practice and gendered theological imagination slowly merged, helped further by the dynamic pressures of an uneven educational system, of political developments, and of a cultic self-understanding. Nevertheless, it is remarkable to observe how some of the most original theological and social insights and initiatives from early Christianity got lost in the church and how, ironically, many of the legal and cultic absolutes challenged by Jesus had slowly resurfaced and displayed a hitherto unknown degree of

²³ See also Jürgen Werbick, "Laie," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed., vol. 6 (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2009), 589–594.

²⁴ Werbick, "Laie," 591f.

absolute power. The uncritical alliance and symbiosis between church and state from the fourth century onwards further supported this development of Christian clerical self-understanding. Moreover, when the interpretation of the texts of the Bible shifted from a community exercise to the special task and responsibility of the clergy, the basic Christian inspiration for theological, spiritual, and social transformation became a closed book for most Christians until the time of the Protestant Reformation.²⁵ The hierarchy's rejection of most modern movements of emancipation, in particular the women's movement, in tandem with the definition of papal infallibility in 1870, further increased the sentiment that the Roman Catholic Church represented a divinely willed form of an absolutist monarchy. The exercise of power in the church was beyond the concern and wider control of the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

This picture has changed somewhat since the Second Vatican Council. The biblical texts now entered Catholic homes and Catholic imagination. Theological education has become more widely available to men and women. Clerical triumphalism and clericalism more generally have been challenged in some parts of the church, most spectacularly by Pope Francis himself who said "One of the strongest and most serious dangers in the Church today is clericalism."²⁶ However, the principal ontological division and ecclesial separation between clergy and laity has not been altered by the Council. Moreover, the entire provision of male clerical power and its problematic theological support structure have largely remained intact. New openings by the Council to restore trust in an inclusive church have not been richly taken up in the post-conciliar church.²⁷ In spite of the

²⁵ Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 159–182.

²⁶ Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Clerics Regular of Somasca," Transcript of speech delivered at Consistory Hall, March 30, 2017, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/march/documents/papa-francesco_20170330_capitolo-chierici-somaschi.html.

²⁷ Knut Wenzel, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Eine Einführung* (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2014), 190.

Council's encouraging affirmation of the common apostolate of all Christians, the deeply rooted medieval male hierarchical structure continues to exist. Educated lay people are often mistrusted, particularly now that lay people have access to the same level of theological education as clergy. Sometimes lay Christians, notably women, are even better educated than the clergy, and this fact further widens the gap and increases mistrust between both groups.

It is a privilege to be alive today when Christian women, hitherto ontologically deemed to remain the eternal laity in the church, are challenging the theological positions of a patriarchal hierarchy and are claiming full participation in all matters of Christian discipleship and church organization. However, rather than "completing" the existing form of male hierarchy now by adding the hitherto lacking female participation, it would seem to me to be more desirable to allow the feminist critique to help unmask the overall inadequacy of the system of ministry that still operates in the church today and that has provided the framework for spiritual, administrative, physical, and sexual abuse and cover-up.²⁸ For the relationship between lay people (literally: "people-people") and clergy ultimately remains an issue about the right understanding of the vocation of the church in today's globalizing world.

In view of the largely discredited distribution of power and responsibility in the church and the systemic inability to acknowledge the connection between a system of power and the cover-up of misuse of minors and vulnerable adults, the church today faces a dramatic credibility issue. "Sexual abuse always takes place in systems and their complex causal chains, especially in those whose relationships of trust in combination with asymmetries of power are foundational for the very system. And every society needs such systems."²⁹ The misuse of power constitutes a "misuse"

²⁸ See the attempt to overcome these ecclesial patterns by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Prophet of Divine Wisdom-Sophia," in *Negotiating Borders: Theological Explorations in the Global Era*, ed. Patrick Gnanapragasam and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 59–76.

²⁹ Mertens, *Den Kreislauf des Scheiterns durchbrechen*, 67.

and as such does not yet point to a failure of a system but presupposes a right use of power. However, the Roman Catholic system of exercising power is built on monarchic and paternalistic foundations. Today, a *right* use of such power can no longer be imagined or justified, most certainly not with reference to Jesus Christ and his proclamation of God's praxis of love. Rather, absolute power can lead to absolute corruption.³⁰ Therefore, a new way of ordering power in the church is urgently needed.

How can trust be restored in a church traumatized by its failure, yet still largely unprepared to listen to the victims of abuse and to attend to their experiences and concerns?³¹ How can the church organize itself anew in order to promote relationships of trust between a leadership that by and large has ignored the victims of abuse and, instead, defended its own "divinely granted" authority in matters of faith and morality? "Critical trust implies the ability for critical judgement, which in turn presupposes conditions that allow the exercise of critical judgement. Wherever the nature of particular institutions systemically blocks the exercise of critical judgement, there cannot and should not emerge trust."³² With regard to church reform, the need for a new climate in the church that supports the exercise of critical judgement by all of its members is obvious. The attention of the church must shift from concern about its own situation to those *others*, the victims and survivors of abuse and their need for justice and restitution.³³

The Primacy of the Praxis of Love

We Christians are involved in a fourfold network of interdependent and dynamic love relationships: to our neighbors, to God, to the universe as

³⁰ Mertes, *Den Kreislauf des Scheiterns durchbrechen*, 68.

³¹ Dieter Steinman, "Diskussion über Missbrauch ohne die Opfer," *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, May 19, 2022, www.saarbruecker-zeitung.de/saarland/saarbruecken/saarbruecken/diskussion-ueber-missbrauch-in-katholischer-kirche-ohne-die-opfer_aid-69919763.

³² Martin Hartmann, *Vertrauen: Die unsichtbare Macht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2020), 135. My translation.

³³ Mertes, *Den Kreislauf des Scheiterns durchbrechen*, 26, 39.

God's creation, and to our own emerging selves. Spiritual, physical and sexual abuse in the church damages this network of love relationships. Any form of abuse is a sin against the divine gift of love and disturbs the transformative dynamics of divine and human love. Abuse interferes with the processes of human participation in God's own eternity. Rather than trying to restore respect for any supposedly infallible aspect of church order, what seems most urgently required is a healing of relationships that would allow for processes of participation by children and adults whose subjectivity and agency have been severely compromised and damaged.³⁴ In other words, what is needed in a church marked by abuse is a restoration of the praxis of love out of which new trust might emerge rather than a re-establishment of a totalizing hierarchical order of power.

Claims by a male and celibate hierarchy to rule the church have proved unable to inspire the necessary process of healing the wounds of victims and survivors. Organizing abuse prevention programs, while bypassing the victims and survivors of abuse and their painful experiences of church power, would merely instrumentalize and victimize the victims once again.³⁵ It would neither promote justice and restitution nor lead to a new climate of trust; it would not liberate the potential of love; it would not detoxify the church environment in which abuse was allowed to occur and largely go unpunished; it would not support processes of physical and spiritual healing. The praxis of love in the church can only be promoted through actual acts of love, supported by an appropriate theology. This would include: first and foremost, attention to the victims and survivors; second, the theological reevaluation of all offices, functions and services in Christian communities; and third, a new corporate vision of Christian discipleship in the church.

The traditional order of faith first, supported by hope and love, needs to be reversed: the praxis of love must come first. Love can inspire hope

³⁴ Mertes, *Den Kreislauf des Scheiterns durchbrechen*, 41, stresses that working with abuse victims means working with relationships ("*Aufarbeitung ist Beziehungsarbeit*").

³⁵ Reisinger, *Spirituellem Missbrauch in der katholischen Kirche*, 183.

and lead to trust and faith.³⁶ Thus, any search for more authentic forms of Christian discipleship will require ongoing conversion and the transformation of all members of the church—not only of the clergy. All must be willing and encouraged to participate more fully in the shared Christian praxis of love. Processes of continuing education of God’s gift of love are required that attend to the biblical foundations of love, to the historical developments of love, to its theological potential, ambiguities and distortions, to its agencies, to its intimate connection with justice and truth, and to its concrete expressions in shifting contexts and horizons.³⁷ Christians do not believe in love, but they engage in the praxis of love. They do not believe in healing, but they participate critically and self-critically in processes of healing and detoxification in the church.

Making the church depend on a historically grown model of clerical service that has proven both unable and often unfit to minister to today’s Christians and that has become the occasion for so much abuse amounts to blasphemy.³⁸ New forms of male and female ministries in the church need to be developed in accordance with the actual needs of service in Christian communities in the different cultures and contexts of the global church. The shared praxis of love can restore trust in the church and in its expressions of hope and faith. It can help in imagining new and better ways of priestly service in the church.

Love, however, must not be confused with mere emotion nor with aspiring to some sort of romantic feeling of blissful harmony. Rather, love is the praxis of dealing with human difference and with God’s radical difference. Love is hard work, yet work inspired by the promise of God’s transformative presence in our lives. Thus, love is the genuine connecting point with God and God’s otherness. The praxis of human love will always remain unfinished, precisely because it negotiates otherness and

³⁶ For an argument on the priority of love over hope and faith, see Jeanrond, *Reasons to Hope*, 179–194.

³⁷ For a discussion of the complex notion of a Christian praxis of love, see Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

³⁸ Cf. also Beinert, “Gottesmissbrauch,” 213.

difference—in each other, in God, in God’s emerging universe, and in our own developing selves.³⁹ God’s gift of love “remains” (1 Corinthians 13:13), but our responses to this divine gift are weak and often vague, misled, and confused. Hence, we Christians are in need of an accompaniment of love that enables and encourages our loving agency to develop and to cooperate with God, with each other, and most urgently with the victims of abuse in our own Christian community.

However, a Christian culture of mutual accompaniment also requires structures of transparency, accountability, and justice. Do we assist each other in developing our respective agency of love? Do we seek power in such accompaniment, or do we seek to empower the persons we accompany? How best can we organize structures that help us to accompany each other in support of the mutually transformative praxis of love in our communities? How can we adequately educate and prepare each other for such a praxis of love and the related work of accompaniment? Which spiritual and theological resources do we have at our disposal in order to strengthen the Christian praxis of love? How can we learn from Christian disciples in other churches? How might we be able to engage in an “inter-love-dialogue” with people from other religious and non-religious traditions?

No genuine praxis of love can ever produce some sort of unity of love, since by nature love encounters, experiences and acknowledges difference and otherness. However, as Christians, we operate with the promise of Jesus Christ’s uniting Spirit—not to be confused with some love-restricting spirit of imposed harmony, unity or unification. God’s gift of love remains dynamic and transformative. It instils in each of us a desire and longing for others and for human and divine otherness. It motivates forms of community in which difference and otherness are welcome and in which all members acknowledge the particular agency to contribute both to their own respective development and to the development of the Christian community within God’s overall project of creation and

³⁹ Cf. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 1–23.

reconciliation. In such a project, there is no space for “laity” in the sense of people who are subjected, alienated, detached, or not involved. There is no room for spectators that merely look on as the reign of God unfolds. Rather, the Christian praxis of love is an inclusive praxis, its boundaries are porous, and its divine center wishes to attract all people of good will without subjecting them to doctrines of absolute unity, spiritual purity, and total conformity. This praxis does not ground in doctrinal claims to assent, adhere, and submit to some timeless collection of truthful propositions and respective agents. Again, the power of the praxis of love lies in its potential attractiveness to invite people to come and see how we Christians love each other and especially how we treat the victims and survivors of abuse in our very midst.

The Christian praxis of love calls for appropriate structures, functions, offices, and services. Hence, the institutional needs and shapes of a church committed to a praxis of love in response to God’s invitation in Jesus Christ and the Spirit will necessarily differ from the needs and shapes of a church constructed on a catechism bedrock radiating power without change.⁴⁰

Conclusion: Love of the Victims and Church Reform

“[T]he Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 8). This clear commitment to the poor and afflicted expressed by the Second Vatican Council could guide the necessary church reform in the aftermath of the abuse crisis, most certainly with regard to those persons whose abuse in and by the church has caused their very affliction and wounds. “The survivors and victims of abuse must be at the center of our concern.”⁴¹ The healing of the wounds of these victims and survivors of abuse will remain the chief

⁴⁰ For a discussion of institutions of love, see Jeanron, *A Theology of Love*, 173–204.

⁴¹ Halík, “With a sorrowful heart,” *The Tablet*, October 2, 2021, 8.

criterion for judging whether the Roman Catholic Church is on its way to genuine renewal and reform in response to God's call in Christ to embark on a journey of love, hope, and faith.



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Chapter 16: The Need for the Historiographical Approach to Understand and Address the Sex Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church

Massimo Faggioli

The years 2017 and 2018 have inaugurated a new phase in the modern history of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church due to the publication of nationwide and statewide reports (Australia, the USA, and then France in 2021) and the revelations of prominent cases involving bishops and cardinals (in Chile, the USA, and France among others). It is a new phase for four reasons: first, because of the expansion of the concept of “clerical abuse” to abuse of power, spiritual abuse and sexual abuse not only by clergy but also by lay members of the Church; second, because of the revelations in continents other than Europe and North America; third, because of the involvement of the Vatican and allegations against cardinals that led to trials, convictions, and the imprisonment of prelates by the secular justice system; fourth, because of the institutional response by the papacy with the decision to call the February 2019 summit in the Vatican for religious superiors, all the presidents of the bishops’ conferences, and members of the Roman Curia on the theme of the protection of minors.

The sense that the waves of revelations and investigations have opened a new phase emerges from the intensity and frequency of the interventions of various actors in the ecclesial and public debate. There is a new sense of urgency communicated by the media and received by the institutional church. But there are still minimal efforts to understand the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church as a historical problem. This understanding requires a historical and comparative approach. A historical study of the phenomenon of abuse in the Catholic Church from a global perspective would investigate it as a crisis involving the Catholic Church in multiple continents and countries. A comparative approach will draw comparisons between Catholic Churches in different regions, between different

Catholic institutions, between Catholic and non-Catholic institutions, and between different historical periods.

In this essay, I argue for a methodological transformation in the way institutions—secular, independent, and ecclesial—in charge of investigations understand the phenomenon and present it to the members of the Church and the public at large. Such a global and comparative historical study of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church will require a long-term investment of energy and resources by national and international networks of scholars. Therefore, this essay will make an intellectual and ecclesial case for this intensive, essential, and transformative endeavor.¹

The Dominant Approaches to the Abuse Crisis

Two dominant approaches shape the understanding of the abuse crisis—dominant not just in the readership and audience of the mass media and Catholic media but also in the leadership of the institutional church and the intellectual elites both Catholic and secular. The first is *investigative journalism*, which broke the news on the depth and magnitude of the abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. The study of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in modern times relies heavily on journalism and journalistic sources, which helped to reveal the scandal in a decisive way. This began in the mid-1980s in the USA with independent journalists, namely the articles published by free-lance journalist John Pope in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and Jason Berry in the *National Catholic*

¹ In the United States of America, at the end of 2019, the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame launched the project “Gender, Sex, and Power: Towards a History of Clergy Sex Abuse in the U.S. Catholic Church.” The project is led by Kathleen Cummings (director of the Cushwa Center, Notre Dame) along with Peter Cajka (Notre Dame), Terence McKiernan (BishopAccountability.org), and Robert Orsi (Northwestern University), cushwa.nd.edu/about/gendersexpower/. See also “Taking Responsibility,” a project launched in 2020 to advance research regarding the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable persons in Jesuit institutions of education, led by Bradford Hinze, an interdisciplinary initiative of the Francis and Ann Curran Center for American Catholic Studies and the Department of Theology at Fordham University. See “Taking Responsibility,” Fordham University, July 2, 2022, takingresponsibility.acf.fordham.edu.

Reporter, after US mainstream news outlets had refused to publish the results of Berry's in-depth investigations.² Not until a second phase did teams of investigative journalists—especially the *Boston Globe*'s "Spotlight team" in 2001-2002—decide to look at the crisis in the Catholic Church. This became a global event and entered the cultural mainstream powerfully with the movie *Spotlight*, which won the Academy Award for best movie in 2015.³

The second is the *courtroom approach*. The church's and the public's perception of the abuse crisis has been largely shaped by media coverage, which in turn has been influenced by the legal framework of tort litigation. The emphasis on tort litigation against the Catholic Church promotes a narrow understanding of clergy sexual abuse as an institutional failure on the part of church officials:

A narrative with clear implications and straightforward moral lessons is considered more newsworthy than a narrative open to many different interpretations. The news media favor stories that are set in frames that are culturally familiar to readers. The familiarity of the frame allows readers to understand and relate to a news story without the need for extensive background information. At the same time, a story that portrays the unexpected or unusual within familiar frames is considered more newsworthy. Events that are surprising attract more attention than

² About this, see Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); Jason Berry and Gerald Renner, *Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

³ See the book published by the Boston Globe's investigative team: The Investigative Staff of the Boston Globe, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002). See also the website created in January 2020 by ProPublica (a nonprofit organization that produces investigative journalism and whose stories are distributed to news partners for publication or broadcast) with a "Nationwide [USA] Database of Priests Deemed Credibly Accused of Abuse," at "Credibly Accused," ProPublica, last modified January 28, 2020, July 2, 2022, projects.propublica.org/credibly-accused/.

those that are routine. And finally, a story about elites or well-known figures is considered more newsworthy.⁴

This nexus of legal framework and the reliance of investigative journalism on litigation documents has presented the crisis to the public and the ecclesial community in a narrative that tends to minimize the historical and social contexts in which these crimes and the cover-up took place. Already in the “Doyle Report,” submitted confidentially to the US bishops in 1985, the authors described prophetically the effects of the legal approach on the abuse crisis, saying, “this is the age of litigation.”⁵ The prevalence of the legal framework and of a law enforcement perspective in the history of the abuse crisis in the USA was also evident in the landmark document the “Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report” released in August 2018.⁶

Underlying these two dominant approaches is a “sociological” conception of Catholicism which sets itself against the Church as “institutional.” The journalistic and legal narratives focus on the (undeniable) institutional failures and responsibilities of Church officials in the scandal—the crimes and the cover-up—but tend to ignore the widespread culture of silence regarding sexual abuse that extends well beyond the confines of ecclesiastical settings and clerical personnel. The

⁴ T.D. Lytton, “Framing Clergy Sexual Abuse as an Institutional Failure: How Tort Litigation Influences Media Coverage,” *William Mitchell Law Review* 36, no. 1 (2009): 175. See also Peter Steinfelds, “The Media as a Source for the History of the Catholic Sex Abuse Scandal in the United States,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 105, no. 420 (2016): 427–440.

⁵ F. Ray Mouton, JD, and Thomas P. Doyle, OP, *The Problem of Sexual Molestation by Roman Catholic Clergy: Meeting the Problem in a Comprehensive and Responsible Manner* (1985), 10, www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/1985_06_09_Doyle_Manual/. This is also known as the “Doyle Report.”

⁶ For a critique of the report—Office of Attorney General Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *Report I of the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury* (Office of Attorney General Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018), www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/—constructed with the help of law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, revealing the total absence of an historical perspective in it, see Peter Steinfelds, “The PA Grand-Jury Report: Not What It Seems,” *Commonweal*, January 9, 2019, www.commonwealmagazine.org/pa-grand-jury-report-not-what-it-seems.

sociological approach assumes itself as a model and speaks on behalf of an idealized civil society, like a new *societas perfecta*, against the corruption of the institutional dimension (both of the institutional church and of political institutions). In an important book published in 2021, Italian church historians Francesco Benigno and Vincenzo Lavenia describe the framing of these crimes as articulated in a moral “polarity” which is arranged “in a single public discourse, that of an idealized civil society.” This moral order opposes “on the one hand qualities (honesty, rationality, openness, independence, cooperation, participation, and equality) and on the other dangers (deception, hysteria, addiction, secrecy, aggression, hierarchy, inequality).”⁷

This counterposition of the social and the institutional, with blame for the abuse crisis placed almost exclusively on institutions, results from the emergence of cultures of ecclesial governance that aim to import managerial and technocratic models into the life of the church. It also represents the flip side of a clerical culture that sees the abuse crisis as the result of moral corruption coming from the outside (secularization, dissent against Catholic doctrine) and that defends the “in-house” approach and the sufficiency of “orthodox” teaching and discipline enforced by the hierarchical leaders of the church as a solution to the crisis.⁸

⁷ Francesco Benigno and Vincenzo Lavenia, *Peccato o crimine: la Chiesa di fronte alla pedofilia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2021), 244 (translation mine). About this dominance of the model of an idealized society, see Roberto Calasso, *L'innominabile attuale* (Milano: Adelphi, 2017) and Roberto Calasso, *The Unnamable Present*, trans. Richard Dixon (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 24–31.

⁸ One example of this approach was Benedict XVI’s essay “The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse,” *Catholic News Agency*, August 18, 2010, www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvi-the-church-and-the-scandal-of-sexual-abuse-59639. This interpretation of the abuse crisis was praised by some prominent Catholic leaders, for example the then archbishop of Philadelphia, Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap., in his article “Benedict and the Scandal,” *First Things*, April 11, 2019, www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/04/benedict-and-the-scandal.

The Limits of the Journalistic and Legal-Criminal Approach to the Abuse Crisis

There is no question that members of the Catholic Church and ecclesiastical structures within the institutional system protected perpetrators of sexual abuse. Without investigative journalism, without a legal approach, and without a focus on the institutional failures, the Catholic community would have never been able to face the reality of sexual abuse, abuse of power, and spiritual abuse against children, vulnerable adults, and adults in vulnerable situations. The revelations of cases of sexual abuse show that the church needs a free and independent press. These approaches have been necessary and will continue to be necessary for the work of prevention and in the pursuit of truth.

Important questions remain, however. These include clarifying who and what constitutes the Church and what kind of truth must be pursued regarding the legal, moral, and historical responsibilities in the sex abuse crisis. The problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church must be dealt with at different levels and with different goals, the most important being justice to victims and survivors and to their families, friends, and communities; prevention of other abuses and of new forms of abuse; and rehabilitation of those who have been accused unjustly. This requires a vast array of different approaches and tools, which will engage the church for generations to come.

The problem of the Church's responsibility in protecting the abusers must include a cultural and theological perspective, one of the most important challenges is in terms of memory and truth. From a methodological point of view, the first issue concerns the kind of truth we need to pursue in order to answer this question: "Did the institution protect perpetrators?" The point of departure is the word and testimony of the victims and survivors, which has for far too long been ignored by church authorities. It has also been long ignored by other authorities—in politics, in the justice system, in the intellectual establishment—and often by other lay members of the church.

The word of the victims and survivors must be given space; it must be received and put to use by others. This is the work of journalists, advocates, judges, historians, and, in the Christian community, of theologians and church leaders. Much more work has been done at the level of journalistic investigations than by the criminal justice system, historians, and theologians. This disproportion between the amount of information made available by journalists on one side and by the work of the justice system and historians and theologians on the other side has to do with constraints on the justice system and the work of historians and theologians. The justice system must abide by the statute of limitations. The work of historians and theologians must operate within the realm of limited possibilities of scholarly work on an issue fraught with ethical and methodological issues especially from the perspective of the need for a comprehensive narrative on the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.

While the necessity for the Church to take a legal-criminal approach to the crisis remains evident—not only canonically but civilly as well—these last twenty years in the history of the scandal have made clear the limits of the “tribunalization” of the church. The waves of revelations, investigations, and prosecutions against sexual abusers in the church and those who failed to report them can blind us to the many layers and dimensions of this crisis. We all have a duty to seek the truth. But which of the many types of truth do we seek? There is without doubt a judicial truth to be sought. But there is also a moral truth, a historical truth, and a theological truth related to the tragedy of the abuse crisis. The Church must ask the police and the criminal justice system for help in reaching the kind of truth that can be proven in the courtroom. However, we cannot limit ourselves to the judicial truth alone because the truth of the tribunals will always fall tragically short if we want to understand the mechanisms of the protection of abusers in the church. Moreover, investigative journalism is necessary to tackle the phenomenon, but journalistic sources and media influences have become an integral part of the strategy and dynamics of today’s church politics warfare, in which the abuse crisis plays a unique role. I explore this point further in the next section.

The Need for an Historical Approach

For the Catholic Church, the abuse crisis stands, some argue, as the biggest crisis since the Protestant Reformation because, just like the Reformation, it is a multi-leveled, cataclysmic series of events. The first level consists of the systemic violation of norms and of corruption. Further, at the second level, lie theological rifts within the church with different—and sometimes opposing—interpretations of the root causes and solutions to the problem from a theological and magisterial point of view. The third level concerns the consequences of the revelations at the political level domestically regarding effects on the relations between church and state at the institutional and juridical level and internationally regarding tensions between the Holy See and national governments as well as between the papacy and national bishops' conferences.⁹

In the last few years, we have seen signs of growing awareness within the Church of the need for an historical approach to the abuse crisis. For example, the nationwide report published on October 5, 2021, by the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church in France (the CIASE report) demonstrates a fruitful departure from the sole perspective of courtroom litigation that was prevalent in other statewide and nationwide investigations and presents the phenomenon in a framework shaped by a sense of history. This is true despite some methodological inconsistencies in the way the report incorporates the different estimates on the number of abusers and of victims.¹⁰ This could mark the beginning of a methodological turn in the way secular, independent, and ecclesial institutions in charge of investigations understand the phenomenon and present it to the members of the Church and the public at large.

⁹ See Massimo Faggioli, "The Catholic Church's Biggest Crisis Since the Reformation," *Foreign Affairs*, October 11, 2018, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-10-11/catholic-churchs-biggest-crisis-reformation.

¹⁰ In themselves, the approaches used in the single parts are consistent. The final report and the other documents on the work of the commission are available on the website of the CIASE: "Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l'Église," CIASE, July 2, 2022, www.ciase.fr/.

We must always remember how small the proportion of what is recorded in documents is compared to how many times abuse actually took place and above all how severely the time factor is compressed. This is especially pertinent for the abuse crisis because of the specific ways in which the crimes took place, the modalities of surfacing in the memory of victims and survivors, and the practice of institutions of hiding or destroying the paper trail related to these cases. For example, the policy of destroying Church files concerning these kinds of crimes in the archives of the Congregation of the Holy Office in the Vatican (at least until the early twentieth century) makes it impossible to recover historical records of the institutional handling of those complaints for long periods of time.¹¹ A turn to an appreciation of the historical perspective is, therefore, essential and urgent for five reasons.

The first reason is that the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is not just a series of individuals committing or covering up crimes. It is the history of a *complex institution* dealing with a complicated past. A comparison with the post-World War II period can be useful here. After an initial phase, in the first few years after the end of the war, countries like Italy, France, and Germany dealt with the past through courts of justice and purge processes. Later, the new post-war European democracies moved to a different way of dealing with the past at the institutional and social-cultural level, using a method called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German. The churches, including but not limited to the Catholic Church, were required to go through what in Germany was called (not without controversy on the interpretation of the expression) “Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit”: “working through the past.” Among the historical and moral questions raised by “working through the past” of the relations between the churches and the authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century, there are the distinction between culpability and responsibility; the differentiation of individual responsibility and collective

¹¹ See Benedetto Fassanelli, *Il corpo nemico. Organizzazione, prassi e potere del Sant’Ufficio nel primo Novecento* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2017), 1–19.

responsibilities; and the risks of a second exploitation of the victims, this time ideological, in the context of a polarized political landscape.

Now, this example may serve as a cautionary tale for the Catholic Church. Post-1945 newly democratic European states and European institutions allowed too easy a rehabilitation for many top members involved with the totalitarian regimes.¹² The transition from the litigation phase to the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* will take place in the Catholic Church as well at some point, and it is crucial that it does not provide the opportunity for more deception or cover-up. At the same time, the historicization of the abuse crisis must consider methodologically—in another parallel with the historiography of totalitarian regimes and of the Shoah—the implications brought about by the passing of “the era of the witness”¹³ and the complications created by the narratives sponsored by public institutions in order to obey the “duty of memory,”¹⁴ often at the expense of more complicated and uncomfortable historical truths. Dealing with a tragic past entails the gradual discovery of numerous collaborators and entails addressing scapegoating and dealing with deep-seated self-exculpatory myths—for political bodies as well as for religious groups.

The second reason for the historical perspective is that understanding the abuse crisis in the Church as an historical problem is key for a *depoliticization of the narratives*. An historical approach to the phenomenon remains faithful to the complex web of responsibilities and rejects the overly simplistic narrative structure of a moralistic tale about right and wrong. This challenges the culturally familiar narrative involving

¹² See, for example, Perry Anderson, “Ever Closer Union,” *London Review of Books* 43, no. 1 (2021), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n01/perry-anderson/ever-closer-union; Hans Woller, *Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien 1943 bis 1948* (München: Oldenbourg, 2009); Copertina Flessibile, *I conti con il fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia: 1943–1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

¹³ See Annette Wieworka, *L'ère du témoin* (Paris: PLURIEL, 2002).

¹⁴ See François Hartog, *Évidence de l'histoire. Ce que voient les historiens* (Paris: Éditions EHESS, 2005). On the problem of “presentism” and the unstable role of historiography before major moral traumas, see Diana Napoli, *Michel de Certeau: lo storico “smarrito”* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2014).

elites with a clear moral lesson: the institutional cover-up by high-ranking Church officials of child sexual abuse. The responsibilities of the hierarchical leaders of the Church must be seen in the context of a wider system of denial and of abuse which includes lay Catholics and other agencies and institutions within and outside of the ecclesial community and the clerical system. History is an exercise in hermeneutical humility: it is a way to understand complex problems through taking distance as much as possible from our own prejudices and presuppositions—including social, political, and theological presuppositions—about who did it, how it happened, who let it happen, and who covered it up. A history of the abuse crisis is also crucial to dismantle and correct the political-religious “culture war” narratives according to which abuses occurred as a consequence of the theological *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council. A great number of abuses took place before Vatican II, and many of them occurred in ecclesial groups known for their distance from, if not outright opposition against, the theology of Vatican II.¹⁵

The third reason for taking a historical perspective is that the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church needs a social history *not separated from the institutional dimension*, with attention paid to not only what is relevant in the courtroom but to lived experience. The public religious discourse’s emphasis on the prophetic has created hyper-moralistic narratives that come at the expense of the comprehension of what is paradoxical and ambivalent in the lives of “ordinary” Catholics. This phenomenon is also important to understand from the penal and moral point of view. There must be an effort to understand the abuse crisis in the context of a larger

¹⁵ Both in the Americas and in Europe, allegations of abuse have been raised against leaders of new ecclesial communities and movements created by charismatic figures but also against the Society of St. Pius X created by Msgr. Marcel Lefebvre after Vatican II in rejection of Vatican II. The SSPX itself created its own “independent review board” seen here: Society of Saint Pius X, “Update on SSPX Independent Review Board,” May 18, 2021, spx.org/en/news-events/news/update-ssp-x-independent-review-board-66397. About the phenomenon of abuse in the new communities, see Céline Hoyeau, *La trahison des pères* (Paris: Bayard, 2021); Massimo Faggioli, “Ecclesial Lay Movements in 21st-Century Global Catholicism: Open Questions in Light of the Sex Abuse Crisis,” *Japan Mission Journal* 74, no. 2 (2020), 75–86.

crisis of readjustment between Christian morality and the world, where an intra-Catholic crisis of authority is located in a larger moment of transition that has both social-cultural and institutional dimensions.¹⁶ A historiography of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church needs to draw attention to different kinds of silences and failures beyond the church hierarchies and connect different moments from the period of the early Church to today.¹⁷

The fourth reason is the need for a *global and historical approach* in this new phase of globalization of Catholicism in order to understand the abuse crisis as it impacts the Church in different ways in different areas of the world. This global and historical approach to the abuse crisis is key to the de-politicization and de-ideologization of the crisis because historical research imposes complexity, both in its method and in its interpretations. The cynical exploitation of the abuse crisis for political and for church political goals dismantles that complexity, selects a frame or part of a historical process, and wields the crisis as a propaganda weapon, doing damage not only to the ecclesial fabric but also to the intellectual fiber of the theological tradition.

Finally, tradition learns from and elaborates upon major historical traumas. The process of tradition formation requires much more than historical studies: *traditio* is not just *historia*. Yet, this *traditio* can develop only in conjunction with historical studies dedicated to understanding traumas such as the abuse crisis in the Church. The Church needs to learn from the abuse crisis, from the abuse itself, and the failure to act and respond. Global history is essential because being global in the study of the past means learning about the history of other systems of sexual

¹⁶ See, for example, Alana Harris, ed., *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–1975* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹⁷ See for example, Michele Mancino and Giovanni Romeo, *Clero criminale. L'onore della Chiesa e i delitti degli ecclesiastici nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013); Claude Langlois, *On savait, mais quoi? La pédophilie dans l'Eglise de la Révolution à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 2020); Dyan Elliott, *The Corruptor of Boys: Sodomy, Scandal, and the Medieval Clergy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

exploitation and crimes, other systems of silencing victims, and other types of gender discrimination, without the idiosyncratic moralization that is centered on one particular culture or tradition that obfuscates the ability to learn from the past.

The Ecclesiological and Ecclesial Implications of an Historical Approach

The effort to conceive of and study the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church as an historical issue must not be confused with the wrong and dangerous idea that the crisis is only in the past and that the problem has been solved. On the contrary, it must be understood as part of the effort to address the crisis through a deeper comprehension of the roots and mechanisms of abuse itself, of the cover-up, and of the failure to respond to it.

The abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is a problem that the Church cannot solve alone, without the help of, for example, public and law enforcement authorities, the public education system, and health care providers. At the same time, it is a crisis with deep ecclesiological and ecclesial roots and consequences that calls for resources internal to the Christian community to guide it towards better systems of prevention and, where possible, a just way of dealing with the past and the present of the Church.

Until very recently, the primary and often exclusive focus was on the episcopal hierarchy. The individual bishops and the national bishops' conferences have been the main targets of investigations and of moral outrage, resulting in undeserved relief for others with responsibilities in the Church. Only in the latest phase in the global history of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, beginning in winter 2017-2018, have we begun looking for a more complete and accurate picture of the scandal and of the responsibilities. What we mean by "the Church's hierarchy" has only recently started to include religious orders and new ecclesial movements. This has been part of the information available to clerical decision-makers for several decades but did not enter the picture of the abuse crisis because of the greater difficulty, compared to the linearity of

the parish and diocesan structures, of framing them from a litigation perspective.

The need for an historiographical approach to the abuse crisis is also necessary because the courtroom litigation perspective, by focusing on the responsibilities and failures of the bishops, has further clericalized a crisis that is ecclesial and not just clerical. Abusers could rely on a web of protection much wider than only the hierarchical church. In most cases, this included a lack of attention combined with willful ignorance to the pieces of information that were available to a number of members of the church beyond the bishops, the diocesan curias, superiors of religious orders, and the Vatican. Abusers could count on the silence and willful ignorance in the institutional and clerical structures of the Catholic Church *but also* among lay Catholics as individuals and as organizations.¹⁸

An historiographical study of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church from a comparative perspective must look at various actors: the Catholic media system (both the Catholic media which depends on the support of the institutional Church and the independent Catholic media); organizations run by Catholic laity; lay ecclesial movements; Catholics in the justice system, in the police, in the secular media, and in politics; and parents and family members of both victims/survivors and abusers.

Investigative journalism and the criminal prosecution of abusers and their protectors are absolutely necessary. Even so, we should remember the temptation that comes with the “tribunalization” of the Church bringing down the guilt solely on the abusers and those in the hierarchy who covered it up. Few or many delimits a small number of individuals. This dichotomy between a few “bad apples” in comparison to the otherwise

¹⁸ One example of the wide network of silence of those who knew emerges also from the report Secretariat of the Holy See, *Report on the Holy See’s Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick (1930–2017)*, (Vatican City: 2020), www.vatican.va/resources/resources_rapporto-card-mccarrick_20201110_en.pdf. It is known that until the *Boston Globe’s* investigative reports published at the beginning of 2002, national mainstream media in the USA had almost unanimously refused to publish Jason Berry’s articles.

healthy batch can too easily become self-absolatory for the rest of the Church. If we assume that we can clearly identify the individuals responsible for the crimes, we feel relieved of the fault that weighs on the Church. There is a gray area between “the bad ones” and “the good ones” that the entire Church must address: “The gray area, it’s not just the others. The gray area is also us.”¹⁹ The ecclesial community cannot delegate this work to others, and it is difficult to accomplish without approaching the crisis historically.

There is no guarantee that an historiographical approach to the abuse crisis will liberate the debate from “tribunalization”; forensic history is one of the possible ways to write the history of a collective trauma. But especially for the modern and contemporary period, during which there is greater access to more abundant and diverse sources than during the medieval period, we can and must think historically about the phenomenon of abuse in the Catholic Church in a way that is conscious of the fact that overreliance on courtroom sources results in listening to and empowering the voices only of those who have access to the justice system. Something similar can be said about those whose stories are heard because they capture the attention of investigative journalists. In a time of crisis for local journalism, we must remember the key role played by those news outlets in discovering cases of abuse.

An historical approach to the abuse crisis in the church is necessary to give voice, and also some justice, to all those who were not and will not be heard in the courtrooms, whose stories were not and will not be told by journalists. We need a new season of historical studies able to understand and present the phenomenon of abuse in the Catholic Church from a comparative and global perspective, without reservations, without apologetic intentions, and without invoking alibis or blaming others. This

¹⁹ Hans Zollner, “Die Stille vor dem Showdown,” *Die Zeit*, February 13, 2019, www.zeit.de/2019/08/sexueller-missbrauch-katholische-kirche-weltbischoefe-vatikan. In print, Hans Zollner, “Die Stille vor dem Showdown,” *Die Zeit* 8, February 14, 2019, 48.

would be an important way to receive Pope Francis's invitation to "judge the past with a hermeneutics of the past."²⁰

We live in an epoch-making crisis, which has evoked comparisons with the times of indulgences which led to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.²¹ The response of the Church to the scandal of corruption at the time of the Reformation required updating the theological tradition and a Catholic reform; the same update and reform is necessary today to confront the abuse crisis. But there can be neither update nor reform of the tradition without an historiographical reflection and sense of what happened.



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²⁰ Pope Francis, "Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia," December 21, 2018, www.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/speeches/2018/december/documents/papa-francesco_20181221_curia-romana.html.

²¹ See Massimo Faggioli, "The Catholic Church's Biggest Crisis Since the Reformation," *Foreign Affairs*, October 11, 2018, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-10-11/catholic-churchs-biggest-crisis-reformation; Tomáš Halík, "With a Sorrowful Heart...—the Scandal of Abusive Priests," *The Tablet*, October 2, 2021, 8–11.

Chapter 17: Ecclesiology and the Challenge of Ecclesiological Failure

Richard Lennan

2021 was a typical year in the recent history of the Catholic Church. “Typical” could imply the absence of anything noteworthy. In this instance, the opposite is true. 2021 was the year in which authorities in France and in the US state of Nebraska issued reports detailing a long history of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by Catholic priests, religious, and lay workers. It was also during 2021 that investigators at a former “residential school” for indigenous children in Canada, a school that the Catholic Church administered, discovered unmarked graves containing the remains of hundreds of children, many of whom were the victims of abuse or neglect. This discovery proved to be representative of a wholesale pattern of abuse in the church-run schools. In addition to these large-scale matters, there were numerous instances of individual priests and bishops facing charges or lawsuits involving sexual abuse. Sadly, these events are what makes 2021 representative of present-day Catholic life. Since 2002, when the *Boston Globe* published its landmark series on sexual abuse by priests and malfeasance by bishops, a series that the film *Spotlight* later made widely known, similar findings have flowed from other news sources and from judicial authorities.

As findings on the sexual crimes of ordained ministers and the compromised integrity of many officeholders in the church have multiplied, anger and consternation have likewise rippled through the ecclesial community. Crimes against children and vulnerable adults continue to stir the moral outrage of Catholics, especially when, as in the Canadian schools, it was often those with a direct “duty-of-care” and ministerial responsibility who perpetrated not only horrendous physical or

sexual abuse but also “determined efforts to instill a sense of inferiority, to rob people of their cultural identity, to sever their roots.”¹

What has faded from the response of most Catholics, however, is any sense of surprise at the constant flow of such revelations. Catholics have now lived through too many years like 2021, too many reports that have conditioned them to expect further distressing news. The exposés that are so familiar in the United States have also become more frequent in many other parts of the world. ‘Scandal’ now clings to the Catholic Church with a dispiriting viscosity, allowing little room for shock when yet another inquiry publishes damning findings about priests and bishops.

Catholics who remain faithful to participation in the worshipping community as it celebrates the Eucharist—a commitment that the abuse crisis has ruptured for many ‘former Catholics’—will proclaim each week their credal conviction that the church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” Understandably, these worshippers might experience a significant amount of dissonance as they profess their faith in the church’s holiness. Taken together, the elements of the credal formula identify the church as the product of God’s initiative and enduring presence; they testify to the church’s existence as the “universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 48), the unique guarantee that God, through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, offers God’s reconciling love to the whole of creation. Nonetheless, the mark of ‘holiness’ sits awkwardly alongside the crimes of the church’s ministers, crimes that have inflicted long-term harm on fragile lives, while also enveloping the ecclesial community in shame.

Exacerbating the dilemma of Catholics about their participation in a scandal-ridden church is the fact that it is the ordained leaders of the church who have most notoriously failed to practice “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23). The Second Vatican Council explicitly charged bishops to “exercise a powerful

¹ Pope Francis, “Meeting with Representatives of Indigenous Peoples in Canada,” April 1, 2022, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/april/documents/20220401-popoli-indigeni-canada.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/april/documents/20220401-popoli-indigeni-canada.html).

influence for good ... by abstaining from all wrongdoing in their conduct” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 26). In the wake of the abuse crisis, this precept rings hollow. The devastation that the church’s ordained ministers have wrought has undermined trust in ordained ministers, while also shining a critical light on clerical privilege. These developments have given new urgency to calls among many Catholics for the reframing of the church’s ordained ministry and the purging of all vestiges of clerical exceptionalism. In the same vein, there is a burgeoning pressure for revisions in the church’s organs of governance, over which clerics currently hold a monopoly.²

The contrast between the present pall over the Catholic Church and an ecclesial community enthusiastically committed to the “missionary option” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 27) which Pope Francis identifies as essential to authentic ecclesial life, raises questions for the work of ecclesiology. If ecclesologists are unable to meet the challenges of the abuse crisis, unable to show how the church’s inherited faith might inform constructive responses to the crisis, then the discipline is unlikely to be a constructive agent in the formation of the Christian community for discipleship in the world. In the absence of theological resources with the capacity to generate conversion and creativity in the church, the official ecclesial response to the crisis would default—as already seems often to be the case—to lawyers and insurance companies.

This essay addresses whether ecclesiology offers fruitful possibilities to a church in need. A focus on the church’s sacramentality is integral to this discussion of ecclesiology. Although there are other ecclesiological frameworks, sacramentality warrants close attention as it features prominently in the ecclesiological teaching of the Second Vatican Council: “All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as

² For one example, from Australia, of a proposal for reform to the church’s governance, see Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, “Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia,” May 1, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TXZd4SP-EBk4VtH9JyB9PMSmjY9Mfj7E/view>.

the church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 9). Not only this “canonical” status of sacramental ecclesiology but also its potential for conveying an exalted view of the church makes it a particularly apt subject of investigation in the context of the abuse crisis. If sacramentality suggests a church immune to failure, it furthers an irredeemably naïve view of the church, a fantasy at odds with the harsh realities of the church’s past and present.

The immediate task for the chapter is twofold: to specify the role of ecclesiology within the panoply of theological disciplines; to consider the capacity of ecclesiology to engage with the concrete realities of the church’s history, a step that will involve a focus on hope in relation to ecclesial life. Fulfilling these two tasks will provide a base for appraising sacramental ecclesiology in the final section of the chapter.

The Dynamics of Ecclesiology

The goal of ecclesiology is not to conjure an ideal church, one that could be failure-proof, immune to complexity, or composed only of saints. Equally, ecclesiology cannot guarantee that the community of the church will march in lockstep towards any particular outcome or certify that a vision for the community of faith will invariably translate into effective action. What ecclesiology can do, by drawing on its affinity with the Christian tradition and its familiarity with the present circumstances and specific contexts of the ecclesial community, is highlight any lack of congruence between the Christian community’s profession of faith and its actions.³ In so doing, ecclesiology underscores that the church remains responsible to the Holy Spirit, rather than directing the Spirit. As a

³ On the role of ecclesiology in indicating whether the church actions are congruent with its faith, see Paul Murray, “Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice: On the Transformative Task of Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Modern Theology* 30 (2014): 252–281; see also Clare Watkins, “Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 167–181.

corollary of its recognition of the Spirit's primacy, ecclesiology can challenge the ecclesial community to acknowledge where it has failed to respond to the call of grace.

Such self-reflection is a prelude to conversion, to a renewed appropriation of all that gives the church its identity as the people of God. The work of ecclesiology, then, aligns with the overall mission of theology: "Theology must be able to find in pastoral activity the presence of the Spirit inspiring the action of the Christian community."⁴ Ecclesiology critiques the practices of the ecclesial community in light of their consequences. At the same time, the discipline also identifies what might be more in accord with authentic responses to grace. In both actions, ecclesiology exhorts the Christian community to more radical faithfulness.

Casting ecclesiology as exhortatory, as visionary and aspirational, might engender the perception that it is merely a form of wishful thinking. Just as exhortations to action in the context of today's climate emergency carry the stigma of being "blah, blah, blah," of lacking plans for action and detailed timetables, exhortatory ecclesiology may well appear impotent to effect change in the church. Although the power to enact a vision might seem more desirable than exhortation, it is crucial to keep in mind that grace too is exhortatory. The Holy Spirit, consistent with God's self-emptying in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5–11), does not impose salvation on humanity. The Spirit moves hearts rather than twists arms. The eschatological framework in which the Spirit operates provides the assurance that "all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28) but proffers neither schedule nor step-by-step plan for accomplishing what is good. Nor does this unequivocal assurance illuminate the Spirit's strategy for overcoming the pilgrim church's susceptibility to faithlessness.

⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, rev. ed., trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 9.

Ecclesiology affirms that Christ and the Spirit are “the co-instituting principles” of the church but properly rejects attributing quasi-divine status to the ecclesial community.⁵ Even as theologies of the church articulate how the church might embody in the world the grace of the Spirit, no theology can transcend the church’s limitations: “Faced with the confused and sinful practices and intentions and construals of our congregations, we need to know how the Holy Spirit, rather than being ‘bound’ to the church and its practices, can *overcome* the effects of the churches upon their membership, and the membership upon the churches, so that in spite of the church as well as by its help we may be sanctified and brought closer to Christ.”⁶ Consistent with this need, ecclesiology prompts the ecclesial community to greater faithfulness in the present.

As a pilgrim community that “carries the mark of this world which will pass” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 48), the church, ecclesialists included, must live “by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). This requirement is congruent with the church’s existence as a body that is “the result of the synergy of a gratuitous divine gift that is pure in itself and a human activity that is characterized by human freedom, limitations, and natural fallibility.”⁷ Paradoxically, then, ecclesiology underscores the intimacy between God and the Christian community, while reminding members of the church of their limitations, which confirm that God alone, not the church, is the source of salvation. In so doing, ecclesiology itself is an act of faith. More explicitly, ecclesiology is an expression of trust in God’s capacity to overcome the impact of humanity’s sin. This trust embodies the “hope that does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured

⁵ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983), 9.

⁶ Nicholas Healy, “Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003): 303; original emphasis.

⁷ Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2011), 90.

into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).⁸

Ecclesiology and Hope

The invocation of hope, like the profile of the Spirit as exhortatory, is not a soft option. In the Christian setting, hope has its foundations in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For this reason, Christian hope implies the capacity for “obedience to what horrifies,” for facing reality unflinchingly, rather than avoiding a confrontation with the truth.⁹ Christ-shaped hope enables the embrace of the truth since it trusts that nothing can overcome “the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). Hope, then, proceeds from faith, while being also a reception of God’s love in Christ, the love that is the source of compassion and generosity within the church no less than beyond it: “Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love ... can free our life and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy the present and the future” (*Spe Salvi*, no. 35). This hope can acknowledge the extent of clerical sexual abuse, listen humbly to the witness of survivors, and accept the call for repentance and conversion, doing so without defensiveness.

Clerical sexual abuse shares in the breach of trust that is intrinsic to all abuse, but the fact that the victims of church-based abuse have largely been the most defenseless members of the community adds an extra layer of damage. This aspect of the crisis, together with sheer number of documented assaults by bishops, priests, and religious, as well as manifold instances of cover-up by bishops, identifies clerical sexual abuse as an

⁸ For an analysis of the church in terms of hope and for the role of ecclesiology in promoting this hope, see Richard Lennan, “The Church as a Sacrament of Hope,” *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 247–274.

⁹ Paul Crowley, *Unwanted Wisdom: Suffering, the Cross, and Hope* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 61.

egregious betrayal of a life-giving and compassionate God. As horrifying as are the specifics of the present situation, this moment is far from being the first time in the church's history when the actions of Christians have contradicted the faith they profess. History is a reminder that the church has never been failure-proof. Hence, the abiding need for theologies that promote conversion of the ecclesial community rather than proceeding as if the church knows no barriers to Spirit-inspired holiness.

There is an undeniable record of holiness in the church's past and present, "a great multitude that no one could count" (Revelation 7:9) of saintly people who selflessly cared for those in need and witnessed in other ways to the inbreaking of God's reign. Alas, the stories of holiness are not the only entry in the annals of the ecclesial community. Myriad expressions of self-righteousness, vanity, and arrogance, all of which fuel the exploitation of others, sit alongside chronicles of sanctity. Indeed, even the inner circle of Jesus's companions could be conceited and self-seeking, "for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest" (Mark 9:34). Disputes and divisions in the Christian community that began in its first generation—"I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ'" (1 Corinthians 1:12)—did not cease with the early church but have continued, and expanded, since that time.

The enduring legacy of division in the church is most obvious in the still-unhealed Catholic-Orthodox and Catholic-Protestant separations. As if this historical wound were insufficient to damage the church's witness to Christ, the current generation of the church's members is more than capable of adding its own forms of resistance to the gospel. Evidencing the impact that today's "culture wars" exert on the church, present-day Catholics reproduce in the ecclesial sphere the polarization characteristic of the wider social and political culture.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a discussion of ideological divisions in the contemporary church in the United States, see Michael Peppard, "Can the Church Transcend a Polarized Culture?," in *Polarization in the US Catholic Church: Naming the Wounds, Beginning to Heal*, ed. Mary Ellen Konieczny, Charles Camosy, and Tricia Bruce (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 145–157.

The Catholic community can often reflect the world's shortcomings, rather than the way of being present in the world that the Spirit enables. Thus, Catholics, far from embodying courageous Christian discipleship, have been as complicit as other sectors of civil society in, for example, the prolongation of racial injustice in the United States, including within the church itself.¹¹ The ecclesial community professes its conviction that "there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28), but its lack of openness to many groups on the margins of society and the church indicates that the Christian community does not always take its inspiration from gospel-centered principles.

As disheartening as it is to acknowledge such collective failures, they echo the inescapable truth proper to every Christian that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Consequently, as Pope John Paul II acknowledged, the lives of members of the church can "constitute a counter-testimony to Christianity. ... Our sin has impeded the Spirit's working in the hearts of many people" (*Incarnationis Mystrium*, no. 11). This is explicitly true in relation to the catastrophe that "the clerical sexual abuse crisis" encapsulates. The past and present reality of sinfulness in the church underscores the eschatological orientation of the church, confirming God alone as the source of salvation and fullness of life. More immediately, the failures that express sinfulness amplify the impossibility of failure-proofing the ecclesial community, of certifying that the church's witness to Christ can be free from any manifestations of human sinfulness.¹²

¹¹ On the experience of Black Catholics in the United States see, for example, Edward Braxton, *The Church and the Racial Divide: Reflections of an African-American Catholic Bishop* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021); M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African-American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018); and Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

¹² For a recent study of the church's sinfulness, see Brian Flanagan, *Stumbling into Holiness: Sin and Sanctity in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018).

Consistent with the history of failure in the church, ecclesiologists could advocate for the practice of “loss management,” frequently adjusting downwards the church’s proclamation of its relationship to God. This tactic, responsive to the church’s failures, would ensure that the self-understanding of the ecclesial community generates minimal expectations of holiness and virtue. A downgrading of claims about the church would make it possible to dismiss with a shrug all revelations of individual and communal failure, classifying them as no more than indicators of the church’s ineradicable humanity. Such a church would inexorably fade into oblivion as its futility would become ever more difficult to disguise.¹³

An ecclesiology that sought to resist defeatism and assert the church’s merits might dismiss even the demonstrated breadth and depth of clergy abuse as the sins of “bad apples,” from whom the rest of the community is distinguishable. More broadly, lay members of the church could claim—with more than a little justification—that since the ordained members of the church are principally responsible for the abuse crisis, it is the “people of God,” understood as inclusive of only the laity, who are more truly representative of the church.¹⁴ In their different ways, each of these options reduces a complex reality to a one-dimensional solution that traffics in the misapprehension that hope requires the denial of failure.

Importantly, two components of the ecclesiology that emerged from the Second Vatican Council offer a way of proceeding more in accord with authentic hope. First, the council stresses that the whole church is “at once holy and always in need of purification,” and so “follows constantly the path of penance and renewal” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 8). There can be, therefore, neither a perfect church nor sectors of the church exempt from

¹³ See, for example, the analysis of young people’s disaffiliation from the church detailed in Robert McCarty and John Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St Mary’s, 2017).

¹⁴ “The people of God” appears often as a synonym for “the laity,” but this is not the approach of Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 9–17, depicted “the people of God” as the entire community of the baptized; that is the laity and ordained together form the one people of God.

conversion. Second, Vatican II acknowledges that “the whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one, cannot err in matters of belief” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 12). Accordingly, the possibility of a holy church, one responsive to the grace that underpins authentic expressions of faith, requires the engagement of the whole people of God.

The analysis of the church’s sacramentality, which is the theme of the final section of this essay, considers whether a renewed appreciation of the facets of ecclesial theology that Vatican II amplified might contribute to forming constructive responses to the abuse crisis. It argues for the compatibility between sacramentality and a self-critical church, contending that self-criticism deepens the hope of the community and so enhances its sacramentality.¹⁵

Sacramentality and the Self-Critical Church

The identifications of the church as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” or “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” are perhaps more familiar to most Catholics than the invocation of the church as sacrament. Yet, it is the church’s sacramentality that is at the forefront of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The council begins its document on “the church” by comparing the church to a sacrament, naming the ecclesial community as “a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 1).

As sacrament, the church has an exalted status. This status can render sacramental ecclesiology problematic, especially if it fosters a self-congratulatory stance that resists the abiding need for conversion common to all members and all activities of the church.¹⁶ So, then, is “the church as

¹⁵ On the need for self-criticism in the life and mission of the church, see Karl Rahner, “The Function of the Church as a Critic of Society,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12: *Confrontations 2*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1974), 229–249.

¹⁶ See for example the critique of sacramental ecclesiology in Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 1978), 78–79. For a positive view of the concept, see

sacrament” a stumbling block to reform in the ecclesial community, or even a tactic that legitimates denial of the church’s sinfulness?

It is certainly true that sacramental ecclesiology presumes an intimate connection between the church and God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit from the Father, with whom Jesus the *Christos* was anointed, is the same Spirit whom the Father sends upon, and whom the Risen One shares with, the community of Christ’s disciples at Pentecost. ... The church is the place where the mission of the Word and the mission of the Spirit find their clearest point of conjuncture in human history.”¹⁷ Building on the presentation of God’s trinitarian initiative in establishing the church, Vatican II concludes that there is “no mean analogy” between the “social structure of the Church” in relation to the Holy Spirit and the human nature of Jesus in relation to his divine nature (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 8). This remarkable statement might suggest that Vatican II was attributing divinity to the ecclesial community, a perception that the council’s description of the church as “unfailingly holy” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 39) might buttress.

It is crucial, then, to make clear that all references to the church’s holiness attest to the ineradicable presence of the Spirit as the church’s source of life. The council’s stress on the Spirit equates holiness with the presence of God, not human perfection. Vatican II also insists that members of the church must remain open to grace. This openness is necessary so that “the holiness of the church is shown constantly in the fruits of grace that the Spirit produces in the faithful” (*Lumen Gentium*, no 39). Grace is not the possession of the ecclesial community nor does it automatically transform human beings into paradigms of sanctity. Rather, “If charity is to grow and like a good seed produce fruit in the soul, all of the faithful must carry out [God’s] will by what they do, with the help of [God’s] grace” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 42). Prayer, self-denial, service of

Richard Lennan, “Narcissistic Aestheticism?": An Assessment of Karl Rahner’s Sacramental Ecclesiology,” *Philosophy and Theology* 25, no. 2 (2013): 249–270.

¹⁷ Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 37–38.

others, and a desire to embrace virtue, all of which have their basis in the Eucharist (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 42), are aids to the realization of the “good fruit” that the church is to make present. This fruit is the sacramental expression of grace at work in the ecclesial community.

Far from legitimating either superiority or mediocrity, the link between the church and sacramentality is the motive for the conversion that can flower in just and compassionate actions that embody grace in the world. Fulfilling this mission requires all members of the ecclesial community to understand that the church is always “both the proclaiming bearer of the revealing word of God as his utterance of salvation to the world, *and at the same time* [the] subject hearkening and believing, to whom that word of salvation of God in Christ is addressed.”¹⁸ The church’s sacramentality, in short, mandates that the ecclesial community not see itself as a privileged body. Rather than being the exclusive community of the saved, one perennially untroubled by the specter of failure, the church is a people whose faithfulness to God, and their God-given mission, is inseparable from their ongoing openness to grace, and their acknowledgment of the inevitable gap between all that the Spirit enables and what their actions reveal of their response to the Spirit.

Recognition of this gap is key to Louis-Marie Chauvet’s contention that the church as sacrament “radicalizes the vacancy of the place of God. To accept its mediation is to agree that this vacancy will never be filled.”¹⁹ The church, through God’s initiative and enduring grace, can be a sacramental expression of God’s life-giving presence in the world, but the church is not a substitute for God. In fact, the church’s constitution in grace means, paradoxically, that the church has the capacity to be a unique obstacle to the working of grace in the world, as the abuse crisis illustrates

¹⁸ Karl Rahner, “What is a Sacrament?,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14, *Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, the Church in the World*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1976), 143; original emphasis.

¹⁹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine M. Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo, 1995), 178.

most tragically. To be other than a hindrance, the church must be, and remain, self-critical, alert to the possibility that the ecclesial community will obscure rather than symbolize the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Self-criticism is also “a primary condition enabling the Church to exercise a critical function with regard to society,” as only a church that acknowledges its own capacity to turn away from God can challenge that same capacity evident in the wider world.²⁰ Once again, it is evident that there is an inextricable connection between the church’s sacramentality and the conversion of the community of faith, its humble recognition that it depends on grace rather than being the source of grace. The possibility that the church can be a body nurturing hope in the world derives from this connection.

The self-criticism and conversion that are irreducible components of the church’s sacramentality can resist any tendency to use sacramental ecclesiology in ways that idealize the church. No less importantly, the recognition that the Spirit at the heart of the church is a gift in which all the baptized share, can challenge those practices and relationships that convey the impression that the church is “a clerical, religiously camouflaged kind of totalitarian system.”²¹ It is not, then, solely clerics who manifest the church. All the baptized share in the vocation to proclaim Christ in word and action. As the product of God’s initiative, the God who alone will bring the church to fulfillment, the church is not at the disposal of any single sector of the ecclesial community.

The church’s sacramentality implicates the whole ecclesial community. Accordingly, worship, ministries, missionary endeavors, and organs of governance in the church will be more likely to reflect all that the Spirit empowers when they facilitate the participation of all the baptized. Greater mutuality and accountability between officeholders and the wider community will serve the strengthening of a self-critical church, which, in

²⁰ Rahner, “The Function of the Church as a Critic of Society,” 237.

²¹ Karl Rahner, “Freedom in the Church,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2: *Man in the Church*, trans. K. H. Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 99.

turn, fosters the church's sacramentality. Pope Francis's advocacy for a "synodal" church, one that consciously engages all who seek to live as disciples, aligns precisely with the sacramental mission of the ecclesial community in the world.²²

Sacramental ecclesiology is not a formula for perfection. The emphasis on grace at the heart of the church, the emphasis that is central to sacramental ecclesiology, can spur the repentance and reform of the ecclesial community. This conversion, in turn, facilitates the emergence of a more faithful and hopeful church, one better able to image Christ in its actions. Such a church does not outgrow its need to embrace the repentance that its failures in the abuse crisis require. The church can be a sacrament of healing and hope only by embracing its own brokenness and need for conversion, a need that exists in all the baptized and every ministry and agency of ecclesial life. By constantly renewing its dependence on grace, the ecclesial community can witness to God's reconciling and life-giving mercy.



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²² For Pope Francis on synodality, see, for example, Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod," October 9, 2021, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html).

Chapter 18: Interconnectedness: The Thread that Enables a Theological and Synodal Response to Abuse

Gill Goulding

In Greek mythology Ariadne gave a thread to Theseus to enable him to find his way out of the Labyrinth. Had Theseus become distracted and lost that thread, he would have been condemned to wander amidst the maze or, more likely, been killed and eaten by the Minotaur, who lived in the depths of the labyrinth. Only by following the thread was there the prospect of emerging from the darkness of the labyrinth into Life. Interconnectedness, I suggest, is a thread that enables us to see the congruent elements of a theological response to the sexual abuse crisis—amidst a spectrum of important diverse areas where we could consistently focus our attention—and move towards a coherent life-giving response. This golden (or truthfully somewhat tarnished) thread of interconnectedness also enables us to appreciate something of the enormity and depth of darkness/profanity that lies at the heart of the sexual abuse crisis and continues to affect the whole Catholic Church.

This article raises some key features integral to this interconnectedness including an understanding of authority as service and the importance of the child as agent and teacher. Though discrete areas, these are interconnected and have profound theological significance. In addition, if recognized as integral, they make a fruitful contribution to a synodal response. Both of these features find their deepest resonance in the person of Jesus who issues a clear injunction to pay attention to the child. Indeed, his own identity is inseparable from his being a child in relationship with the Father, the eternal child, always the Son of the Father. This Christocentric focus opens the foundation of the triune mystery of childhood. The primal trust in the Father rests in the Holy Spirit common to both Father and Son.

There is also a call to conversion and transformation for the ecclesial community, from the abuse of power and authority—an abuse that all of us can engage in as parents, teachers, social workers, bus conductors, cleaners, anyone involved with others—to the exercise of authority as service after the manner of Christ. Accordingly, there is a challenge to the whole Church to a more profound appreciation of the depths of this interconnectedness enabling a theological imperative for a synodal way of proceeding in our own life-giving response to the abuse crisis.

Authority as Service

Contemporary generations have seen the radical questioning of authority. Caught between the Scylla of anarchy with the consequent destruction of culture and the Charybdis of despotism which tramples human dignity, the concept of authority ongoingly seems indispensable for our human interactions. What might an edifying authority in the Church look like? And how can the fundamental relationship of trust which is vital for the exercise of true authority as service be re-established? I say re-established, as underlying the sexual abuse crisis is a betrayal of trust and a predatory misuse of authority. Pope Francis has argued that at the heart of the sexual abuse crisis is the abuse of power. I have proposed that part of the way to address this is through a discussion of the appropriate use of power.¹ Perhaps the best way to think about the appropriate use of power is through the notion of the appropriate use of authority—as service.² Within the Christian tradition there has been an honourable exercise of authority in this way across generations: in the service of the poor, the provision of education, especially for girls, the foundation of medical care facilities, and the daily witness of countless holy men and women in

¹ Gill Goulding CJ, “Towards a Theological and Synodal Response to the Abuse Crisis,” *New Blackfriars* 102, no. 1097 (2021): 96–107.

² Christopher Butler poignantly notes that New Testament sources view the authority of Christ as having been perceived by his followers primarily because of his service of exorcism and healing within the community. See Christopher Butler, “Authority in the New Testament,” *Downside Review* 57, no. 4 (1939): 505–523.

positions of authority. The fact that authority is sometimes dishonoured does not negate that reality. “Engaged theological reflection could enable such authentic authority by a dialectical process, that also identifies and seeks to reform the dishonourable.”³

Within the Christian faith tradition there is an understanding of a certain authority within our very being. This stems from the Trinitarian act of creation which arises from the ebullience of God’s dynamic loving activity and asserts the essential dignity, value, worth, and goodness of each human person, made in the image and likeness of God. This authority of being involves a dependence which belongs to the very nature of creaturehood. We are creatures who have a Creator, and this intimate link of dependence calls us to a deep relationship with God that is mirrored in our human need to relate in depth to one another. There is a two-fold dynamic here: to depend upon God “sets us free from every form of enslavement and [secondly this] leads us to recognize the great dignity [of human persons]” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 32.). The maturity of a well-lived Christian life evinces that relational intimacy with God and appropriate expressions of intimacy with other human persons. The apprehension of such lives gives encouragement and support to the developing relational identities of children and young people. When young lives suffer the trauma of sexual abuse the perverted imprint on their experience of relational identity and intimacy can mar all future relationships.

The Inuit peoples of the Arctic region of Canada built inuksuk or inukshuk, human-made stone landmarks or cairns found in northern Canada. These stone structures were important to the people for navigating their way across the frozen north. They were used, amongst other things, as a point of reference indicating a direction for travel. They were pointers to something beyond themselves. In a not dissimilar manner, those who exercise authority in the context of Christian faith are called to be people who point to an authority which lies beyond themselves, indeed

³ Goulding, “Towards a Theological and Synodal Response to the Abuse Crisis,” 98.

that is far superior to them. God is the final authority, and all creatures are subject to God. Accordingly, those called to represent God in exercising authority within the Church are called also to give an example of obedience to God if they are to be credible in exercising that authority as service. The life of the representative of the authority of God must reflect that intimacy with God which is the foundation for all authority and which overflows into a service that is hope-filled and life-giving for others. This is a truly edifying exercise of authority.

The Authority of Christ

“Total and generous availability to serve others is the distinctive mark of those in positions of authority in the Church ... (as) the first servant of the servants of God is Jesus.”⁴ Rooted in the profundity of his relationship with the Father, Jesus was always reaching out to his disciples and beyond them to the poorest and most forgotten. “In him God reveals his personal innermost being: his most humble love in the world to the point of his putting off of all his own power (Phil 2:6–7), to the point of obedience on the Cross of shame (Phil 2:8), and precisely in all this the breaking forth of the light of his absolute superiority over every power opposed to himself which is not the power of love. ... Christ remains as the one who realizes (by his Cross) God’s decision of absolute love for the world.”⁵ In the mystery of the cross we find a freedom from the abuse of power and the most profound image of authority as service. Indeed, the final hermeneutic is always the cross.

This power of love is central to Jesus’s delegation of authority to his Church, Peter, the twelve, and those to whom they would subsequently delegate. It is important to note as Balthasar does that the primary authority was of forgiving sins, which was key to the mission of Jesus.⁶

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, March 24, 2006, www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060324_consistory.html.

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Authority,” in *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 137–139.

⁶ Balthasar, “Authority,” 137.

Also, it is clear that Peter assumes this responsibility only by himself being willing to lay down his life for the Church. The gift of being able to offer forgiveness is linked to the willingness of those so gifted to offer their lives in the service of others. It is, however, important to indicate that, by virtue of baptism, where we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we receive some share in his authority and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This means that the witness of Christian lives is a fundamental duty. At the heart of this witness is a willingness to being open to forgiving and being forgiven.

There is a significant delineation of authority within the Church, which can only truly be understood in an analogous sense. "An analogy between the authority of the Church in their totality and the authority of those who by Christ are endowed with particular authority among the people, an analogy in which the presence of the authority of God in Christ is made concrete (incarnate) for the people in their differentiation."⁷ The dilemma across all generations is that the authority of the Church is to be a continuation of Christ's own authority and yet it can never fully measure up to the office of Christ. Only when authority is exercised in that spirit of humble love which characterized the ministry of Jesus is it credible to the people.⁸ Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of the priestly ministry as a great mystery of love which needs to be fostered "through prayer, through listening to the Word of God, through the daily celebration of the Eucharist and also through regularly going to the

⁷ Balthasar, "Authority," 138.

⁸ Balthasar, "Authority," 139. He continues: "The authority of the Church must understand that it can function only within the analogy of the total authority of the people of the Church, or to put it in modern and concrete terms, in a continual dialogue between the whole Church and the Church leadership (the bishops in their collegiality and their head, the Pope); ... the right sense of direction lies both in the sense of the believers of the generality of the Church and in the general college of the bishops and in the head which, as it were, sums up and epitomizes them, but which none the less is only 'head' *of* and *for* and *with* something. ... Christ is the authority in the Church which can never be surpassed. But he does not exercise his authority one-sidedly as the exalted, law-giving judging Christ, but as *the* appearance of God who is exalted only in humiliation, legislates only in love, and judges only as he forgives."

Sacrament of Penance.” Without availing of these practices, the priest “inevitably ends up losing sight of the authentic meaning of his own service and the joy which comes from a profound communion with Jesus.”⁹ It is at this point that the trajectory towards abusive behaviour can open up.

Clearly, the call to holiness is a very striking reminder for those in identifiable positions within the Church—priests, bishops, religious, and laity—but they, like we ourselves, are all members of the People of God. As such, we share a responsibility and a need for accountability in the way we use the authority that we have in our differing circumstances. We are all called “into a people who might acknowledge [God] and serve him in holiness” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 9), and where more importantly should that holiness be seen but in the way we exercise the authority we have in different spheres? Indeed, *Lumen Gentium* insists that we “are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 9).

The Importance of the Child

At the heart of all consideration of the sexual abuse crisis is the person of the child or vulnerable young person. Yet, so often, there is still a failure to engage children directly on the topic of their experience. There is still a cultural ambivalence towards children, perhaps rooted in Rousseau’s romantic idealism of childhood or Kant’s view of children as unformed and animal-like and a childhood as a preparation for the adulthood that is to come when childhood disappears.¹⁰ Also, there is the Victorian idealization of the nuclear family.¹¹ These representations take little or no

⁹ Pope Francis. “General Audience,” March 26th 2014, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140326_udienza-generale.html.

¹⁰ See Immanuel Kant, *Über Pädagogik* (Königsberg: D. Friedrich Theodor Rink, 1803). Kant specifically addresses this view of the development of children in the Introduction and Chapter 1.

¹¹ See David Popenoe, “Victorian Fathers and the Rise of the Modern Nuclear Family,” in *Families Without Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 81–108.

account of children's agency, even though the notion of the agency of the child is pivotal to the various subdisciplines of the humanities which have flourished since the 1980s, variously named *childhood studies*, *social studies of childhood*, or *the sociology of childhood*. It is vital that we challenge our ongoing cultural assumptions about: what constitutes real knowledge and capacities required for reliable communication; the nature of children; and the difficulties of honest conversation about pain and suffering, even more so when it is a child that one desires above all to shield and protect from suffering. An honest question might be to ask are we protecting ourselves from pain rather than the child? I suggest that it is possible and necessary to speak with children about their experiences, because children are knowing persons, inter-subjective subjects, indeed communicating subjects by reason of their fundamental inter-subjectivity.¹² While they often lack capacities for abstract formulation, children have a drive for knowledge and a gift for creative meaning-making. They are able to communicate and engage in dialogue with others, including adults, through conversation, but especially through art, stories, and play. We have much to learn through children and not least because the gospel imperative (Mark 10:13–16 and Matthew 18:1–6) is that we should pay attention to children, not just to protect them but to learn from them.

Decades before childhood studies, Karl Rahner, SJ, wrote an article¹³ that raised up the agency of the child and the unsurpassable value of childhood by exploring the transcendent dimension of children's knowing and loving and how open they are to the mystery of God's presence. Indeed, he emphasized that childhood is not something that we lose or leave behind as we progress to being adults. Rather "we go towards it as

¹² There is literature about how to talk with child victims about the abuse they suffered. See "Practitioner and Parent/Caregiver Guides," Office for Victims of Crime, ovc.ojp.gov/child-victims-and-witnesses-support/guides; Haroon Siddique, "Child victims of sexual abuse 'often accused of lying to police,'" *The Guardian*, June 24, 2021, www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/24/child-victims-of-sexual-abuse-often-accused-of-lying-to-police.

¹³ Karl Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 33–50.

that which has been achieved in time and redeemed for ever in time.¹⁴ We only *become* the children whom we *were* because we gather up time—and in this our childhood too—into our eternity.”¹⁵ Childhood, Rahner asserts, has a value and importance way beyond our human conceiving because “childhood itself has a direct relationship with God.”¹⁶ Childhood has a unique value in itself, and this is applicable to every child.¹⁷ Christianity has reverence for the child. Rahner’s theological conception of childhood is not one of naïve optimism, but of hope placed in God’s grace that abounds.

The child is a child, and we have all been children or, rather, we have all been a particular and unique child. Our experiences of being a child will be different according to the unique nature of our being and according to the circumstances in which we lived. It is the remembering of the experience of our own childhood that is important here. It is vital that we do not disregard our own experience of being a child. As Rahner insists, both scripture and tradition presuppose that we understand what a child really is from our own experience rather than treating this as a question to be explored. Among other things, our childhood can remind us of our

¹⁴ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 39: “The child and his origins are encompassed by the love of God through the pledge of that grace which, in God’s will to save all mankind, comes in all cases and to every man from God in Christ Jesus.”

¹⁵ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 36. He continues: “Childhood may always remain open. ... We do not move away from childhood in any definitive sense, but rather move towards the eternity of this childhood, to its definitive and enduring validity in God’s sight. Childhood is not only of eternal significance for man’s destiny to the extent that in childhood the foundations are laid for decisions which have an eternal significance. ... It is important in itself also, as a stage of man’s personal history in which that takes place which can only take place in childhood itself.”

¹⁶ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 36.

¹⁷ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 38: “The child is right from the first the partner of God ... who can love the smallest thing because for him it is always filled with the all; who does not feel the ineffable as lethal to him, because he experiences the fact that when he entrusts himself to it without reserve he falls into the inconceivable depths of love and blessedness.”

shared vulnerability, our fragility as human persons in relation with one another.

Children of God

Childhood is also, Rahner argues, open to mystery. Indeed, in the last analysis, it is a mystery. “And because it is a mystery ... life itself is mysterious ... and provided we reverently and lovingly preserve this state of being delivered over to the mystery, life becomes for us a state in which our original childhood is preserved for ever ... a state which endows us with the power still to be able to play, to recognize that the powers presiding over existence are greater than our own designs, and to submit to their control as our deepest good.”¹⁸ The mysterious nature of being a child we come to realize only later in life as we grow to become what we are, namely children. Indeed, as Rahner indicates, the experience of childhood involves not just an existential but an eschatological reality. Jesus points to children as those who know their own needs (Matthew 18:4), that they have nothing of themselves that merit the help of God, but who expect everything from God and trust in God’s loving kindness and protection. This mystery of trusting openness to God mirrors something of the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

Yet, it is vital, as St Paul asserts (Ephesians 3:26), to acknowledge that human persons are called to realize their identity as children of God. This, for Rahner, is the maturity of our understanding of what it means to be a child. Integral here is the “trust, openness, expectation, of interior harmony with the unpredictable forces with which the individual finds himself confronted ... a readiness to journey into the untried and the untested.”¹⁹ In this expression of maturity, it is made evident that it is the very fact that we are children of God that has been present within our lives from the beginning. It is not that this is an attribute acquired over time

¹⁸ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 42. He continues: “And when our powers are at an end we realise in a childlike-spirit that our task too is at an end. ... When we take up this attitude, we make the mystery the protection and defence of our lives.”

¹⁹ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 47–48.

through diligent exertion or merit. “In the last analysis, ... Childhood is only truly understood, only realises the ultimate depths of its own nature, when it is seen as based upon the foundation of childhood of God.”²⁰

Rahner appears conscious that those who as children felt neglected, abandoned, or, I would add, suffered the scourge of sexual abuse may interpret that experience in an ultimate and metaphysical sense such that it overwhelms all of life. Such persons will often not be able to overcome subsequent experiences of life’s difficulties or the impact of further psychological trauma by reappropriating the memories of a secure childhood which roots them positively towards meaning and life. Rather, they will interpret such experiences as further projection of the experience of negativity, insecurity, and retraumatized abuse.

It is those children and young people who have been abused, who are in many cases unable to acknowledge and live out the fullness of their identity as children of God, due to the suffering caused by abuse. The experience of sexual abuse when the perpetrator is a member of the clergy not only involves the violation of an understanding of relationship and intimacy but is also a deep betrayal of the soul of the child or vulnerable person. If there is then an attempt by the perpetrator to justify such abuse using the authority of the priest or utilizing the sacraments, such as the sacrament of reconciliation, there is a profanation of what is sacred. Both the reality of the child or young person and the sacraments are profaned by a sacrilegious act. The priest who stands to that child or vulnerable adult as a spiritual authority in their relationship with God has both betrayed that trust and indelibly marked the soul of the one who was abused. Stephen Rossetti in a landmark book written in 1990 used the term “slayer of the soul”²¹ to depict the depth of the profane action of abuse. It is of uttermost importance that the ecclesial community reflects on the

²⁰ Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 49.

²¹ Stephen Rossetti, *Slayer of the Soul: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990).

profound suffering that is occasioned by abuse both catastrophically for the victim and also for family, friends, and the wider church community.

The Eternal Child Who is Christ

In this profound betrayal of those who have suffered abuse, we may also glimpse something of the depth of betrayal of Jesus. In the profanation of the sacred species which was his body, through torture and crucifixion, we glimpse something of the betrayal of his mystical body, which is the Church, and especially the most vulnerable therein. In the indifference shown to his sacred body made vulnerable to us in the Eucharist, we glimpse something of the rejection and indifference shown over the years towards those who are victims of abuse. In the parable of the last judgement in Matthew's gospel, Jesus clearly states, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Abuse of any child or vulnerable adult is abuse of Jesus, a sacrilegious act. For, he goes on to say, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45). When there was a refusal to listen to the painful stories of sexual abuse; when victims were blamed for daring to suggest such an action on behalf of a priest; and when no comfort was offered, only misunderstanding, denial, and ostracism, here, once more, Jesus asserts, such actions were taken towards himself. The alignment that Jesus makes between himself and the most vulnerable is inviolable. When children are involved, his words become graphic. "Whoever welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:5–6). This is a punishment imposed for the most pernicious of crimes.

Anyone who welcomes a child in the name of Jesus welcomes Jesus himself. He is not asserting that a child is some kind of analogy for the Son of God. Rather, he is emphasizing that to welcome the child is to welcome "the archetypal Child who has his abode in the Father's bosom. ... Whoever turns to the most insignificant of children is in fact, attaining to

the ultimate, to the Father himself.”²² Here, we touch on a profound mystery at the heart of the gospel, Jesus is always the eternal child of the Father. The word becomes flesh in the concrete person of Jesus of Nazareth, born of the virgin Mary and with a foster father, Joseph. At the same time this God-Man, Jesus Christ is Son of God, Son of the Father. His own trusting obedience to the Father includes an openness and willingness to go as far as the loving will of the Father may dispose him.²³ The foundation on which Jesus stands in his earthly life is his relationship with the Father. This is reiterated many times by Jesus himself, particularly through the gospel of John. His own identity is inseparable from his being a child in relationship with the Father. “Precisely this shows to what extent he remains a child even as an adult, and why this permanent characteristic gave him such a unique understanding of childhood and made him exalt so highly the condition of being a child.”²⁴

And what does it mean to be a mature child of God? It means to be one who is always dependent, who knows that one owes one’s existence to God, and, with a lifelong awareness of being a child, is always willing to ask and to give thanks. A child is also open to giving to others. A childlike attitude is open to the intimate character of the Church as mystery acknowledged in the reception of sacraments: in the proclamation of the word, in the leadership ordained by Christ and the special priesthood of the faithful; and in confidence that the grace of God is contained therein for childlike receptivity. The child also lives in the present, willing to take

²² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 10.

²³ Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, 31: “This primal trust in the Father, which no mistrust ever clouds, rests on the Holy Spirit common to Father and Son. In the Son the Spirit keeps alive the unshakeable trust that the Father’s every ordinance (even the transformation of the distinction of persons into abandonment) will always be an ordinance of love, which the Son, now that he is a man, must reciprocate with human obedience.” Further theological reflection probing the depths of the eternal childhood of Jesus is necessary to bring forth the extent of this fecund understanding. Such profound exploration is beyond the parameters set for this article, though further work is being undertaken as a resource for a different text.

²⁴ Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, 33.

one day at a time and to look for the grace evident within that day. “A child that knows God can find him at every moment because every moment opens up for him and shows him the very ground of time: as if it reposed on eternity itself.”²⁵ To be a child of the Father holds primacy over the whole drama of salvation since it is what leads the Son from his human childhood through his public ministry and rejection by human persons all the way to his high priestly office on the cross.²⁶ The eternal child holds us up to the Father as he intercedes for us as eternal High Priest. The Church’s motherhood wrought by grace, rests upon the primary foundation of her own childhood which persists and which permeates all authority when exercised as service.

In order for this interconnected understanding to positively contribute to the life of the church and her way of proceeding, there needs to occur significant conversion and transformation. Conversion is necessary from the abuse of power and authority to a way of exercising authority as service after the example of Christ. We become God’s children by adoption, the Son unites us with himself and takes us to the Father. Definitively, this is accomplished at the cross and recapitulated for us in the Eucharist, but this being-in-him is already contained in God’s plan before the foundation of the world for the Father chose us in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). The Church baptizes according to the Trinitarian formula, consecrates the human being to God, and communicates to the person the divine gift of birth from God and membership of the family of the Church. From this foundation, there are clear implications for the way we are called to exercise authority. Any life-giving exercise of authority needs to include: an awareness of its accountability; a cognizance of the unique dignity of those

²⁵ Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, 55.

²⁶ See Hans Zollner, SJ, “The Child at the Center: What Can Theology Say in the Face of the Scandals of Abuse?” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 692–710, where he spells out some theological lines for further theological study, in particular “an underestimation of the power and subtlety of evil”; and looking toward the “development of a modern theology of the child.”

entrusted to its care; and a childlike, humble openness and receptivity both to God and to others in the expression of that authority.

To assist individual reflection on this matter of the exercise of authority, I suggest three salient questions for consideration. *What* is the authority that you are called to exercise? It is important to identify and acknowledge this. *When* do you exercise this authority, in relation to which persons? *How* do you exercise this authority? Do you see yourself as trying to serve the people with whom you exercise that authority or is it the case of just telling others what to do or not do? Thirdly, *why* do you exercise this authority, is it out of love for others—a path of service? A way of responding to these questions might be to consider prayerfully your experience by seeking the help of the Holy Spirit. As I have already indicated, it is only when authority is exercised in the spirit of the humble love which characterized the ministry of Jesus that it is both credible to people and free from abuse. This humble love needs to be nourished by prayer, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of reconciliation in order to receive the joy which comes from profound communion with Jesus.

The Synodal Spirit

This love that we receive from the Lord is the force that transforms our lives, opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit and enabling mission. Here we encounter the dynamic of the synodal process, where two key dispositions are essential. The first is an openness to deep humble listening to all involved in the process. The second is to have the boldness to speak openly, honestly, and not inhibited by fear. Such a process is open to listening and learning from the most vulnerable, fragile, and marginalized, engaging in communion with them, and participating in being on mission to serve them.

In addition, I would assert that exploring this way of interconnectedness is a synodal way of proceeding. Thus, it is one which is in line with what Pope Francis has designated to be a proper way of proceeding for the Church in living out her evangelical mission. In particular, this synodal way of proceeding, inclusive of those who suffered the trauma of sexual

abuse, can contribute to a path of healing both for victims/survivors and for the wider Church. When we engage in that process of intense listening to the Holy Spirit, a listening “with the ear of the heart” as Pope Francis stated,²⁷ we are able by grace, to hear and perceive profound truth. In listening to those who have suffered from abuse, we may glimpse something of the depth of their pain and the profanation of both their whole person and the person of Jesus. The realization that they have been heard at that depth of their being can be a life-giving step for the survivor of abuse and a moment of grace also for the Church brought to recognize her own complicity. Listening together, discerning together, focusing on communion and participation, and being open to the Spirit of God moving within the Church enables the people of God to follow the thread that leads to Life. As Pope Francis stated, “This recent time is a time of listening and discernment to arrive at the roots that allowed such atrocities to occur and be perpetrated and thus find solutions to the abuse scandal, not merely with containment strategies—essential but insufficient—but with the measures necessary to take on the problem in its complexity.”²⁸

Conclusion

The theme of interconnectedness is not an immediate solution to the problem of sexual abuse within the Church. What it does do is to raise up the complexity involved in any response. Interconnectedness indicates some of the diverse and discrete theological elements constitutive of the problem and suggest that the way forward involves a consideration of different levels of discourse, one of which involves theological considerations. To focus on one element alone—even the experience of victims/survivors of sexual abuse—is too simplistic.

²⁷ Pope Francis, “Message for the 56th World Day of Social Communications,” January 24, 2022, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20220124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html.

²⁸ Pope Francis, “Letter to the Church in Chile,” May 31, 2018, no. 3, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180531_lettera-popolodidio-cile.html.

If the Church is to move forward into being once more a sign of hope and a beacon of light and life in the contemporary world, it is important to be open to the way the Spirit of God is proceeding. Like Ariadne's thread, the Spirit aims to draw us out of darkness and into the, though painful, light of God's redeeming activity within the lives of those who have suffered and the wider ecclesial communion. Having in one hand the thread of interconnectedness while engaged in any of the discrete areas—both those indicated above or others—sets the disposition for openness in which the Spirit of God can work prodigiously.



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Chapter 19: Can Purgatory Help? Reflections from Dramatic Theology in the Context of the Abuse Crisis

Nikolaus Wandinger

In recent decades, theology has emphasized God's mercy and forgiveness. Following the Second Vatican Council, important theologians, among them Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and Joseph Ratzinger, have spoken of a hope for universal salvation despite the real possibility of eternal damnation.¹ Pastoral practice in many places has relegated the idea of God's justice and punishment to the background and for good reasons. A long history of fear-mongering was abandoned in favor of a stance more compatible with the Kingdom message of Jesus.² Consequently, the traditional sequence of *Dies Irae*, which made for great musical compositions, was removed from the Liturgy of the Dead. However, more recently a number of theologians have renewed the issue, and some have protested against what they perceived as an injustice to victims and a cheapening of divine grace.³ Similarly, in discussions involving the sexual

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. IV (Freiburg: Einsiedeln, 1983), 223–294; Karl Rahner, "Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums," in *Sämtliche Werke* 26 (Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 417–418; Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatologie—Tod und ewiges Leben* (Regensburg: 1977), 178–179.

² According to New Testament Scholarship of the late 20th century, the Message of the Kingdom of God (*Basileia tou theou*) is the prime message that the synoptic gospels attribute to Jesus in his earthly ministry; its content will become clearer in the course of the article.

³ Most notably see, Klaus von Stosch, *Gott—Macht—Geschichte. Versuch einer theodizeesensiblen Rede vom Handeln Gottes in der Welt* (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 207, n. 112. For the discussion, see Jan Heiner Tück, "Inkarnierte Feindesliebe. Der Messias Israels und die Hoffnung auf Versöhnung," in *Streitfall Christologie. Vergewisserungen nach der Shoah*, ed. Helmut Hoping and Jan Heiner Tück, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 214 (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 216–258; Magnus Striet, "Streitfall Apokatastasis. Dogmatische Anmerkungen mit einem ökumenischen Seitenblick," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 184 (2004): 185–201; Bernhard Nitsche, "Eschatologie als dramatische Nach-Geschichte?," in *Von der Communio zur Kommunikativen Theologie. Bernd-Jochen Hilberath zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin: LIT-Verlag,

abuse crisis, I noted that many people deem talk of forgiveness an offense to the survivors of sexual abuse and its cover-up. The fact that many offenders have already died by the time their survivors find the strength to speak out and are finally believed aggravates this even more. Not only is it impossible to legally address the deeds of many assailants due to existing statutes of limitation, but it is also inconceivable to confront them on a personal and moral level—at least not in this life.

Christian faith hopes for an afterlife. Yet, what does this hope entail for victims of abuse and their tormentors? In an earlier time, the answer would have been quite simple: grave sinners who died in their sin would go to hell. If they repented and were reconciled to God and the Church in confession, they would have to be purified in Purgatory but could then enter heaven. This would become manifest in the last judgment where Christ would part the redeemed sheep from the damned goats (Matthew 25:31–46).⁴

This clear-cut model, however, has lost its power to resonate. The idea of hell seems incompatible with a merciful God; the idea of purification seems strange, to say the least. How would this purification occur? By enduring pain to make up for one's misdeeds? How could that contribute to purification? Both the traditional clear-cut perspective and the contemporary optimistic view have problems in common. Where is the voice of the victims of sexual abuse in the Church? Do they have a say in when God doles out forgiveness to their tormentors or condemns them to hell? Doesn't mercy for the criminals amount to renewed injustice to the victims? Or does damnation for the criminals diminish God's mercy?

As hope for universal salvation and the emphasis on God's mercy became the dominant expectation, these questions were largely neglected in the Church's ministry of the word. In contrast, theologians who work with the approach of Dramatic Theology have suggested new models of the last judgment in a narrative way that appeals to human imagination

2008), 99–109.

⁴ Franz-Josef Nocke, "Eschatologie," in *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, ed. Theodor Schneider (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1995), 444–447.

more than other forms of systematic theology. In this essay, I give a short summary of this approach and then consider how this model might contribute to a new plausibility of the theology of purgatory.⁵ Finally, I show how this may promote the idea of “justice in mercy” in the case of sexual abuse in the Church.

The Dramatic Approach

Raymund Schwager holds the view that Jesus’s message of the Kingdom of God included the image of an all-forgiving Father of infinite mercy.⁶ However, he argues that this had to be shown to be plausible by engaging with the New Testament in a systematic way. Doing that, one quickly realizes that the Kingdom Message seems to end at a certain point and in its place a message of judgment is delivered. The two seem diametrically opposed but the New Testament places both in Jesus’s mouth. Outstanding examples would be for the former the Parable of the Merciful Father (Luke 15:11–32) and for the latter the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23–35).

Schwager argues that a dramatic interpretation can show that the two parables—and others like them—belong to different situations in Jesus’s mission and that they receive their interpretative key from these situations and from their respective positions in the overall drama.⁷ In this way, Schwager takes the judgment parables quite seriously and yet places them on a very different scale than the Message of the Kingdom. He deems the latter message to be Jesus’s very own message as he is not reacting to somebody else but proclaiming the good news he was sent for, namely his heavenly Father has prepared a Kingdom for all who accept this gracious

⁵ See also Nikolaus Wandinger, “The Rationale behind Purgatory,” in *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive Our Death?*, ed. Georg Gasser (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

⁶ Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

⁷ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 54–59. For an overview, see Nikolaus Wandinger, “Raymund Schwager, SJ, Dramatic Theology,” *Lonergan Workshop* 19 (2006): 325–346.

offer.⁸ Nevertheless, this Kingdom does not materialize out of nowhere. It can only come about when humans accept Jesus's message by living according to Jesus's vision, which is most clearly captured in the Sermon on the Mount. Importantly, Jesus calls his listeners to even love their enemies, as the Father does when he lets the sun shine and the rain fall over both good and bad persons.⁹ The full realization of the Kingdom, therefore, is dependent on the human reaction to its offer. Yet, this reaction turns out to be mostly negative. The messenger, the message, and the implied consequences are rejected.

This constitutes the situation for the judgment parables. "The two situations are ... opposed to each other not as offer and refusal of the offer, but as offer and demonstration of the consequences of rejection of the offer. The transition to the second situation is not made by Jesus, but it results from the reaction of his hearers. Jesus simply makes clear the theological consequences of their decision."¹⁰ These consequences are that they bring judgment upon themselves. It is a self-judgment for they themselves cause it, and they also determine the criteria for it. It can only be called a divine judgment insofar as God permits it to occur, but in fact, it is not brought about by God but by human resistance against the message of the Kingdom. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant illustrates this well, as the master initially forgives an astronomical sum, and when he changes his mind, he merely emulates his unforgiving servant's behavior. The criteria by which the master judges and punishes are the servant's.

The climax of the drama is Jesus's crucifixion. A new situation occurs through his freely giving up his life. The changes this brings about can be highlighted by comparing the Parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:33–46) to the events that the gospels tell about Jesus's death and its aftermath. At first glance, the parable seems to be foretelling Jesus's fate and its

⁸ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 29–53.

⁹ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 36.

¹⁰ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 56.

consequences. However, on closer look, we see that this is only partially so, and in this partial identity lies the hermeneutical key for our question. The parable clearly alludes to the imagery of Israel as God's vineyard, God sending the prophets whose warnings are not heeded, and finally, God sending His son who is not heard either but put to death. This provides structural similarity. However, differences are significant. The parable relates no sayings of the son; The gospels relate numerous sayings of Jesus during his Passion. In the parable, the father avenges his son by killing the murderers.¹¹ In the gospels, the Father raises the Son from the dead, and the Son returns to the disciples and brings them a message of peace, which they carry on after Pentecost.

One of Jesus's words during the Passion is his prayer of forgiveness (Luke 23:34). It contains two important aspects. First, it reveals the divine will to forgive because Jesus's prayer cannot be construed as demanding something from the Father against His will but as consenting to and proclaiming the Father's will. Second, it indicates a reduced responsibility on the side of the perpetrators of evil because they know not what they do.

Christ's crucifixion has to be seen as a revelatory event. It revealed the unfathomable love of God and Christ for us. It also revealed the inextricable entanglement of human beings in sin. All persons who were active in the trial and execution of Jesus knew not what they were doing. Schwager argues that, besides other things, this also means they did not realize that they were in fact bringing judgment on themselves, that in their own sinful actions they themselves were also victims of sin. "The reasoning in Jesus's request ... makes clear that the distinction between responsible action and being a victim is not identical with that between active deeds and passive suffering. The executioners of Jesus were certainly active at the crucifixion, but because of their lack of knowledge they were ultimately not responsible agents: in their actions they were victims."¹² At a "deeper

¹¹ For the parable and the fine differences between Matthew's (21:33–46) and Mark's (12:1–12) versions of the parable, see Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 135–136.

¹² Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 171.

level, Jesus no longer stood over against his opponents, but he underwent together with them the blows of a destructive power, but in such a way that *he alone experienced this suffering for what it was*. Through his identification with his executioners, he suffered together with them ... being killed by sin.”¹³ Józef Niewiadomski analyzes how this became possible. He concludes from his reading of Carl Améry:¹⁴

A victim’s hate immediately directed at the perpetrator only creates superficial distance. In the victim’s phantasy, the victim becomes a perpetrator for an instant, and the perpetrator a victim; the hateful extinction of the other only creates a blank spot, a screen for a projection from which hate rebounds back on the victim. That way, the victim is on the path to self-victimization, to becoming what the perpetrator in fact intends, namely a *victima* and nothing but a *victima*, victimized by the perpetrator and by themselves. A victim thus defined incarnates victim-perpetrator-entanglement.¹⁵

Jesus could avoid that because he did not direct his desire at his human enemies but at his divine Father. Therefore, there is no direct face-off between Jesus and his adversaries at the crucifixion, but the situation is structured as a triangle with the Father mediating the relationship. This is shown in the way that Jesus does not directly forgive his enemies but prays to the Father for them.¹⁶

However, there is a significant difference between Christ’s relationships to those who become victims of sin by sinning and to those who—like Christ himself—become victims of sin by being wronged. With the latter he identifies directly, he is one of them and has experienced their

¹³ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 187, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (München: Szczeny, 1966).

¹⁵ Józef Niewiadomski, “Das Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis und die Frage nach dem Letzten Gericht,” in *Erben der Gewalt. Zum Umgang mit Unrecht, Leid und Krieg*, ed. Jörg Ernesti, Ulrich Fistill, and Martin M. Lintner (Brixen-Innsbruck: Brixner Theologisches Jahrbuch, 2015), 111–112.

¹⁶ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 112–113.

pain. With the former he identifies without them realizing what they are doing and what he is doing, and only in a certain respect: “Since the crucified one identified himself with sinners only insofar as they are victims, all people still retain a responsibility for themselves, for which there is and can be no longer any substitution, and this responsibility makes the conversion of each individual necessary, precisely because of Christ’s act of standing in for all.”¹⁷ In short, the Passion can be understood as a substitution—not, however, not a substitution by which Jesus underwent God’s judgment but a substitution by which Jesus underwent *our self-judgment*.

The Last Judgment Re-Imagined

Józef Niewiadomski’s construction of a vivid image of the last judgment as human self-judgment in his dramatic theology is relevant for this analysis.¹⁸ He claims that it is a trans-historic and trans-cultural phenomenon that human beings who have been wronged accuse those whom they deem responsible and demand retribution in the forms of judgment, condemnation, exclusion, expulsion, or even killing.¹⁹ Niewiadomski imagines this between all human beings, including the great villains of human history: Hitler meeting the victims of Auschwitz, Stalin those of the Gulag; the victims of Hiroshima confronting those who developed the bomb and ordered its use; suicide bombers and child abusers meeting their victims; the unborn facing a society that did not welcome them into life; and the millions of children of the poor Global South who were cheated out of their rights facing the citizens of the rich Global North.²⁰

¹⁷ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 192.

¹⁸ First developed in Józef Niewiadomski, “Hoffnung im Gericht. Soteriologische Impulse für eine dogmatische Eschatologie,” in *Herbergsuche. Auf dem Weg zu einer christlichen Identität in der modernen Kultur*, Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1999). Enhanced in Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis.”

¹⁹ Niewiadomski, “Hoffnung im Gericht,” 169.

²⁰ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 116.

All who violated my rights, wronged me, whose victim I've become stand before me as perpetrators. Being their victim, I will be able to give a verdict on their justice. It is up to me. What will I demand? Probably, I'll insist on my rights and demand retribution and revenge. Simultaneously, I will be confronted by all victims of my life, my lies, my accusations. They will have the same right over against me. Probably, they will also insist on their rights, their retribution and their revenge; I, however, will profess my innocence by accusing others in order to deflect the retribution This could become a *dies irae*—a day of wrath—in the best Biblical tradition, if all depended on us alone on this day and if this judgment were only a self-judgment. Then humanity ... would, without any contribution by God, condemn each other into hell (of self-righteousness, accusation, deflection, and lies). Everybody would insist on their victimhood, demand retribution, and deflect the retribution directed towards them onto others.²¹

However, it will not depend on humans alone. Another, decisive element in this universal reckoning will be “God’s immeasurable charity and readiness to forgive,”²² which from a Christian perspective is experienced by meeting Christ as a forgiving judge.²³ Niewiadomski speculates that when faced with Christ’s model of forgiveness, “hardly anybody will be able to deny forgiveness and to insist anachronistically on their rights and their retribution.”²⁴ He concludes his article by expressing his conviction that “this confrontation will be painful and ‘as through fire’ ... but this doesn’t change anything about the hope that the day of wrath will be changed into a day of forgiveness, grace and mercy.”²⁵ Niewiadomski here alludes to 1 Cor 3:15, the passage that was generally used as the Biblical

²¹ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 116, my translation.

²² Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 117, my translation.

²³ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 116–117.

²⁴ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 117, my translation.

²⁵ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 117, my translation.

foundation for the theology of purgatory, and recommends rethinking the theology of purgatory from this perspective.²⁶

Judgment and Purgatory

On the basis of the analysis thus far, dramatic theology enables us to imagine the last judgment and purgatory in a new way: A day of reckoning between all gathered, in which everybody voices their pain and anger about having been wronged and accuses the perpetrators. This accusation serves the indispensable element of justice. Justice demands that all crimes, all sins, and their perpetrators be uncovered. Victims' accusations must be heard, including those that have not been attended to by any attorney, judge, or counselor. The grievances and hurts of those who have been sidelined as untrustworthy witnesses or as children who don't know what they are saying will be listened to. In this scenario, they will be heard by God, by all gathered, and—among them—by the offenders themselves who will have a hard time closing their ears in the presence of God. That these accusations will be permeated and amalgamated with anger, wrath, even hatred seems only likely in all cases where a process of healing and reconciliation could not yet take place, and such a process could hardly occur when the perpetrators closed themselves to it or when they had already died. At the last judgment, they cannot avoid this reckoning anymore.

However, if we move on to only employing God's mercy, we might cause the impression that once again the grievance and pain of the victims are overruled by some higher power. According to the Creed and its Biblical basis, the Parable of the Last Judgment (Matt 25:31–46), Christ will be the judge. If we take this seriously and account for him in his dual nature of divine and human, we might avoid this impression of a divine overruling.²⁷

²⁶ Niewiadomski, "Hoffnung im Gericht," 185, n. 202.

²⁷ For the following see: Nikolaus Wandering, *Die Sündenlehre als Schlüssel zum Menschen. Impulse K. Rabners und R. Schwagers zu einer Heuristik theologischer Anthropologie*, Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2003), 374–386. Also: Niewiadomski,

Jesus's Role in Judgment

Let us look at Jesus, the human being, and his role in that judgment. As he is equal to us in all but sin, he has wronged no one. Thus, no one can rightfully accuse him. Jesus, however, could accuse those who have wronged him. Here, we may first think of those who were responsible and those who were instrumental for his crucifixion. This would seem strange after having already prayed to the Father for forgiveness for them (Luke 23:34). It seems more plausible that he will act in accordance with his own prayer and will forgive.

The Parable of the Last Judgment, however, indicates that Christ has been affected by much more than the sins directed to him during his earthly ministry. If everything that was done or not done to one of the least brothers and sisters of Jesus was done to him (cf. Matthew 25:40–45), this comes to bear in the last judgment as well. Can Christ also simply forgive these misdeeds? On the one hand, this seems to follow from his prayer for forgiveness and the identification it conveyed. On the other hand, the Parable of the Last Judgment clearly states that the Son of Man will send some into the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Is there a way out of this conundrum?

I argue that it is here that the transformation that the crucifixion brought about, exemplified by the Parable of the Tenants, becomes clear. Schwager showed that Christ included even the perpetrators in his identification as he realized they were also victims of sin. So, the event of the crucifixion transcends the clear-cut separation between sheep and goats that the parable espouses and shows that—certainly to a lesser or greater degree—all human beings (except Christ and his mother) belong to both camps.²⁸ If Jesus had not undergone the Passion with the love of enemies then the condemnation of the “goats” would follow. But Christ’s substitution on the cross has subverted this outcome just as it has transformed the ending of the Parable of the Tenants.

“Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 117.

²⁸ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 196.

Turning Towards Reconciliation

Returning to Niewiadomski's image of that day of wrath, we can imagine Jesus, the human, standing among all the accusing and deflecting victims of sin, and he and his mother being the only victims who are not also perpetrators. Jesus, the human, does not accuse and demand retribution but offers forgiveness and aims at reconciliation. As this is the last judgment, the identity of Jesus, the human, with Christ, the divine Son, is revealed to all participants. They realize that, through Jesus, God invites to a universal reconciliation, which, however, can only occur after all grievances have found expression. What would be demanded for this to occur?

First of all, as already stated, all sins and crimes would need to be unveiled, all pain and suffering be named. If they had not been uncovered before, they will certainly be now as "nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17). Also, all entanglements in sin, all inhibitions of freedom, all consequences of original sin that limited the responsibility of evil-doers will become visible. Then victims and perpetrators alike will encounter the unbelievable reaction of Jesus: his willingness to forgive what he suffered on the cross and by identifying with all victims of human sin.

It seems likely that the other victims would not just watch this as unconcerned bystanders. Christ has identified with them in the most direct manner. Thus, his identification will be most palpable to those who have been victimized most. Just as during the crucifixion Jesus did not direct his desire at his enemies but at his divine Father, so that he as victim did not directly confront his persecutors but met them mediated through his relationship with the Father,²⁹ so now the victims in this process need not face their persecutors directly but mediated through Christ. This might enable them too to see where their tormentors were in fact victims of sin themselves. Hopefully this enables them to slowly move closer to

²⁹Niewiadomski, "Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis," 112.

healing and thus also to move closer to becoming able to forgive. They are face to face with the one who completely identified with them, the one whom nobody can accuse and who could accuse (almost) everybody yet does not accuse but forgive. Hopefully, this would move them in a kind of positive mimesis³⁰ and empower them to offer forgiveness too.

Furthermore, the perpetrators would be faced with Christ's forgiveness and, if and when it develops, also by their victims' readiness to forgive. By no means does that mean that they have already finished the process of judgment. The offer of forgiveness is only the first step; acceptance of that offer is needed to turn it into realized forgiveness, and the constitution of a new kind of relationship between perpetrator and victim is needed to reach reconciliation. Acceptance of forgiveness presupposes acceptance of one's guilt. It means giving up all pretexts, excuses, belittling, denial, and deflection of guilt and accepting that responsibility "for which there is and can be no longer any substitution."³¹ It means suffering the accusations and accepting the burden of pain one has caused others. If persons who are entangled in sin succeed in moving—slowly and painfully—towards that attitude, redemption will occur. If that happened to all of humanity, universal salvation would occur. This is the hope that such a theological vision leads to.

Judgment as Purgatory

So far, I have imagined the last judgment. In classical belief, the last judgment occurs after purgatory. So, why do I still emphasize purgatory? It is obvious that the last judgment, as imagined here, is not the instantaneous pronouncement of a divine verdict. It is an arduous process in which the final verdict is being revealed. The boundaries that separated purgatory from the last judgment in traditional imagery have been deliberately blurred here as both purgatory and the last judgment become

³⁰ Petra Steinmair-Pösel, "Original Sin, Grace, and Positive Mimesis," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 14 (2007): 1–12.

³¹ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 192.

aspects of one complicated process that certainly requires psychological time but not necessarily chronological time. Similarly, the distinction between individual judgment at death, the intermediate state until the last judgment, and the final judgment is deliberately blurred. These theologoumena highlight important aspects of the process that we imagined, but they need not be distinct entities. They can be viewed as stages of a single process that we may call purgatory or judgment.³² The term “judgment” emphasizes that this process is not indefinite. It comes to an end, and its outcome then stands for eternity. The term “purgatory” emphasizes that while it is going on, changes are still occurring that can be described by the notion of purification in two ways: being purified from the stains of one’s own sins and also being purified from the painful residue of the crimes committed against oneself.³³

³² By deliberately blurring these boundaries, it also seems possible to avoid the discussions about whether there is a diastasis between individual death and the resurrection of the body and about the state of the soul that have determined much of the discussion in German-speaking theology of the late twentieth century. The proposed conception takes up the most important concerns of both sides of this debate: it is the human person that enters this process, not just a disembodied soul, but the salvation of this person is not complete unless all the relationships of this person will have been evaluated and incorporated into the resurrection body. I will leave the ontological implications of this to another discussion.

³³ Tradition also stipulates that some will move into Heaven immediately after death, others might be condemned into Hell immediately after death, and all those who enter Purgatory will eventually enter Heaven. Can our model accommodate for that too? We are not talking about locations but of the finalization of a human person’s relationship to God and to the rest of humanity. It is possible that some need not enter into this painful process because there is nothing they have to suffer through—or because they have already done so during their pilgrimage on earth. So, these go “straight to Heaven.” For most people purification might be necessary, but it will eventually lead them to reconciliation, to “Heaven.” Some seem to have taken final decisions against the love of God and of neighbor. For them, the presence of Christ, who is offering his forgiveness, is a challenge to probe the finality of that decision. And there might be some whose rejection of love was indeed final. For them, the process would not lead to reconciliation but to eternal self-exclusion; for them, the described process is not Purgatory but the onset of “Hell.” That implies, of course, that while the process is still going on, a human person does not know whether this is Purgatory or already the beginning of “Hell.” This will only be revealed when the process ends. This does not contradict the conviction that God knows.

Sexual Abuse, Purgatory, and Reconciliation

When applying this model to the case of the sexual abuse of minors, there arises a grave problem. The proposed model of human self-judgment implies that a perpetrator who would be unable to accept forgiveness could not be saved. Does this also imply that a victim who would eventually not be able to forgive could not be saved either? And is this not the utmost re-victimization that threatens victims of grave crimes with damnation for their inability to forgive? This issue is already implied by the open ending of the Parable of the Merciful Father (Luke 15:11–32): When the “good” son becomes angry at his father’s treating his brother to a great feast and refuses to go in, the father comes out to convince him to join the feast. Yet, the parable does not tell us whether this succeeds. It is not a question of not being allowed in. It is a question of not wanting to go in and celebrate with those who have wronged him. But the interpretation of this parable also must take into account the transformation that occurred through the cross and Easter. Yet the objection looms large. For many survivors of sexual abuse and their advocates, the mere mention of the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation arouses objection, even resentment. Telling them, then, that their eternal salvation is dependent on it, seems an absolute outrage.³⁴

A first response is that this is in fact what Niewiadomski’s imagery of the last judgment presupposes. I emphasized that accusation should be seen as fulfilling an important task: justice. However, leaving it there would not just make reconciliation impossible. It would freeze victims in their victimhood and would act contrary to their healing processes. One reason why the reaction to any suggestion of reconciliation is so harsh might be that the suggestion often comes prematurely and is perceived as self-serving. When an organization whose representatives were offenders, that protected offenders and thus became an offender herself, then preaches forgiveness to the survivors, this can only arouse rejection. Yet, proclaiming the message of forgiveness belongs to the core of the Church’s

³⁴ Niewiadomski, “Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis,” 105–106; for references 118, nn. 4–5.

mission. By destroying the Church's ability to plausibly fulfill this mission, the abuse and cover up crisis threatens the very essence of Christian faith.

To be clear, I am not talking of reconciliation today or tomorrow but of reconciliation at the end of a long arduous process that could continue beyond this life and then is called "purgatory." It is a reconciliation that is probably more akin to a resurrection than to a mere continuation of what was before. This eschatological horizon might open up possibilities that remain closed in the here and now. In this image, it is neither the Church who preaches forgiveness nor God who demands it. It is Christ, the innocent victim, who grants it and offers his own model to be emulated by other victims through the Holy Spirit, the defender of victims.³⁵

This process can already begin in this life: through prayer, the Eucharist, and substitution by Christians living the message of reconciliation;³⁶ in counseling and therapy sessions, in mediated confrontation with those perpetrators who allow themselves to be confronted, and perhaps also in approaches to human justice that move away from retributive towards restorative justice.³⁷ Avoiding the pains of these kinds of purification would mean remaining a prisoner to the pain and resentment that the perpetrators have caused. If it is true that a victim remains defined as a victim and entangled with their perpetrator as long as they are dominated by hate against the perpetrator, then victims become real survivors only by allowing themselves to be liberated from this entanglement, by being healed of their hate. A very striking example of overcoming this kind of entanglement is given by Eva Mozes Kor, who as a child survived Auschwitz together with her sister as so-called "Mengele twins": twins who were abused for medical experiments by the Nazi doctor

³⁵ Niewiadomski, "Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis," 115–117.

³⁶ Niewiadomski, "Opfer-Täter-Verhängnis," 117.

³⁷ Of the vast field of publications and websites, I only want to refer to two here: Tom Roberts, "Justice for all: Restorative Justice Goes beyond Retribution," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 4, 2021, www.ncronline.org/news/justice/justice-all-restorative-justice-goes-beyond-retribution; Clare McGlynn, Nicole Westmarland, and Nikki Godden, "I Just Wanted Him to Hear Me': Sexual Violence and the Possibilities of Restorative Justice," *Journal of Law and Society* 39, no. 2 (2012): 213–240, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6478.2012.00579.x.

Josef Mengele. When she discovered that she could forgive one of Mengele's accomplices, she realized that this finally empowered her:

I ... discovered ... what power I actually possessed. I had the power to forgive! And no one could give me this power, no one could take it away. It was solely in my control and I could use it however I saw fit. An amazing discovery. Up to this point in time, I had simply reacted to everything that people had done to me. I had acted just like victims tend to act. They do not feel like they have control over their lives. So, instead, they react to what other people say and do. Now it suddenly dawned on me: I am in control of my life. *I have power.*³⁸

She then mentally applies this even to Mengele himself:

The idea that I could somehow gain the upper hand over Josef Mengele was an incredible experience for me. I was no longer the victim, passive and helpless, but the active person. That made me feel powerful. I realized that forgiveness was freeing—not for the offender, but for the victim. I didn't need to get revenge, retaliation, or atonement in order to experience this sublime feeling. ... I would forgive Dr. Mengele and finally be free. That was my personal epiphany.³⁹

That way, forgiveness is not viewed as a demand on the survivors. It is seen as an act of self-liberation and empowerment for them. Some, although few, like Eva Kor, are able to act that way even during their life-time. Why should there not be hope that all will be able to do so at the final judgment? When we talk of the hope for universal salvation, this is not an unfounded hope. This hope comes from the knowledge that, while God is “that greater than which nothing can be conceived,” Jesus in his crucifixion has fallen lower than any human can fall.⁴⁰ Because Jesus has identified with

³⁸ Eva Mozes Kor, *The Power of Forgiveness* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2021), 94.

³⁹ Mozes Kor, *The Power of Forgiveness*, 95.

⁴⁰ Józef Niewiadomski, “Vom Geheimnis königlicher Hingabe. Predigt zum Christkönigssonntag,” November 21, 2021, www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/texte/1359.html.

the victims of sin in a way that cannot be surpassed, his identification encompasses and permeates their wounds and their pain in a way that we cannot fathom before we meet him in the last judgment. But then, we may hope, the victims of these crimes will be suffused by Christ's love for them but also by his love for the perpetrators. Therefore, it may be hoped that—as far-fetched and inconceivable as this sounds now—it might be less difficult for the abused children to forgive their tormentors than for those tormentors to accept that offer. In a similar way, it might be less difficult for the victims of the great crimes of humanity to forgive their murderers than for the murderers to accept that offer.

Therefore, I argue that the idea of purgatory can help to open up a horizon for survivors of grave crimes, such as sexual abuse, by promising them that they will be heard and by expressing hope that they might eventually be healed. This cannot be an excuse for neglecting steps to safeguard minors or to bring offenders to justice here and now. But it can give hope when—as often is the case—human justice proves inadequate.



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Chapter 20: Mission, Reform, and Suffering: The Challenge of the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Church

Neil Ormerod

It is hard to imagine anything so antithetical to the mission of the Church as the sexual exploitation of the vulnerable. The Church's claim to promote the mission of Jesus Christ in the world rings hollow in light of the evidence of abuse we now know. There is an old maxim that evil is the perversion of the good; the greater the good, the greater the perversion involved. To so undermine the mission of the church, which entails the good of salvation, is a terrible evil, and it arises not just from the abuse but from the complicity of those who protected the perpetrators "for the good of the Church."¹ That so many of those in leadership acted the ways they have represents a cataclysmic collapse of their moral horizon. How has such an appalling situation been allowed to occur, when even a cursory reading of the Gospel should have brought it to a halt? The Gospel of Jesus has been replaced with an anti-Gospel of an anti-Christ where protecting the power and reputation of the Church has replaced the proclamation of God's kingdom.

In attempt to address this, I consider three issues. The first is the nature of the Church's mission and its relation to the mission of Jesus. This may help uncover at least one of the ways in which that mission may be perverted. Second, I consider the question of redemptive suffering in the

¹ Ample evidence for the damage done both by perpetrators and those complicit in subsequent cover-ups can be found in the report of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Volume 16 of seventeen deals specifically with religious institutions, including the Catholic Church in Australia. Vol. 16 consists of three books, the second of which deals solely with the Catholic Church. It is over 900 pages long. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report*, vol. 16: *Religious Institutions Book 2* (Australia: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), www.childabuse.royalcommission.gov.au/final-report.

Church's mission. And finally, I turn to the nature of reform in the Church, identifying three dimensions of possible reform.

Mission

As Pope Francis continues to make clear, mission lies at the heart of the Church, "I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 27). This impulse to move the Church beyond itself was even evident in his pre-conclave speech where he spoke of the dangers of a Church becoming "self-referential," of a "theological narcissism" overtaking the Church. Here, he is following the teaching of Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* where he taught that the "Church is missionary by her very nature" (no. 5). This insight into the missionary nature of the Church has been central to my ecclesiological research. In my book *Re-Visioning Ecclesiology*, I spell out five theses on the relationship between the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church.²

*Thesis 1. The mission of the Church is the historical prolongation of the mission of Jesus.*³

The purpose of this thesis is to shift attention away from the Church itself and towards the person of Jesus, from ecclesiology to Christology. While we believe as a matter of faith that Jesus is the unique and irreplaceable redeemer of humanity, we also accept that while Jesus's death may have a universal efficacy, it is not universally effective. There is an ongoing and necessary work that endures in his name, a community of believers who effect Jesus's presence to the world to carry on his mission. This body of believers makes up in our own bodies what is lacking in the redemptive suffering of Christ (Colossians 1:24). Inasmuch as the mission of Jesus is incomplete in its effects if not its efficacy, the Church's mission is to carry on that task and realize it in human history.

² Neil Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

³ Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 103–105.

*Thesis 2. The mission of Jesus is the advancement of the Kingdom of God amongst humanity.*⁴

One of the advances in Christological thought in the last century has been a renewed appreciation of the role of the Kingdom of God in the mission of Jesus. It is the central motif around which his earthly mission orbits. From the beginning of his preaching (“the kingdom of God is at hand,” Mark 1:15) to his final actions in the last supper (“I shall never again drink wine until the Kingdom of God comes,” Mark 14:25), the Kingdom is the core of Jesus’s preaching. Similarly, all Jesus’s miracles, his table-fellowship, and his reaching out to the poor and marginalized of society are about the in-breaking of the Kingdom amongst humanity. Jesus in fact embodies the Kingdom of God on earth. Nonetheless the notion of the Kingdom of God is heuristic, capturing something like “total human flourishing.” While this can be expressed in symbolic and metaphorical language with some ease, it is much more difficult to give an explanatory account of its meaning.⁵

*Thesis 3. Jesus achieves the advancement of the Kingdom of God through a redemptive suffering which overcomes evil through self-sacrificing love.*⁶

This is the heart of Jesus’s message. The advancement of the Kingdom of God requires more than just the doing of good deeds and avoiding evil. One has to ask what sort of good Jesus does and why he chose to do that particular sort of good. According to the Gospel accounts, the religious authorities of Jesus’s time had become agents of oppression, laying heavy burdens of people’s backs but not helping them carry their burdens. The religion they promoted was no longer an agent of salvation but of oppression. Jesus identified himself with the victims of those oppressive

⁴ Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 105–108.

⁵ Much of the methodological burden in *Re-Visioning the Church* is an attempt to move towards such an explanatory account, drawing on the work of Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁶ Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 108–110.

forces, he confronted and challenged that evil, and it is that evil which attempted to destroy him on the cross. Jesus transforms this mindless fate into life-giving sacrament by making of his death a symbol of the power of love, a new covenant in his blood, with the power to overcome evil through a free act of loving self-sacrifice. This is the Eucharistic mystery enacted in the Last Supper and embodied in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

*Thesis 4. The mission of the Church is the transformation of the present situation to a new situation which more closely approximates the Kingdom of God on earth, through the promotion of a self-sacrificing love which overcomes the evils of the present through redemptive suffering.*⁷

The Church will be an agent of personal, cultural, and social change as it seeks to move history towards a new situation that more closely approximates the Kingdom of God. As John Fuellenbach notes, “The church as the community of those who have been chosen to carry on the vision that Jesus conveyed must define itself in relation to the Kingdom, which is meant for humankind and the whole of creation.”⁸ As with the mission of Jesus this transformation will not be achieved through domination and power games—“He will not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick” (Matthew 12:20, quoting Isaiah 42:3). Its way will be the way of discipleship, of redemptive suffering. In a sinful world moral integrity comes at a price, a price Jesus did not shirk. It will be the same for his followers. In fact, “The tradition is unanimous that ... Jesus left His disciples in no doubt that they were committing themselves to suffering if they followed Him.”⁹ It is through such a suffering that we make up in our own bodies what is lacking in the redemptive suffering of

⁷ Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 110–111.

⁸ John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 15.

⁹ K.H. Rengstorf, “Mathetes,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), quoted in David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 38.

Christ (Colossians 1:24) and so redeem the present age (Ephesians 5:8–16, Colossians 4:5–6).

*Thesis 5: The Church is empowered in its mission by the gift of the Holy Spirit poured into the heart of believers, giving them a love which more powerful than evil, a fidelity to the mission of Jesus, and a hope that transcends all human expectations.*¹⁰

Just as Jesus received the Spirit from the Father without reserve (John 3:34) to carry out the mission of the Father, so too those who carry on the mission of Jesus must be empowered by his Spirit. This Spirit is the “love of God poured into our hearts” (Romans 5:5), ensuring that our starting point is not self-aggrandizement or power but love of God and neighbor. Without love as our starting point, we are a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1). The Spirit also empowers us to remain faithful to the mission, giving us confidence that we can meet the challenges we shall face (Matthew 10:20). The Spirit comes to us in our weakness (Romans 8:27ff), conforming us to the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). As a spirit of consolation, the Holy Spirit fixes us on our ultimate hope, a hope beyond all human expectations, a hope revealed in Jesus’s resurrection, that God is at work in human history raising up the lowly and rejected one and making him the Lord of History.

Here I focus on the fourth of these theses because I think it helps clarify how a body such as the church which is committed to the mission can go so radically astray. The language of self-sacrifice and redemptive suffering can too easily be perverted if sufficient attention and self-reflection is not paid to the problems this causes. At the heart of this perversion lies a perverted understanding of God, wherein God is confused with the Accuser (Satan).¹¹ When this happens, religion becomes demonic, and,

¹⁰ Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 111–112.

¹¹ See Neil Ormerod, *Creation, Grace and Redemption* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 84–87.

given the scale of damage done within the Church by the abuse scandal, we should not shy away from such an implication.

The duality in the language of sacrifice needs to be made explicit. There is what our liturgy would call a “sacrifice of praise,” the willing sacrifice of self to achieve a greater good—celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, personal hardship for the sake of family, military service to protect one’s country—that is good, noble, and praiseworthy. This willing sacrifice in the face of manifest evil has the power to turn around moral collapse, by revealing the heart of love, that turns the other cheek, that goes the extra mile, that returns insult with prayer. Jesus’s fidelity to his mission leads inevitably to his suffering and death on the cross, not because God wills it, but because of the sinfulness of human beings. Jesus’s love unto death is a revelation of the depths of divine love for humankind: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

However, there is a darker form of sacrifice, where we sacrifice the other to meet our own desires—the wife beater, the rapist, the narcissist—a sacrifice that perpetuates the spiral of violence and destruction in personal and social relations. Such people are willing to sacrifice anything and everything to protect themselves from the truth of their own failures to love. We see such a sacrificial attitudes writ large in the dictators and aspiring dictators who are regularly emerging in our troubled times. We also find it evident in the church: first, in those priests and religious who have sexually abused their victims, sacrificing them at the altar of their own self-gratification; secondly by church authorities, who have further sacrificed these same victims to protect the “good name” of the church, echoing the stance of Caiaphas, “Better one man die for the sake of the nation” (John 11:50).

The first type of sacrifice grows out of a fullness of love, the second out of the emptiness of self-hatred. The God who evokes the first is life-giving and generous; a God who demands the second is a moral monster. Indeed, soteriologies that paint the suffering and death of Jesus as a placation of an angry god are blasphemous, confusing God with Satan, confusing the

voice of love that says “Yes” to the universe with the voice of accusation, sowing doubt, shame, and self-loathing.¹² Historically the Church has regularly fallen into this perversion concerning the nature of God, corralling people into obedience through fear and punishment. From this perspective, it is relatively easy for the Church to cast the victim of abuse as the problem, to take to itself the voice of accusation towards the victim while protecting the perpetrator as “one of us.” The victim carries shame, while the perpetrator is offered therapy.¹³

This willingness to sacrifice the “other” to protect oneself personally or institutionally is the antithesis of the Church’s mission. Yet, this has been the recurrent experience of the victims of clergy sexual abuse. They do not find in the Church the consoling healing love of Jesus but a voice of accusation and intimidation seeking to silence the victims. The Gospels present Jesus as warning his early community of the dangers of the institution becoming an instrument of power and prestige: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:25–26). Yet, in the early decades of the church, the author of 1 Clement depicts those who

¹² Lonergan notes the ways in which this confusion occurs but provides no further analysis of it. See Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *The Redemption*, ed. Robert M. Doran, Jeremy D. Wilkins, and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 153–167.

¹³ Shame, loss of self-esteem, and guilt are commonly reported by survivors of clergy abuse. See Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs, “Listening to Male Survivors of Church Sexual Abuse: Voices from Survivors of Sodalicio Abuses in Peru,” *The Canonist: Journal of the Canon Law Society Australia and New Zealand* 8 (2017): 135–167; Jennifer Beste, “Envisioning a Just Response to the Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Theological Studies* 82, no. 1 (2021): 29–54: “If we take seriously trauma theory’s insight about the crucial role communities play in exacerbating or ameliorating traumatization, it becomes clear that Christian communities’ inadequate pastoral response to abuse allegations or other forms of traumatic injury contributes significantly to survivors’ posttraumatic sequelae and suffering. Furthermore, the experience of institutional betrayal can increase their PTSD symptoms, feelings of inadequacy, self-deprecation, distress, anxiety, depression, shame, self-blame, poor physical health, suicidal ideation, and suicide.”

sought to overturn the existing church leaders as more interesting in power and self-aggrandizement than genuine service of their flocks. It is not difficult to find examples throughout all the Church's history where this has been the case. The problem is recurrent. For all this though, there is a constant failure on the part of the Church to recognize it and deal with it in a similarly recurrent fashion. What is needed is ongoing reform.

Redemptive Suffering

The history of clerical sexual abuse is one of suffering. As documented in the Australian Royal Commission and in the vast literature of sexual assault, victims suffer long-term ongoing trauma as a result of their abuse. I vividly remember one survivor of childhood abuse speaking of regularly waking dripping in sweat after a nightmare, some fifty years after his abuse by a priest in an orphanage. Ironically, this survivor remained celibate since all his associations with sex were painful. He did not want to inflict that on anyone, while the priest who abused him ostensibly vowed to the celibate life lived out a lie. After leaving the orphanage, this survivor was reunited with his birth mother, saved her from an abusive relationship, and provided financial support raising his two step-sisters. With counselling, he sought to address the impact of the abuse he endured and worked to bring the Church and state authorities to account for his suffering. He gave his suffering a redemptive meaning by working to address the problem of abuse.¹⁴

While it is possible for victims to take on this suffering and turn it into a creative redemptive response, as we find in various survivor networks who work for healing and justice, for the most part, this imposed suffering

¹⁴ The victim, David Owen, was part of the Case Study 26 of the Royal Commission. His evidence can be found in Royal Commission into Institution Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Public Hearing—Case Study 26*, by Rockhampton Magistrates Court. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2015, www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Case%20Study%2026%20-%20Transcript%20-%20St%20Josephs%20orphanage%20Neerkol%20-%20Day%20C072%20-%2016042015.pdf, 15–37. My wife and I have had many conversations with David about his abuse.

is simply degrading, dehumanizing, and destructive of people's lives. Such destructive suffering is not redemptive but rather its antithesis, the demonic suffering imposed by the powerful to protect their privilege and reputation, both personal and institutional. While it is possible that victims become the agents of institutional transformation, suffering not only their original abuse but also the power of the institution turned against them, genuine change needs to come from within the institution itself, when those who hold institutional responsibilities begin the painful yet redemptive work of reform.

Consider the transformation of Bishop Geoffrey Robinson from an anxious defender of the Church's privileges to become a fierce advocate on behalf of sexual abuse survivors within the Australian Church.¹⁵ In the early 1990s, he was invited by a network of survivors to meet with a small group to discuss their situation.¹⁶ He heard the pain of the survivors, their desire to hold the Church to account, their need for pastoral support, and for some their ongoing love of the Church. It was a transformative event, one of many I am sure, but he went on to play a major role in the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in the development of a new response to sexual abuse survivors and a new attitude towards them within the Church.¹⁷ It involved much personal suffering for him. It assisted him in

¹⁵ Bishop Robinson was auxiliary bishop in the Sydney Archdiocese from 1984 to 2004. When he retired, he wrote on the need to reform the church and continued his advocacy work for survivors. He also gave testimony to the Australian Royal Commission. See Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

¹⁶ While I was not present at the meeting, my wife Thea was one of the survivors present. Much of what I state here is personal recollection from various conversations with the bishop over the years.

¹⁷ Particularly the two documents, National Committee for Professional Standards, *Towards Healing*, by Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia (Alexandria, New South Wales: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2010), www.catholic.org.au/documents/1346-towards-healing-2010-2/file, and National Committee for Professional Standards, *Integrity in Ministry*, by Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia (Alexandria, New South Wales: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2004), www.catholic.org.au/documents/1344-integrity-in-ministry-2010-1/file.

naming his own abuse as a child (not clerical abuse in his case) and later abuse by a priest while a seminarian.¹⁸ More significantly, he experienced isolation within the Bishops Conference for his continued advocacy of survivors and his willingness to advocate for individual survivors. This was a truly redemptive suffering, willingly undergone, to transform the Church to truly live out its mission.

These two cases represent examples of redemptive suffering, a willingness to engage the Church with its failures and seek to change its processes and attitude. In particular, we need more of those in leadership roles such as Bishop Robinson to act as advocates for survivors, despite the ongoing resistance of the Church's institutional structures to hearing the voice of victims. Such people will undoubtedly experience marginalization, but unless a critical mass of those in leadership of the Church are willing to take up this suffering, little will change.

Reform

Reform of any institution is multidimensional.¹⁹ One dimension is personal transformation, a radical shift in the horizon of an individual, a commitment to a new way of life, to new values. Yet, the individual exists within an institutionally pervasive culture, of meanings and values which inform the individual, set expectations and role models, but which the individual may also be able to shift, to become a cultural change agent. Finally, all this will operate within an institutional set of arrangements, or duties, authorities, powers, and routines which are inertially resistant to change. These three dimensions interact in complex ways, shaping and being shaped by one another. All these are evident within the institution of the Church.

¹⁸ After the bishop's death, Michael Kelly, SJ, revealed a story of Robinson's abuse as a student priest in Rome by the spiritual director of students at the seminary (Propaganda Fide College). See Michael Kelly, "Obituary for Bishop Geoff Robinson," *Pearls and Irritations*, January 3, 2021, johnmenadue.com/obituary-for-bishop-geoff-robinson/.

¹⁹ The general structure can be found in Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 279–283.

Religious and Moral Reform

Often calls for reform are about an interior transformation, a radical conversion to the demands of faith and the preaching of the Gospel. They focus on the individual person and their relationship to God and to the good. They demand a higher level of commitment and fervor. While such reforms may create new institutional forms, such as the monasteries and mendicant orders, these reforms generally leave existing structures in place, but from those within them, a higher level of spiritual and moral performance is called for.

We find calls for such reform in recent pleas from Pope Francis summoning priests and bishops to be more prayerful, to know the “smell of their sheep,” to put aside the lust for power.²⁰ It is embodied in his own simplicity of life, so evident as archbishop of Buenos Aires and now as pope. A focus on spiritual and moral reform emphasizes the importance of divine grace as the primary agent of reform. Any attempt at a larger reform that ignores the importance of such a personal transformation will fail. As Gandhi once noted, we keep on dreaming of institutional forms so perfect that no one needs to be good.²¹ Such dreams are bound to fail.

There are at least two ways in which the call for personal reform can be subversive of genuine reform. The first is to conflate such personal reform with a promotion of more ardent piety. In relation to the sexual abuse issue, ardent displays of piety have proved ineffective in either preventing abuse or in reducing coverup. Certainly, in the Australian context some of the worst cases of abuse arose in religious orders with strongly pious routines.²² Overt piety does not equate with religious and moral

²⁰ See Robin Gomes, “Pope to Priests: Be ‘Shepherds with “the Smell of Sheep,””” *Vatican News*, June 7, 2021, www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-06/pope-francis-priests-students-church-louis-french.html.

²¹ E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 24, notes “Gandhi used to talk disparagingly of dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.”

²² One can note the abuse of children by the (Irish) Christian Brothers in Western Australia, well before the reforms of Vatican II, which was one of the case studies for the Australian

transformation and can in fact be a mask that covers up corruption. The second way is to use calls for personal reform to deny or circumvent needed cultural and institutional reforms—“reform starts with you” and often ends there. Those who actually exercise power in the church can use a call for personal reform to defuse demands for institutional reform. Rather, personal reform should drive cultural and institutional reform.

Cultural Reform

The cultural life of the Church too can be reformed. Culture is the lived meanings and values from which a society operates, and while the Church is primarily formed by the meanings and values of the Gospel, there are various other elements that arise from the surrounding culture as well as distortions of the key Gospel meanings that can occur. We have noted such distortions in relation to the inversion of the notion of sacrifice and the perversion of power that have been endemic in the Church’s life. The reform of the church’s culture will be driven largely by those who have undertaken their own personal religious and moral reformation in conformity with the demands of the Gospel. Such people drive the reform of our theologies, spiritualities, moral teachings, and popular practices that shape our Church culture.

Again, Pope Francis has been correct in identifying the cultural phenomenon of clericalism as a major contributor to the problem of clergy sexual abuse.²³ Clericalism combines elements of the aura of sacred power, a shared clerical life-style and patterns of formation, and sense of group loyalty that fails to identify perpetrators in their midst and covers up their deeds once they are exposed. Clericalism turns priesthood into a privileged

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. See Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report*, Case Study 11; Similarly, the Australian-established order, the Brothers of Gerard Majella, established post-Vatican II, is noted in the same report.

²³ Kathleen N. Hattrup, “5 of the Many Times Pope Francis has Warned against Clericalism,” *Aleteia*, August 23, 2018, aleteia.org/2018/08/23/5-of-the-many-times-pope-francis-has-railed-against-clericalism/.

status within the Church, rather than a service of the Church. At its heart, clericalism is a subversion of the mission of the Church. This problem is even more exaggerated in relation to episcopal ministry.

Cultural change will generally be initiated by leadership within an institution. Sadly, the last two papacies have elevated men to high office based on perceptions of loyalty wrapped in a form of religious piety that took strongly traditional forms.²⁴ The outcome has done little to address the problem of sexual abuse. If anything, these two papacies exacerbated the problem of clericalism through their writings on priesthood and the liturgy.²⁵ It is not difficult to see in Bergoglio's pre-conclave speech as reaction against these tendencies.

Social Reform

There are reforms which seek to leave existing structures and institutions in place but reform the people who work within them. These are often religious and moral reforms. There are reforms which seek to adapt and augment existing structures to improve their operation and efficiency in achieving their goals. We can call this *minor* social reform. Finally, there are reforms which seek to bring about change in the very institutional forms themselves. We shall call this *major* social reform. Such reforms respond to a major legitimacy crisis in the existing institutions which have lost their social license. Authentic institutional reforms seek to give better expression of the mission of the group; inauthentic reforms seek to maintain the power and privileges of those who manage the institution.

Pope Francis has engaged in various minor social reforms. Some of these have been directed towards assisting the Church's response to the sexual abuse crisis, for example: changes to canon law that clarify reporting

²⁴ One might identify the ascendancy of groups such as Opus Dei, the Legionaries of Christ, and the Neocatechumenal Way. Some such movements have been founded by a charismatic leader who subsequently has been found to have a history of sexual abuse.

²⁵ There is now evidence of Benedict XVI's complicity in covering up sexual abuse while he was archbishop Munich and Freising (1977–1982), in a recent report commissioned by the German Church into abuse in that diocese.

requirements and penalties associated with sexual crimes of clergy;²⁶ removal of bishops who have failed to properly respond to the crisis in their diocese; the promotion of men who share his own pastoral vision for the Church. However, we are yet to see reforms which would fundamentally change the power relationships within the Church. Authority remains firmly in clerical hands, largely to the exclusion of women and the laity more broadly. Pointedly, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse provided empirical evidence that the presence of women in key diocesan structures correlated with significantly lower rates of abuse by clergy. One Australian diocese where the local bishop had brought women into leadership roles (Adelaide) recorded the lowest rates of abuse in comparison with other dioceses in Australia. The report indicated that there had been credible allegations of abuse made against 7.9 percent of diocesan clergy across all dioceses in Australia whereas Adelaide had a figure of 2.4 percent.²⁷

This growing demand for greater lay authority in the structures of the church should not be viewed as in some way parallel to the investiture crisis of the Middle Ages.²⁸ The issue then at stake was to free the Church from the control of the feudal lords of medieval Christendom. The current situation is not about such Church-state relations but about appropriate participation and power sharing by the laity in the running of their common life, for the good governance of the Church. The present governance structures have demonstrably and consistently failed in their handling of the sexual abuse crisis. The current restrictions ensures that clericalism is never challenged, that alternative voices are not heard. This is

²⁶ Brendan Daly, "An Analysis of the Vademecum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," *The Canonist* 11, no. 2 (2020): 197–217.

²⁷ Neil Ormerod, "Sexual Abuse, a Royal Commission, and the Australian Church," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 950–966.

²⁸ For a thorough analysis of Church-State relations in the Middle Ages see Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964). For an analysis, see Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 243–245.

a recurrent institutional failure which requires a recurrent institutional response.

One step could be the approach of Pope Francis to move the Church to a more synodal path, bringing a larger range of voices into what could be called the “strategic aspects” of decision making. But more is needed than such an episodic engagement of non-clerical perspectives; something is needed which engages institutional authority on an everyday level. One such possibility is that of the diocese of Adelaide, noted above. During the hearings of the Australian Royal Commission Archbishop Philip Wilson (2001–2018) noted that on taking over the diocese he instituted canonical changes which secured the position of a diocesan pastoral council with women in its leadership team, who have delegated authority from the bishop.²⁹ He utilized the position of chancellor in the diocese, which is a non-gender-specific canonical position, and has been held by men and women. The diocese currently has two chancellors, one woman and one man, both laypersons. At a more local level, parish pastoral councils should have genuine deliberative authority.

As noted in the opening of this section, these three levels of reform interact in complex ways. However, they also operate on different timeframes. Personal reform can be relatively rapid, particularly where some major conversion experience occurs. Social reform operates on a longer timeframe as changes are implemented and embedded in practice. Cultural reform is the most difficult and longer-term prospect, though without such cultural reform gains at the institutional level will remain precarious. It is the steps Pope Francis is making at the cultural level which in the long run will determine whether his institutional reforms survive his passing on the mantle of the papacy to his successor.

²⁹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report*, vol. 16: *Religious Institutions Book 2*, 665.

Conclusion

When the Church as a whole can adopt paths of redemptive suffering, it can truly return integrity to its mission. For too many survivors, the Church continues not to be a safe place. Only with a full accounting of the past, with genuine repentance for failures both individually and institutionally, and active outreach to survivors of abuse as having an active claim on the pastoral ministry of the Church, only then can the Church be a safe place. Survivors have already suffered more than enough; now the Church is suffering the humiliation of continued exposure of its sins. It can either indulge in self-pity and develop a persecution complex, or it can make of this suffering a redemptive moment for the good of the Church and its mission.



Neil Ormerod is widely published with fourteen books and over eighty-five articles, including in international journals such as *Theological Studies*, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, *Gregorianum*, and *Louvain Studies*. His areas of interest include Trinity, Christology, historical ecclesiology, and the work of Bernard Lonergan. He is Honorary Professor, Alphacrucis University College, Australia. He has been a long-term advocate for clergy abuse survivors.

Chapter 21: Sexual Abuse in an Ecclesial Context and Gender Perspective: Challenges for the Ethical Administration of Power

Claudia Leal

The relative failure of organizations to control the use of power is suggested by numerous data points and phenomena. Among these is the Corruption Perceptions Index, which, in its latest publication, notes the incapacity of a majority of nations to control corruption, understood as the use of public power for private ends.¹ Additionally, the Accountability Index, despite having remained at high and relatively stable levels, nonetheless shows a slight but sustained decline since the year 2012.² This suggests a stagnation or weakening of the restrictions on the use of political power by governments, such as requiring justification of their actions or subjecting them to possible sanctions.

Even if these differences in the above global indices can be considered moderate and refer almost exclusively to the administration of power in the public sector, the reality in Chile presents a more critical situation, one which extends to diverse sectors. The situation in Chile takes place against the backdrop of the profound crisis which we, as a society and moral community, are experiencing as a result of the allegations of sexual abuse in the Chilean Catholic Church,³ as well as serious cases of business

¹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2018* (Transparency International, 2019), www.transparency.org/files/content/pages/CPI_2018_Executive_Summary_EN.pdf.

² For more information, see the database *Country-Date: V-Dem V9*, www.v-dem.net/en/data/archive/previous-data/data-version-9/.

³ “Mapa chileno de los delitos de abuso sexual y de conciencia cometidos en entornos eclesíasticos,” Red De Sobrevivientes Chile, www.redsobrevivientes.org/post/mapa-abusos; Comisión UC Para El Análisis De La Crisis De La Iglesia Católica En Chile, *Comprendiendo La Crisis De La Iglesia En Chile* (Santiago, Chile: Pontificia Universidad Católica De Chile, 2020), www.uc.cl/site/assets/files/11465/documento-de-analisis-comprendiendo-la-crisis-

corruption,⁴ irregularities in municipalities and the police,⁵ and significant increases in the number of complaints of sexual harassment since 2017.⁶

In this essay, I examine the exercise of power through the lens of disciplines such as psychology, ethics, and theology. I put these disciplines in dialogue with each other with the goal of fundamentally diagnosing the flaws present in the usual evaluation of the exercise of institutional power, which are emphasized when we focus on the phenomenon of sexual abuse. Based on this diagnosis and the reflections of some Latin American ecclesiologists, I propose the necessity of incorporating a gender perspective into the analysis of power. This not only enables an understanding of abuses of power when women exercise or suffer it but also overcomes two incorrect comprehensions regarding abuses of power: first, the assumption that, in order to do away with abuse, it is enough to destroy the site of power, and second, understanding the abuse of power as a horrible or monstrous phenomenon alien to our daily experience of social life.

Some Considerations from Organizational Psychology

Power is intrinsic to social life and, as such, quintessential for organizations.⁷ For this reason, it is difficult to delimit power as an object

de-la-iglesia-en-chile.pdf?it=site/assets/files/11465/documento-de-analisis-comprendiendo-la-crisis-de-la-iglesia-en-chile.pdf.

⁴ Umut Aydın and Nicolás Figueroa, “The Chilean Anti-Cartel Experience: Accomplishments and Challenges,” *Review of Industrial Organization* 54, no. 2 (2019): 327–352.

⁵ Eduardo Engel, “Políticas anticorrupción en Chile: ¿Cómo estamos?” *Mensaje* 67, no. 668 (2018): 16–19.

⁶ Pía Toro, “Denuncias por acoso sexual en el trabajo suben 34% en primer trimestre de 2019,” *La Tercera*, April 22, 2019, www.latercera.com/pulso/noticia/denuncias-acoso-sexual-trabajo-suben-34-primer-trimestre-2019/623951/.

⁷ Cf. Miguel C. Moya Morales and Rosa Rodríguez Bailón, “Relaciones de poder y procesos cognitivos,” in *Psicología Social*, ed. José Francisco Morales (Buenos Aires: Editorial Médica Panamericana S.A., 2002), 177–199; Francisco Díaz Bretones et al., *Psicología de las organizaciones* (Barcelona: UOC, 2004); Stephen P. Robbins, Timothy A. Judge, and Javier Enríquez Brito, *Comportamiento organizacional*, 15th ed. (Nuacalpan de Juárez, México: Pearson, 2013); Antonio Marrero Hernández, Leonardo Romero Quintero, and María

of study. Power is often confused with or closely linked to similar constructs such as influence, leadership, status, or authority. However, power differs from these other constructs. Influence does not necessarily suppose the asymmetric capacity of the actors to control the possible results of behavior,⁸ something that occurs in the predominant definitions of power. Leadership is distinguished by the implied congruence of goals or objectives between leader and followers, something that does not necessarily occur in the exercise of power.⁹ With respect to status and authority, both constructs refer to the position of a subject within a hierarchy. Status is perceived on the basis of criteria such as wealth, prestige, privilege, or honor and is not necessarily structurally determined.¹⁰ Authority, understood as the “degree of power associated with a position according to the formal design of the organization,” is, however, structurally determined.¹¹

The definitions of power are many. Nonetheless, we may summarize its predominant characteristics. Power is the potential or capacity to influence, which may or may not be enacted, which an actor or set of actors possesses over another actor or set of actors, such that the ideas of the former be accepted by the latter, or that the behavior of the latter be exercised in a form instrumental to the interests of the former. John French and Bertram Raven identify five bases of power:¹²

Magdalena Castaño Trujillo, *El poder en las organizaciones* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España: Imprenta Pérez Galdóz, SL, 1995).

⁸ Analia Kornblit and Mónica Petracci, “El acoso sexual en el escenario laboral,” in *Psicología Social*, 167–171.

⁹ Robbins, Judge, and Brito, *Comportamiento organizacional*.

¹⁰ Kornblit and Petracci, “El acoso sexual.”

¹¹ Andrés Rodríguez Fernández and Francisco Díaz Bretones, “La organización y la red de organizaciones como unidad de análisis,” in *Psicología de las organizaciones*, ed. Andrés Rodríguez Fernández (Barcelona, España: UOC, 2004), 233–283.

¹² John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, “The Bases of Social Power,” in *Classics of Organization Theory*, ed. D. Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 311-320.

1. Expert power: influence that an actor may exert over others as a result of experience, ability, or knowledge;
2. Referent power: influence that an actor may exert over others based on the admiration that these others develop toward the actor. This type of power is enjoyed by a person who displays characteristics, values, or resources that make others want to be like that person;
3. Legitimate power: power based on norms and expectations. Those who possess legitimate power have the right, for example, to impose orders on others based on cultural values that legitimize their exercise of power, either by the position they hold or by appointment/designation by a legitimate authority;
4. Coercive power: power based on the application, or perceived threat, of possible sanctions in response to disobedience;
5. Reward power: influence that is founded on the capacity of one person to facilitate the successful results desired by others.

In this typology, there tend to be brief—but constant—references to Jeffrey Pfeffer, the principal author on the subject.¹³ Pfeffer is cited by Robbins and Judge, by Marrero Hernández, and by Rodríguez Fernández and Díaz Bretones.

The authors differ in their focus regarding the factors that guide the ethical administration of power. However, the idea of complexity appears as a constant motif for the following reasons.¹⁴ First, the bases of personal power—that is, referent power and expert power in French and Raven's typology—have been shown to be more efficient than the bases of formal power. This means that the most effective types of power are those that are due to individual actions and attributes, which evade organizations' formal mechanisms of control and the assignment of power. In contrast to authority, power, especially personal power, does not demand formal

¹³ The texts that correspond to the references are Jeffrey Pfeffer, "Merger as a Response to Organizational Interdependence," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1972): 382–394; Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations* (Toronto: Pitman, 1981); Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power: Why Some People Have It—And Others Don't* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).

¹⁴ Fernández and Bretones, "La organización."

legitimacy. Therefore, its ethical exercise is difficult to oversee. Second, diagnosing power in an organization demands the evaluation of that body's perception and accuracy of judgement, according to Greiner and Shein.¹⁵ However, these aspects are difficult to determine, since power tends to be hidden and may express itself in various forms, many of which can be deceiving, such as manifestations of status. Third, Rodríguez Fernández and Díaz Bretones recognize that "the exercise of power always implies an ethical attitude which, in the context of organizations, will be determined by the value-system that dominates the concrete culture of each organization."¹⁶ Because changing the culture of an organization is a long and difficult process, according to Robbins and Judge, we interpret the above statement to indicate that the ethical use of power depends on a variable that is difficult to introduce. Culture should be understood as something relatively fixed in the short term. Furthermore, the essential aim of culture in organizations, setting the predominant values, norms, and beliefs of its members, "turns out to be hardly easy, since culture is not a unit and is not shared in the same way by all, on the contrary, there exist different subcultures that seek to be established within dominant ones."¹⁷ Fourth, considering that both the structures of an organization and its activities can be explained in terms of the context in which the organization exists,¹⁸ we cannot expect organizations to be able to absolutely control the values and principles which internally govern the exercise of power, as if they were impermeable to the values and customs of their surroundings. Finally, power differences tend to generate cognitive biases that are difficult to control. These biases operate unconsciously and affect interactions between those with unequal power, tending to encourage social distancing and the maintaining of power differences.¹⁹ Examples of the latter include the negativity bias that often occurs when a

¹⁵ Cited by Fernández and Bretones in "La organización."

¹⁶ Fernández and Bretones, "La organización," 233.

¹⁷ Fernández and Bretones, "La organización," 235.

¹⁸ Allusions to Pfeffer in Fernández and Bretones, "La organización."

¹⁹ Morales and Bailón, "Relaciones de poder."

superior evaluates subordinates. The anxiety that afflicts persons with very little power can reach the point of representing a cognitive demand that diminishes the capacity to process information, worsening performance and hindering empowerment.

Given the aforementioned difficulty in defining an ethical administration of power, it is unsurprising that little attention has been paid to analyzing the abuse of power. However, we identified some elements. First, studies suggest that there are individuals with a so-called *exchange orientation*, in which power activates behaviors with selfish ends, while there are also others with a so-called *communal orientation*, in which power activates behaviors with communitarian ends.²⁰ These orientations result from differences in unconscious associations. Some tests indicate that, in experimental conditions, evaluated persons' orientations correlate significantly with the types of conduct that power activates in them.²¹ Along the same lines, the variable of the *necessity of power*, studied with projective and neurophysiological techniques by McClelland, correlates positively with the interest in using power for one's own benefit and negatively correlates with the use of power to help others.²² Second, studies demonstrate that, in certain men, there is an unconscious link between power and sex.²³ This explains in part, according to Bargh and Raymond, the phenomenon of sexual harassment. Under experimental conditions, the existence of this unconscious link has been successfully evaluated based on the LSH (Likelihood to Sexually Harass) scale, which predicts conduct of sexual harassment.²⁴ Women are sexually harassed by men more

²⁰ Serena Chen, Annette Y. Lee-Chai, and John A. Bargh, "Relationship Orientation as a Moderator of the Effects of Social Power," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80, no. 2 (2001): 173–181.

²¹ Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh, "Relationship orientation."

²² Cited in Fernández and Bretones, "La organización."

²³ Morales and Bailón, "Relaciones de poder."

²⁴ John A. Bargh, Paula Raymond, John B. Pryor, and Fritz Strack, "Attractiveness of the Underling: An Automatic Power → Sex Association and its Consequences for Sexual Harassment and Aggression," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68, no. 5 (1995): 768–781.

frequently,²⁵ and counts vary significantly by country. The concept of power is essential for understanding harassment, and, the more disparate the level of power, the more probable sexual harassment becomes.²⁶ Third, organizational justice appears to significantly moderate intentions to commit sexual harassment, which suggests that a lack of consistent policies and procedures increases the frequency of sexual harassment. Robbins and Judge suggest the following as measures to protect against sexual harassment: a) an active policy in the organization which defines what constitutes sexual harassment, informs workers that they may be dismissed if they harass another person, and establishes procedures for presenting claims; b) assurance for those who complain of harassment that they will not suffer retaliation; c) the investigation of cases and the notification of juridic departments and human resources; d) discipline or dismissal of offenders; and e) the organization of internal seminars to create awareness about diverse aspects of sexual harassment. Finally, it is recommended that certain restrictions on leaders' use of power be in place, since, for example, evidence suggests that leaders with much reward power exercise it in an abusive way to influence others, disregarding the opinions of subordinates, keeping their distance from them, and applying the efforts of subordinates more to the use of their own power than to the motivation of those under them.²⁷

Towards an Ecclesiology of Power

What I have argued thus far may be disregarded by arguing that, in the Catholic Church, power is different than in any other organization. Indeed, many theological sources articulate the legitimacy of ministerial power by contrasting its significance within the Church with the exercise of lay, worldly power. On the contrary, I believe that dialogue with disciplines such as the psychology of organizations leads us to use more

²⁵ Kornblit and Petracci, *El acoso sexual*, 169.

²⁶ Robbins, Judge, and Brito, *Comportamiento organizacional*.

²⁷ Kipnis (1972), cited in Hernández, Quintero, Trujillo, *El poder en las organizaciones*, 69.

precise and sophisticated language to speak about power and, more urgently, helps us to form an “objective suspicion” of charismatic power, that power which is based on personal attributes and which is most common in religious organizations.

Stewardship theory assumes an anthropology that highlights the collaborative and prosocial aspects of people.²⁸ However, evidence from documents focused on the subject put this appealing theory under suspicion and lead to the realization that power tends to change those who possess it in ways that put the morality of conduct at risk. Power reduces one’s tendency to see things from the perspective of others and connect with their emotions.²⁹ Power increases instrumental attention and objectification, understood as the process of relating to others as if they were objects based on how useful they are for one’s own interests.³⁰ Power lowers one’s inhibitions, freeing one from the normative restrictions that usually govern thought, expression, and behavior.³¹

Similarly, Magee, Kilduff & Heath mention other, less direct, mechanisms by which power affects those who possess it by incentivizing immoral conduct within organizations.³² Power may act as a de-socializing

²⁸ James H. Davis, F. David Schoorman, and Lex Donaldson, “Toward a Stewardship Theory of Management,” *The Academy of Management Review* 22, no. 1 (1997): 20–47; Joris Lammers and Diederik A. Stapel, “How Power Influences Moral Thinking,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 97 (2009): 279–289.

²⁹ Adam D. Galinsky, Joe C. Magee, M. Ena Ineri, and Deborah H. Gruenfeld, “Power and Perspectives Not Taken,” *Psychological Science* 17, no. 12 (2006): 1068–1074; Gerben A. van Kleef, Christopher Oveis, Ilmo van der Löwe, Aleksandr LuoKogan, Jennifer Goetz, and Dacher Keltner, “Power, Distress, and Compassion: Turning a Blind Eye to the Suffering of Others,” *Psychological Science* 19, no. 12 (2008): 1315–1322.

³⁰ Deborah H. Gruenfeld, Ena Inesi, Joe C. Magee, and Adam D. Galinsky, “Power and the Objectification of Social Targets,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 1 (2008): 111.

³¹ Dacher Keltner, Deborah H. Gruenfeld, and Cameron Anderson, “Power, Approach, and Inhibition,” *Psychological Review* 110, no. 2 (2003): 265–284.

³² Joe C. Magee, Gavin J. Kilduff, and Chip Heath, “On the Folly of Principal’s Power: Managerial Psychology as a Cause of Bad Incentives,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 31 (2011): 25–41.

mechanism, as it reduces the influence of organizational values previously internalized in socialization processes due to increased correspondence between one's own values and conduct. The changes in cognitive processes that usually occur with the acquisition of power can generate a bias toward results. That is, those who hold power can direct and encourage subordinates with an approach that is too goal-oriented, devoting little attention to ethics or adaptation to organizational values in the means that subordinates use to achieve goals.

It should be noted that the authors closely link power to politics. In general, politics and power are considered integral dimensions of organizational dynamics, but political *behavior* is distinguished as something that exists in varying degrees. Politics includes those activities which develop in order to acquire, increase, and use power and other resources, with the end of obtaining intended results in a situation in which there exists uncertainty or tension about the alternatives to be followed.³³ However, political behavior corresponds, in all the consulted literature, to Alcaide's definition: "Those discretionary activities, undertaken by organizational actors, related to the acquisition, development, and use of power to protect or promote their own interests in a situation of conflict with the interests of others."³⁴

The predominance of political behavior is generally morally condemned, not only because it supposes the orientation, promotion, and protection of one's own ends or conflict but also because it consists, by definition, of the use of non-sanctioned means of influence which are not regulated by the organization. Additionally, it implies a deficit of rationality.³⁵ Further, generally, the more politics is used, the more demographic attributes potentially become the basis of alliances, replacing meritocratic attributes and diversity, thereby weakening performance.

³³ Fernández and Bretones, "La organización"; Hernández, Quintero, Trujillo, *El poder en las organizaciones*; Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*.

³⁴ Manuel Alcaide Castro, *Conflicto y poder en las organizaciones* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1987), 47.

³⁵ Castro, *Conflicto y poder en las organizaciones*.

Considering this, even though political behavior in organizations can be adaptive, the literature suggests strategies that may be enacted to reduce the predominance of political behavior in cases where power is being used unethically through informal channels, highlighting:

1. Structuring organizations in a less pyramidal way, favoring less centralization of power;³⁶
2. Establishing clear systems with objective criteria to evaluate performance;
3. Reducing ambiguity in roles by defining expected behavior;
4. Promoting an organizational culture in which confidence prevails and which rejects a zero-sum focus, rejecting a logic that implies, if someone has succeeded, it is because another has failed.

These considerations raise numerous questions and prompt us to distance ourselves from the measures which, until now, have been adopted as a response to the crisis of sexual abuse in an ecclesial context. It will be necessary to recognize that replacing the church hierarchy does not by itself generate transformations that protect the institution from new cases of abuse of power, whether of a sexual nature or any other.

The case in Chile—as Carlos Schickendantz indicates—leaves us with some ecclesiological lessons³⁷ which confirm the importance of a less-idealized conception of the exercise of power. Naivete must not be replaced with distrust but with the aim to better understand the risks and grey areas that human beings experience in their relationships. Contemporary ecclesiology has taken the important step of affirming that one's image of the Church determines one's style of relationship—*ad intra*

³⁶ Eisenhardt y Bourgeois (1988), cited in Hernández, Quintero, Trujillo, *El poder en las organizaciones*.

³⁷ Schickendantz, Carlos. “Mentalidades elitistas y clericalismo estructural. Algunas lecciones eclesiológicas que deja el ‘caso chileno,’” in *Teología y prevención: Estudio sobre los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia*, ed. Daniel Portillo Trevizo (Bilbao: Sal Terrae, 2020): 95–126. See also John Beal, “‘Tan inertes como un barco pintado sobre un océano pintado’. Un pueblo a la deriva en la calma chicha eclesiológica,” *Concilium* 306 (2004): 111–123.

and *ad extra*—with the community.³⁸ A markedly monolithic, self-centered, and hierarchical image organized around androcentric and patriarchal principles has set in place a style of community relations in which some groups—emblematically, but not exclusively, women—have historically been displaced from pastoral, academic, and administrative spaces. Also in operation is a culture of classes in which those who have received the ministry of orders belong to the first class, while the other members of the faithful belong to the second. Both characteristics of this ecclesial model leave some of its members in a situation of positional vulnerability, a place in which their identity is understood from the vantage point of subordination, independent of their personal characteristics.

Under what conditions and suppositions is it possible to develop an ethos of power modelled after the example of Jesus in the Gospels? This question requires a theoretical framework that permits theology to make use of a phenomenology of church power, a design that is rooted in the content of the typical relations of a Christian community and sheds light on the paradoxes and grey zones to which its members are habitually exposed.

The Female Performance of Power

In accordance with what has been covered thus far, I affirm the general rule that, for better or worse, power makes individuals act more as they are, manifesting and accentuating orientations, traits, and idiosyncrasies, whether pro- or antisocial, embedded both in individual personality and in the culture of which they are a part. However, when considering gender in our analysis, evidence suggests that empowerment tends to take on different forms between men and women. Men in power are more likely to participate in roles that represent others whereas women in power tend

³⁸ Sandra Arenas, “Desclericalización: antídoto para los abusos en la Iglesia,” in Portillo Trevizo, ed., *Teología y prevención: Estudio sobre los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia* (Sal Terrae: 2020): 127–144.

to involve others in the process of organizational decision-making.³⁹ These and other observations suggest that women tend to be more disposed toward participative, voluntary processes. In contrast, men tend to perceive their empowerment as a product of individual actions rather than as a result of investments in complex networks of relations that provide a sense of community.

Sociocultural constructs of gender are often interpreted as tied to representations that are implicitly or explicitly present in the culture, ideology, and architecture of an organization. In this sense, Linstead and Maréchal describe how the metaphors of phallic masculinity manifest themselves negatively in an organization's strict hierarchical control by the imposition of roles, competence, violence, and lack of tolerance for error.⁴⁰ The metaphor of the male phallus is identified with male hegemony, power, and control. Approaching these variables as a partially unconscious symbolic may permit deeper reflection on modes of intervention to counteract the authoritarian qualities of the patriarchal character of organizations. This may allow the recovery of matriarchal aspects, which may allow for a greater sense of organizational humanity.⁴¹

The cultural naturalization of gender differences and roles requires a critical reconstruction that will permit us to name violence and abuse in a more sophisticated way coherent with human experience.⁴² In the global ecclesial context, the analysis of the experiences of abused males, both

³⁹ Itzhaki & York (2000), cited in Paul W. Speer, N. Andrew Peters, Theresa L. Armstead, and Christopher T. Allenm "The Influence of Participation, Gender and Organizational Sense of Community on Psychological Empowerment: The Moderating Effects of Income," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 51, nos. 1–2 (2013): 103–113.

⁴⁰ Stephen Andrew Linstead and Garance Maréchal, "Re-Reading Masculine Organization: Phallic, Testicular and Seminal Metaphors," *Human Relations* 68, no. 9 (2015): 1461–1489.

⁴¹ Höpfl (2008), cited in Linstead and Maréchal, "Re-reading masculine organization," 1470.

⁴² An interesting exercise of this kind, in the Chilean context, is represented by the Observatorio Contra el Acoso Callejero. Cf. Javiera Arancibia et al., *Acoso Sexual Callejero: Contexto y Dimensiones* (Chile: Observatorio Contra el Acoso Callejero, 2015), www.ocac.cl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Acoso-Sexual-Callejero-Contexto-y-dimensiones-2015.pdf.

minors and adults, has been emphasized. Only recently has attention been paid to the narratives of women who have suffered abuse at the hands of church agents.⁴³ However, this is insufficient, considering the lack, in both the civil and religious world, of a taxonomy of the exercise of power that highlights the female performance of the male; in effect, there are women who abuse, even though we are still far from being able to speak scientifically of such a phenomenon.⁴⁴

Approaches to the role of the body in the performance of power can be a starting point for an awareness of the implicit dynamics of female power.⁴⁵ Similarly, theological considerations that take on the perspectives of women are slowly starting to permeate Latin American Mariology, a subject that has most likely affected the self-understanding not only of believing women of the American continent but also of Latin women in general.⁴⁶ Based on her studies of Elizabeth Johnson, theologian Blanca Besa articulates some of the paradoxes and questions that we need to revisit.

[T]his reflection on the close link between Marianism and the cult of Mary—as the ideal woman/mother—should take into account the fact that, despite the oppression and androcentrism it entails, in the Chilean case at least, it does not imply a detriment to devotion to the Virgin. On the contrary, to the present day, one of the singular features of the nation

⁴³ Daniela Bolívar and Claudia Leal, “Abuso sexual contra mujeres adultas en contexto eclesíastico: evidencia y vacíos,” in *La crisis de la Iglesia en Chile: Mirar las Heridas*, ed., Brahm Sofía, and Eduardo Valenzuela (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica, 2021).

⁴⁴ The Latin American Church carries out an incipient reflection on the matter based on recently revealed cases, such as that of the Sodalicio. See “Camila Bustamante, ‘El abuso de mujeres contra mujeres en la Iglesia no existe, tampoco la víctima, la justicia o la reparación,’” *Religión Digital*, 2022, www.religiondigital.org/libros/Camila-Bustamante-mujeres-Iglesia-reparacion-siervas-sodalicio-libro-investigacion_0_2474452534.html.

⁴⁵ Rainer Bucher, “El cuerpo del poder y el poder del cuerpo. La situación de la Iglesia y la derrota de Dios,” *Concilium* 306 (2004): 151–162.

⁴⁶ Sonia Montecino, *Madres y Huachos. Alegorías del mestizaje chileno* (Santiago, Chile: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1994); Sonia Montecino, “Símbolo Mariano y constitución de la identidad femenina en Chile,” *Estudios Públicos* 39 (1990): 283–290.

is its veneration of Mary. What is especially curious is that, even if Marian devotion is seen among men, the great majority of those who visit sanctuaries, fulfill religious promises, celebrate the month of Mary, and pray the rosary, among other such activities, are women. One possible explanation is that Chilean women do not feel oppressed by this model, or that they simply accept this as part of the stereotype that they are expected to embody. However, another possible answer is that they see in Mary something more than a model of ideal motherhood. If so, what do they see in her that makes them have recourse to her person to find relief and comfort, strength and hope in their daily struggle for their own, and their children's, survival?⁴⁷

Conclusion

Power, and particularly its relation to abuse in the ecclesial crisis, requires a critical reconsideration which demands a complete understanding of its complex outlines, relationships, and territorialities. The topography of power demands not its sectorization or exclusion but the recognition of its omnipresence. Such a reading requires a de-essentializing reorientation that makes it possible to pay attention to power in its production and exercise. Above all, it must be clarified that power is nothing more than the relationships, networks, and frameworks of power. Power does not come from outside and impose itself on passive subjects. Rather, power is produced by virtue of intersubjectively constructed relationships: power understood as a verb and as an eminently relational exercise.



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⁴⁷ Blanca Besa Bandeira, "La marialogía de Elizabeth Johnson en diálogo con el contexto chileno," *Palabra y Razón* 20 (2021): 67.

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studied law (Universidad de Chile) and interreligious dialogue (Russell Berrie Fellowship).

Chapter 22: Clergy Sexual Abuse, Trauma-Informed Theology, and the Promotion of Resilience

Nuala Kenny

The global prevalence of physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and youth by family members and persons in positions of trust is staggering. It is even more tragic when perpetrated by clergy who represent a loving God. Jesus shows real anger at this violation of the innocent: “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Protection of children and youth, the most vulnerable among us, and promoting their human flourishing is central to our call to discipleship. This requires recognition of the harms of sexual abuse, addressing the systemic and cultural beliefs and practices that foster abuse and an understanding of vulnerability. Finally, it calls us to the promotion of resilience rooted in scientific insights and Resurrection witness.

Acknowledging the Harms of the Sexual Abuse of Children and Youth

The sexual abuse of minors is an abuse of power, position, and conscience against the most vulnerable among us. It occurs in homes and in safe places at the hands of trusted adults. It is a major social problem, not yet acknowledged in many nations and cultures. We know the profound harms of this violation from the stories of victim-survivors in an abundance of graphic information from criminal and civil court cases. The genre of biography, autobiography, and blog also provide crucial insight

into such harms.¹ Pope Francis ensured that victim voices and stories were central in his unprecedented 2019 Summit on the Protection of Minors.²

Research confirms the damaging consequences from sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence by a trusted person including physical, emotional, and spiritual harm.³ Sexual abuse in this crucial time in human development can cause difficulties with the sense of self, trust in and expectations of others, and cognitive functioning, which can lead to dramatic changes in school performance. Victims can be erratic, from dependent to raging and angry, and can engage in self-destructive behaviors, including suicide. If children and youth can speak of their abuse, counselling near the time of the abuse can help significantly. There is usually a long-time lapse from the experience of the abuse to its revelation. This can result in life-long physical, psychological, and emotional damage for many.⁴ Victims can experience guilt, shame, and negative self-image; confusion about sexual norms and identity; difficulties with trust and relationships; a sense of helplessness that interferes with education and employment; depression, anxiety and anger; suicidal tendencies; and a small risk of becoming abusers themselves. Psychological counselling is an essential component of treatment.

¹ Gary Bergeron, *Don't Call Me a Victim* (Lowell, MA: King Printing Company, 2004); Hank Estrada, *Unholy Communion: Lessons Learned from Life Among Pedophiles, Predators, and Priests* (New Mexico: Red Rabbit Press, 2011); Carmine Galasso, *Crosses: Portraits of Clergy Abuse* (London, UK: Trolley Ltd., 2007); Tony Lembo, *The Hopeville Fire Department: A Boy's Tale of Betrayal by One of New England's Most Notorious Priests* (Doylestown, PA: Prose & Pictures, 2007); Colm O'Gorman, *Beyond Belief* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010); David Price, *Altar Boy, Altered Life: A True Story of Sexual Abuse* (Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2008).

² "Vatican Summit on the Protection of Minors in the Church," *St. Louis Review*, www.archstl.org/st-louis-review/vatican-summit.

³ David Finkelhor and Angela Browne, "The Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Conceptualization," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 55, no. 4 (1985): 530–541.

⁴ Julia I. Herzog and Christian Schmahl, "Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Consequences on Neurobiological, Psychosocial, and Somatic Conditions across the Lifespan," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9, no. 420 (2018): 1–8, doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2018.00420.

As Stephen Rosetti has shown, the sexual exploitation of children and youth by clergy can cause additional calamitous effects on faith and spirituality. Victims can feel abandoned by God, who did not stop the abuse, even when they begged.⁵ This loss of a loving and caring God is the greatest harm of clergy sexual abuse. Thomas Doyle, who has studied “spiritual trauma,” shows that many victims lose confidence in their inherent goodness and believe they are unlovable and unhealable. Some experience a sense of futility and constrained agency which can have serious consequences for survivors’ moral identity.⁶ Often victims were not believed by their parents, and sometimes were even punished for daring to suggest the “holy priest” had sinned.⁷ This damage was exacerbated when Church officials failed to believe victims. Beliefs in the Church as a place of holiness and security can be shattered forever, and victims lose the support of the liturgical and prayer life of the community.

Kenneth Pargament and colleagues have observed that many excellent therapists do not recognize the unique spiritual harms when the perpetrator is “another Christ.” Pastoral care may compound the abuse because it can trigger PTSD with the smell of incense, the sounds of church bells, and other symbols. Healing and reconciliation cannot be forced. With help, many victims come to some healing. Tragically, many are never reconciled with God or with the Church.⁸ A special issue of the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* consolidated research on the long-term impact of child sexual abuse on adult functioning and well-being.

⁵ Stephen J. Rosetti, *Slayer of the Soul: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991).

⁶ Thomas P. Doyle, “The Spiritual Trauma Experienced by Victims of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 3 (2009): 239–260, doi.org/10.1007/s11089-008-0187-1.

⁷ Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁸ Kenneth I. Pargament, Nichole A. Murray-Swank, and Annette Mahoney, “Problem and Solution: The Spiritual Dimension of Clergy Sexual Abuse and Its Impact on Survivors,” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, nos. 3–4 (2008): 397–420, doi.org/10.1080/10538710802330187.

However, it demonstrated inadequate attention to vulnerability and failed to focus on resilience.⁹

Underlying Dynamics and Systemic Cultural Factors

A culture of safeguarding minors and the vulnerable requires conversion of both minds and hearts and “best practice” policies and protocols.¹⁰ It also requires an understanding of the deeper systemic and cultural forces, including beliefs and practices that allow or promote such harm. In 1986, with the public recognition of the longstanding crisis of the sexual abuse of minors in the West, the initial focus of inquiry was on identifying risk factors in individual victims and in offenders. It soon became apparent that this approach failed to assess adequately the complexity of causation. The American sociologist David Finkelhor provided a helpful framework for assessment in his “dynamics or preconditions” for abuse. These include motivation to abuse, overcoming inhibitions, overcoming the child’s resistance, and decreased social vigilance.¹¹ This approach has been modified and expanded over time but is still helpful in focusing on the deeper issues at work. These preconditions can inform a Church-specific analysis in order to identify beliefs, practices, and relationships which have been enablers for the clergy sexual abuse of trusting and dependent children and youth.¹²

In my almost forty years of work in healing the Church from the clergy sexual abuse crisis, I have identified a pathology in the Church that is contrary to the mission, words, and witness of Jesus:

⁹ Heather B. MacIntosh and A. Dana Ménard, “Where Are We Now? A Consolidation of the Research on Long-Term Impact of Child Sexual Abuse,” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 30, no. 3 (2021): 253–257, doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2021.1914261.

¹⁰ Karlijn Demasure, Katharina Fuchs, and Hans Zollner, *Safeguarding: Reflecting on Child Abuse, Theology and Care* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018).

¹¹ David. Finkelhor, *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

¹² Nuala Kenny, “The Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis: Dynamics and Diagnosis,” *ET Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 201–219, doi.org/10.2143/ETS.4.2.3007278.

The pathology includes devastating physical, emotional and spiritual harm to children, youth and vulnerable people; silence, secrecy and denial to avoid scandal; abuse of power, authority and conscience; failure of moral theology to form conscience and foster virtue; leadership failure to learn from empirical and social sciences; the inability or unwillingness to address underlying systemic and cultural factors; and polarizing divisions regarding the nature of the crisis that are fracturing the Body of Christ and impeding healing.¹³

A central issue in all pathology is abuse of power, position, and conscience.¹⁴ While much has been done at all levels of the Church regarding policies and protocols toward protection and prevention, these deeper issues persist.¹⁵

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is derived from the Latin *vulnus*, a wound; hence vulnerability means being capable of being wounded. It is both a crucial spiritual and moral notion and a vague and complex one. Vulnerable does not mean being or having been wounded, but rather being able to be wounded.¹⁶ Understanding the nature of vulnerability is essential for any effective protection of children, prevention of abuse, and promotion of resilience to adverse events. Researchers have identified the need for precise

¹³ Nuala P. Kenny, *A Post-Pandemic Church: Prophetic Possibilities* (Toronto: Novalis, 2021), 34.

¹⁴ Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea, *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007); Stephen Bullivant, Eric Marcelo O. Genilo, Daniel Franklin Pilario, and Agnes M. Brazal, ed., *Theology and Power: International Perspectives* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Michael W. Higgins and Peter Kavanagh, *Suffer the Children unto Me: An Open Inquiry into the Clerical Sex Abuse Scandal* (Toronto: Novalis, 2010); Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nuala P. Kenny and David Deane, *Still Unhealed: Treating the Pathology in the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis* (Toronto: Novalis, 2019).

¹⁶ Michael H. Kottow, "The Vulnerable and the Susceptible," *Bioethics* 17, nos. 5–6 (2003): 460–471, doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00361.

definitions of vulnerability, the exploration of the interplay of risk and vulnerability in specific policy and life contexts and understanding the importance of vulnerability in our spiritual and moral lives.¹⁷

Vulnerability is inherent in our embodied and embedded humanity and unique to our personal situation. Mackenzie and colleagues have categorized vulnerability as inherent, contingent or situational, and pathogenic. Inherent vulnerability is our ontological or essential vulnerability. Contingent or situational vulnerability is caused or exacerbated by specific personal acute or chronic conditions, including health status, socioeconomic factors, culture, and the environment. Pathogenic vulnerability is created by unique harmful factors in personal history, such as a history of abuse, brokenness, and marginalization.¹⁸

Vulnerability generates negative connotations of victimhood, helplessness, and pathology, but it is a central notion in understanding humans.¹⁹ There are concerns regarding a reductively negative view of vulnerability which is the very condition for responsiveness.

It is assumed that vulnerability is almost exclusively negative, equated with weakness, dependency, powerlessness, deficiency and passivity. This reductively negative view leads to problematic implications, imperiling ethical responsiveness to vulnerability, and so prevents the concept from possessing the normative value many theorists wish it to have. When vulnerability is regarded as weakness and, concomitantly, invulnerability is prized, attentiveness to one's own vulnerability and ethical response to vulnerable others remain out of reach goals.²⁰

¹⁷ Kate Brown, Kathryn Ecclestone, and Nick Emmel, "The Many Faces of Vulnerability," *Social Policy and Society* 16, no. 3 (2017): 497–510, doi.org/10.1017/S1474746416000610.

¹⁸ Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds, *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006).

²⁰ Erinn C. Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), i.

The social science literature has concerns regarding attention to vulnerability insofar as it can be paternalistic and oppressive, widen social control, and result in stigma and marginalization rather than people's empowerment and protection.²¹ This includes minors and adults who lack capacity to protect themselves, like homeless persons, refugees, and victims of domestic violence. There are strong ethical implications of vulnerability. It can be patronizing and paternalistic or unifying and socially transformative. Acknowledging mutual vulnerability allows us to be aware of others and their dignity and capabilities.

Vulnerability is a condition of the moral life. Ethical responses to vulnerability should be guided by the promotion of autonomy and resilience to counter the sense of powerlessness and the loss of agency.²² Vulnerability precedes everything about being human. In theological language, the priority of vulnerability is precisely that ground on which the *imago Dei* rests. We are created in the image of God. If God is vulnerable, then we, who are made in God's image, are vulnerable. In the Old Testament, the covenant, which binds us to God, is as vulnerable as the bonds that bind us to one another. Vulnerable to the voice of God, the prophet discovers the capacity to express the sympathy of God.²³

Irish theologian Enda McDonagh has outlined key elements of a theology of vulnerability. He begins with God's self-revelation as vulnerable in the act of creation itself—"God said: 'Let there be'..." for all elements in creation (Genesis 1)—and proposes that:

This is the risk of creation for God, introducing into being other reality distinct from Godself God rejoiced in this otherness as gift but...the

²¹ Kate Brown, "'Vulnerability': Handle with Care," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 5, no. 3 (2011): 313–321, doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2011.597165.

²² Mianna Lotz, "Vulnerability and Resilience: A Critical Nexus," *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 37, no. 1 (2016): 45–59, doi.org/10.1007/s11017-016-9355-y.

²³ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 1969).

gift turned threat, alien to and alienated from God in its climactic creatures, man and woman.²⁴

In the Incarnation, the divine Word was made human flesh in Jesus Christ and takes on our embodied vulnerability:

God ... became human in Jesus Christ. This letting go by God of God in incarnation transcends all human imaging and yet seems transcended in the surrender until death on a cross by the Son of God made man. It is in that dying into resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, which completes the divine letting be of creation and letting go of incarnation by letting God be God in God's Trinitarian sense and in the universe.²⁵

In the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:29–37), the neighbor takes on personal risk in order to respond to the need of a wounded man.²⁶ This shifts vulnerability from being in need to the vulnerability of those who respond to need.

The clergy sexual abuse crisis has shown that the Church is vulnerable. Vulnerability is, however, not merely the product of the environment of the church. Vulnerability is part of the essence of the church. The vulnerability of the church is based on a theology and anthropology of vulnerability and is expressed in an ethic and mission of vulnerability.²⁷ Ecclesial, political, and economic responses are needed because

vulnerability can be reduced by equal protection to all members of society under a principle of justice. Susceptibility is a determined state of

²⁴ Enda McDonagh, *Vulnerable to the Holy: In Faith, Morality and Art* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 19.

²⁵ McDonagh, *Vulnerable to the Holy*, 20.

²⁶ Vincent Leclercq, *Blessed Are the Vulnerable: Reaching Out to Those with AIDS* (London, UK: Twenty-Third Publications, 2010).

²⁷ Nico Koopman, "Vulnerable Church in a Vulnerable World? Towards an Ecclesiology of Vulnerability," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2, no. 3 (2008): 241, doi.org/10.1163/156973108X333731.

destitution and therefore can only be reduced or neutralised by measures that are a) specifically designed against the situation in question and b) actively applied. The susceptible, like the sick, require targeted treatment to palliate their misery.²⁸

Which relates to Linda Hogan's argument that:

Mutual dependence, shared vulnerability, these are elements of human experience that have rarely featured in the ways in which politics is constructed or ethical theories are framed And yet shared vulnerability and mutual dependence may be precisely the qualities that have a resonance with the individuals and communities world-wide who are struggling to find the grounds for the hope of shared future in a world divided.²⁹

Trauma Informed Theology

Experiences of pain, loss, and suffering are essential components of being embodied and socio-culturally embedded and dependent humans. Response to the multiple traumas of our time must be rooted theologically and become a reality in our life, worship, and mission. Trauma presents challenges for pastoral care and for Christian systematic and practical theology. Trauma, which is the impact of violence, has been studied by psychology since the end of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Studies of World War One "shell-shocked" soldiers noted they did not just recall the violence they experienced but re-lived it. In flashbacks, they could not distinguish between the traumatic event and the present. Shelly Rambo has identified the three crucial lessons of trauma studies: "The past is not

²⁸ Michael H. Kottow, "The Vulnerable and the Susceptible," *Bioethics* 17, nos. 5-6 (2003): 463, doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00361.

²⁹ Linda Hogan, "Vulnerability: An Ethic for a Divided World," in *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers from CTEWC 2018*, ed. Kristin E. Heyer, James F. Keenan, and Andrea Vicini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 219–20.

³⁰ Cathy Caruth, ed., *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

the past. The body remembers. The wounds do not simply go away.”³¹ The lessons help us understand the personal trauma of sexual abuse. Obstacles of impaired memory and survivor difficulty talking about traumatic events have been the focus of therapy. This breaking of silence and denial is necessary but not sufficient to heal the moral and spiritual trauma.

Pastoral care is concerned with the spiritual and physical well-being of individuals and communities. Pastoral workers are first responders who experience tragedy fatigue, especially in ministering to those who have lost their faith and are questioning a loving God. This can lead to compassion fatigue, burnout, and traumatic stress. Self-care, self-compassion, and self-acceptance are essential but may be compromised by theological notions of self-sacrifice. Effective protection of children and youth requires the education and support of families. They are the domestic Church and carry the responsibility to educate and form their children in the faith in a time of crisis and unbelief.

In the Old Testament, the call of the prophets in crisis and calamity such as the catastrophe of Babylonian destruction and exile is to restore right relationships with a faithful God, creation, and all others.³² The life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Paschal Mystery, is central to Christian faith. Christian theology has always grappled with suffering and offered words of comfort and explanation through concepts such as “God’s rule” and “God’s will.” Evangelization has focused on accepting a defined set of beliefs and some guilt and coercion. Each Gospel reveals a different account of the Evangelist’s response to the trauma of the crucifixion. The Gospel tells us the Emmaus disciples and Mary Magdalene, in their grief and loss of hope and trust, do not recognize the risen Jesus at first. This is a classic response to trauma. Jesus reveals his

³¹ Shelly Rambo, “How Christian Theology and Practice Are Being Shaped by Trauma Studies: Talking about God in the Face of Wounds That Won’t Go Away,” *The Christian Century*, November 1, 2019, www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/how-christian-theology-and-practice-are-being-shaped-trauma-studies.

³² Walter Brueggemann and Nahum Ward-Lev, *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020).

wounds that remain even after the Resurrection. He asks Thomas to enter into them: “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (John 20:27–28). The Resurrection demonstrates the ultimate resilience after trauma.

These insights open the way to a trauma-informed practical theology.³³ Trauma requires witness and accompaniment.³⁴ Theologians learning from trauma focus on accompaniment, truth-telling, and wound healing.³⁵ A trauma-sensitive approach also allows for the contradictions we hold between our belief in a loving and merciful God and the experience of harm and suffering.³⁶ In responding to trauma, Collin-Vezina and colleagues propose some principles to assist in effective response: trustworthiness and transparency, safety, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment and choice, and attention to cultural, historical, and gender issues.³⁷

Some theologians respond to trauma within existing traditions of liberation, feminist, disability, and queer theologies which focus on power and socio-cultural issues. These are important and echo Pope Francis’s call for a new neighborliness: “Building social friendship does not only call for rapprochement between groups who took different sides at some troubled period of history, but also for a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society” (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 233).

³³ Meg Warner, Christopher Southgate, Carla A. Grosch-Miller, and Hilary Ison, ed., *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

³⁴ Stephanie N. Arel and Shelly Rambo, eds., *Post-Traumatic Public Theology* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

³⁵ Rambo, “How Christian Theology and Practice Are Being Shaped by Trauma Studies.”

³⁶ Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

³⁷ Delphine Collin-Vézina, Denise Brend, and Irene Beeman, “When It Counts the Most: Trauma-Informed Care and the COVID-19 Global Pandemic,” *Developmental Child Welfare* 2, no. 3 (2020): 172–79, doi.org/10.1177/2516103220942530.

Promoting Resilience in Children and Youth

The clergy sexual abuse crisis tragically demonstrates failure to keep the child central.³⁸ The convergence of the sexual abuse crisis and pandemic and trauma studies raise critical questions. Vulnerability is a condition of the moral life. We learn from infancy about trusting others and the fragility of relationships. The promotion of moral agency in children is essential for protection, prevention, and resilience.

The clergy sexual abuse of children and youth has raised questions about the theology of childhood and the curriculum for seminarians about children and child development. Celibate priests in the Latin Rite are called Father but never “Daddy.” Many have little experience of childcare. Child studies from developmental psychology and sociology have much to offer. For Christians, the importance of children’s value and development of moral agency is crucial.³⁹ Early empirical studies understood children as passive, incomplete, and lacking the capacity for meaningful relationships and moral agency. Advances in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies have brought crucial insights that can inform our understanding of the development of children as moral and social agents from birth and the fundamentally relational nature of life.

Allison Gopnik provides vivid accounts of how children in the first six years of life develop the capacity to understand others’ communicative intentions, share emotions, establish joint attention, a prelude to language, and joint intentionality which is the ontogenic basis for the recognition of human equality and mutual recognition.⁴⁰ This starts with amazing, heightened awareness in the gaze of a newborn in maternal-infant

³⁸ Hans Zollner, “The Child at the Center: What Can Theology Say in the Face of the Scandals of Abuse?,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 692–710, doi.org/10.1177/0040563919856867.

³⁹ James Gerard McEvoy, “Towards a Theology of Childhood: Children’s Agency and the Reign of God,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 673–691, doi.org/10.1177/0040563919856368.

⁴⁰ Alison Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby: What Children’s Minds Tell Us about Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

bonding. It continues through early infancy. Through smiles, sounds, and touch, parents provide emotional connection. By nine months of age, children share emotions. By eleven months, children's pointing establishes joint attention, a prelude to language. Between three and six years, children develop mutual recognition and joint intentionality which "leads young children to understand others as, in some sense, equivalent or equal to themselves."⁴¹

Theology has also turned to a formal study of the child. Marcia Bunge and colleagues have presented a masterful review of the child and childhood in the Bible.⁴² It portrays diverse and complex relationships of love and care as well as those who are cursed, abandoned, and victims of profound injustice. The Bible often refers to children metaphorically as being sons and daughters of God and reinforces a positive view of believers as needing to become childlike (Matthew 18:3). Jesus's interactions with children are countercultural. Moreover, he associates their vulnerability and powerlessness with the reign of God.

McEvoy also argues persuasively that consideration of children and childhood should be an essential element of Christian anthropology.⁴³ Karl Rahner turned to the scriptures and traditional theology for insights into the Christian meaning of childhood. He identified the unsurpassable value of childhood: "Childhood itself has a direct relationship with God. It touches on the absolute divinity of God not only as maturity, adulthood . . . but rather in a special way of its own."⁴⁴ He critiqued the view that saw childhood as a "subordinate and preparatory function" for future stages of life. The tradition teaches that children and adults are caught up in the

⁴¹ Michael Tomasello, *Becoming Human: A Theory of Ontogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press, 2019), 200.

⁴² Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008).

⁴³ James Gerard McEvoy, "Theology of Childhood: An Essential Element of Christian Anthropology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2019): 117–136, doi.org/10.1177/0021140019829322.

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner SJ, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 36.

dynamics of grace and sin. Scripture sees childhood realistically (1Corinthians 3:1 and Matthew 11:16–17) and idealistically as when Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15). In their openness and trust, children show what it is to be open to God. Childhood is a mystery.

The promotion of resilience is crucial in responding to trauma and abuse and healing from it.⁴⁵ The word’s origins are in the Latin *resilere*, meaning “to recoil or spring back.” In psychology it has come to mean the ability to respond effectively to and cope with trauma, adversity, and failure. It is never returning to normal but a positive adaptation resulting in an ongoing protective capability. There are important biological and epigenetic factors under study. Research has also identified resilience-promoting factors including strong social networks, confronting our fears, and an optimistic outlook.⁴⁶ How do we obstruct resilience, and even re-traumatize, by bad theology and insensitive, inadequate pastoral care?

Simple “quick fix” answers to our wounded Church will not produce healing, protection, and prevention. All mothers know that bringing forth new life is painful and messy work. How can we respond to clergy abuse in ways that promote the resilience of the Resurrection? There is much to be done, if we are to be true disciples of the Jesus who loves children.



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⁴⁵ Lotz, “Vulnerability and Resilience: A Critical Nexus,” 45–59.

⁴⁶ Michael Ungar, *Multisystemic Resilience Adaptation and Transformation in Contexts of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Trauma-Informed Theology and the Promotion of Resilience

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