

The politics of meaning: societal discourses on the sexual abuse of children and their influence on the Catholic Church

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This chapter on child sexual abuse contributes to an understanding of the shift from a focus on perpetrators that denies the voice of the victims, even holding the victims to be sexual delinquents responsible for their abuse, to a “victims first” approach. The Catholic Church has been heavily influenced by the major discourses in society that give power to psychiatrists, therapists and social workers. However, with regard to clerical sexual abuse in the Church, two distinct discourses can be identified. In the first, sin is considered a cause for abuse, reducing it to a matter of the will. The second discourse restricts child sexual abuse to the North American context, suggesting that moral decay has contaminated the clergy in that region.

Introduction

In recent decades, sexual abuse has been widely discussed in the Catholic Church as well as in society at large. Also, dominant discourses in society were previously more concerned about the perpetrators than the victims. But recently, a major paradigm shift has taken place: victims have come forward testifying how the abuse has ruined their lives and are asking for justice. This has resulted in a “victims first” approach.

This chapter contributes to an understanding of the shift from a focus on perpetrators, one that denies the voice of the victims, even holding the victims to be sexual delinquents responsible for their abuse, to a “victims first” approach. Although the focus is on the Catholic Church as such, the major discourses in society play an important role in its thinking and actions. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the interaction

This chapter adopts a constructionist approach, which accepts that society is both an objective and a subjective reality. It holds that meaning is constructed, leading to a taken-for-granted reality. Foucault

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and Derrida have convincingly shown that language creates the framework in which psychological and social life take form. Considering someone who has sexually abused a minor a psychopath, gives power to legislative authorities; the decision to put someone in a psychiatric institution—and not in prison—is based on the testimony of a psychiatrist. Thus, language not only creates meaning, every discourse also leads to practical consequences. It follows that discourses can be constructed to serve certain purposes (Gergen 1999, 42). For example, a discourse can be constructed that focuses on false accusations so as not to have to pay compensations,



which leads to a situation of no longer believing the victims and setting the perpetrators free.

Within the limits of this chapter, I will look at history from the turn of the twentieth century to today. An analysis of some of the major discourses concerning the sexual abuse of minors will reveal both the meaning that is conveyed as well as the purpose and consequences of such discourses. It makes clear that the status of the victim and the offender is not fixed but changes over time. To be aware of the historical evolution of meaning is to become aware of the fact that the categories we use for the persons involved often create much suffering (Gergen 1999, 48). We need to ask the questions: Who gains? Who is hurt? Who is silenced?

This chapter is rooted in the study of a large number of scientific writings that describe or research, or else are expressions of, the particular periods that are under analysis. The first group of writings can be identified as historical, describing how sexual abuse was being examined during a specific period; the second group includes empirical research based on interviews or the analysis of sources, such as journals and magazines, while the third group looks at the construction and the meaning of the phenomenon of abuse.

Definitions

Currently, the World Health Organization defines Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) 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 or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are—by virtue of their age or stage of development—in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim” (WHO 2006).

The Oxford Dictionary defines politics as “the principles relating to or inherent in a sphere or activity, especially when concerned with power and status” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 3rd ed., s. v. “Politics”). We will use the term “political” in this broad sense, i. e. as it is connected with power relationships and status. Within this context, the chapter will examine the major discourses on the sexual abuse of minors.

A discourse (Burr 1995, 64) expresses meaning through language, which in turn influences identity as well as social and political praxis. It is a way of

talking about and understanding a specific reality. For Foucault, however, discourse is not limited to language; it includes practice (Hall 2001, 72). Discourse is related to power, operating by rules of exclusion. Those in power decide what can be discussed, where and how one can speak, and “who gains, who is hurt, who is silenced, what traditions are sustained, which are undermined” (Gergen 1999, 62). In discourse analysis, the primary concern is not if the perspectives under being examined are true, but rather, “what interest [do] they serve, what relations of power [do] they uphold?” (Miller 1990, 118).

The social construction of reality does not depend on one discourse only, but on a miscellany of simultaneous discourses, each one viewing the “world” from a certain perspective. Prevailing or dominating discourses can be opposed by counter-discourses. When the voiceless and oppressed start to speak for themselves, they create a counter-discourse, which is always political, because only those who have been oppressed can form a counter-discourse, and by doing so they resist the oppressing power (Moussa and Scapp 1996, 92–93).

Telling the truth or inventing fantasies?

Europeans began giving greater attention to CSA in the late nineteenth century, primarily in Great Britain and France. In France, the discovery resulted from research in the field of forensic medicine. Major works published by Ambroise Tardieu (1867), Paul Bernard (1886) and Paul Brouardel (1909) presented their research on indecent assault cases, which they considered a form of physical violence. Tardieu asserted that three-quarters of those charged with rape were accused of raping children (Olafson, Corwin and Summit 1993, 8). The French forensic tradition documented tens of thousands of cases of sexual abuse and rape.

It is speculated that, while studying at the Paris Morgue, Sigmund Freud may have been present when Brouardel conducted autopsies on victims of sexual abuse. However, when Freud published his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Three Essays on the History of Sexuality) in 1905, he stated that it is rather exceptional for children to be the only sexual object. In his opinion, they only fill this role when the individual is “a faint-hearted and impotent individual who makes use of such substitutes, or when an impulsive urgent desire cannot at the



time secure the proper object” (Freud 1910, 40) He continued: “Thus we find with gruesome frequency sexual abuse of children by teachers and servants merely because they have the best opportunities for it” (Freud 1910, 41). So, Freud distinguishes between individual causes (a faint-hearted, impotent individual) and situational causes (no proper object).

Freud initially defended the proposition that traumas present in adult hysterical women were the result of true (real) sexual abuse in their childhood (Freud 1998), but he definitively retracted his seduction theory in *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Schusdek 1996). From that time onwards, he maintained his conviction that the seduction scenes recounted by his patients had never taken place and were instead invented fantasies. A crucial reason for this was that he could not believe that incest was so widespread (Smart 1999, 397).

The opinion that children invent stories and, consequently, stories of sexual abuse was revived by the controversy surrounding the False Memory Syndrome and False Accusations of child sexual abuse made in the late 1980s (Beckett 1996). While K. Beckett describes the pre-1980 phase as characterized by groups advocating against collective denial of CSA (Beckett 1996, 69), from 1985 onwards articles appeared opining that most of the abuse cases were false accusations because children do lie and leading questions can make them do so (Waller 1991). Created in March 1992, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) defines False Memory Syndrome as a condition in which people remember things that did not actually happen. Therapy and hypnosis are held responsible for the evocation of such memories (FMSF 2013). The foundation was rather successful because, as Beckett states, they managed to influence the media, “facilitated by the status and authority of many of the academic and professional sponsors of this frame” (Beckett 1996, 73).

The perpetrator

At the same time that Freud was considering hysteria as the consequence of sexual abuse, governments began criminalizing the sexual abuse of children. In Great Britain, the age of consent was raised from ten to thirteen in 1875, and to sixteen in 1885, and incest was criminalized in 1908 (Olafson, Corwin and Summit 1993, 9; Smart 1999, 392–394). In the Netherlands, the age of consent was fixed at sixteen in 1886 (Brongersma 1984, 81).

The label “sexual psychopath” originated in Krafft-Ebing’s work *Psychopathia Sexualis*, in the chapter “Pathological Sexuality in its Legal Aspects”, published in 1884, which greatly influenced the discourse on perpetrators. Discussing the sexual abuse of children, Krafft-Ebing differentiated between psychopathological and non-pathological cases. The non-pathological cases were the result of “moral weakness or psychological impotence”, while the psychopathological were “acquired weaknesses” and caused, for example, by alcoholism or a degenerative predisposition. Krafft-Ebing further labeled such moral weakness, which he considered a vice, a “perversity” and called the pathology, the disease, a “perversion” (Angelides 2005, 274).

Based on this discussion, U.S. criminal law regarded any person who committed sexual abuse with minors a “psychopath” (Freedman 1987, 91). “Sexual psychopath” as a legal category, which considered the psychopath curable and only dangerous to society until healed, was an experiment (Prager 1982, 50). Perpetrators were admitted to psychiatric care instead of prison. The state continued to rely on insufficient medical knowledge, and often hospitalization was “the shortest route to freedom” (Prager 1982, 55).

After the 1930s, a consensus slowly grew that the label “sexual pathology” was inadequate (Freedman 1987). More specific descriptions were sought to differentiate between those perpetrators who were dangerous to others and those who were mentally disordered (Weisberg 1984, 30).

From the 1920s until 1960, sexual abuse disappeared from the radar. L. Gordon argues that in the U.S., a decline in feminism led to a reduction in concern for children’s welfare (Gordon 2002). It was only in the 1970s that “sexual psychopath” was relabeled as “sex offender” and “child molester”, making victims more visible.

Let us summarize: we can see that, from the start, distinctions have been made when analyzing perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Freud talked about weakness and impotence and about those who suffer from “impulses” and behave in a sexually deviant way. He also pointed to easy accessibility as a factor in abuse (e.g. teachers). Krafft-Ebing differentiates between perversity (a vice) and perversion (a disease). Thus, not all abuse occurs for the same reason. However, when looking at media coverage of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in the 1980s, distinctions were lost and the profile of the priest who commits sexual abuse was reduced to one single type, the pedophile priest, mainly due to media



coverage that only focuses on the most sensational cases (Jenkins 1996).

Framing pedophilia in positive terms

The Kinsey Reports, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), greatly influenced ideas about human sexual behavior. Deviant sexual behavior seemed less exceptional than previously thought, which may have played a role in the “sexual revolution of the ‘60s”, a reaction against “the repression of sexuality” that advocated the celebration of sexuality as a normal part of life, not repressed by family, society, church or government. Embracing “free love” as an ideal, many people engaged in sexual experimentation.

This also affected attitudes toward pedophilia; emphasis was placed on the etymological meaning of the term: love for a child. A group of people defended the opinion that a “sexual relationship between an adult and a child”—notice the difference in discourse—should not always be considered abuse. This group tried to influence legislation and strove to lower the age of consent for sexual relations. In 1979, the North American newspaper *Gay Community News* called for a repeal of all age of consent laws and freedom of all forms of sexual expression (Angelides 2005, 281).

The pro-lowering lobby assumed that sexuality is a form of social behavior, whereby no intrinsic or essential difference can be made between normal or abnormal behavior. In this paradigm, there is only conformist and non-conformist behavior, and sexual behavior is affected by social rules (Ghijs, Cohen-Kettenis and Vanderschoot 1994). The morality of an act, then, is determined by the fact that the relationship in question is actually a subject-subject relationship and not by the fact that society recognizes a particular form of relationship. Threats of violence, temptation by flattery or money and goods, considerable differences in social status and sexual deception turn a relationship into an object relationship. As a result, pedophilia is, in this vision, not always CSA (Van Naerssen 1989). In addition, based on Freud’s insights, they defended the point of view that children were sexual beings, and by doing so, they challenged the notion of innocent childhood.

Within this context, the term perversity or pathology has no scientific meaning whatsoever and refers only to social conflict. Assistance consists of eliminating the effects of social stigmatization so

that a person can experience his/her sexual preferences. The negative consequences, if they exist, are not the result of sexual relations between adults and children, but due to negative reactions to the environment.

1970–1980: feminist framing: an influential reinterpretation

The 1970s and 1980s are characterized by feminist framing. CSA came under public scrutiny through the “battered child syndrome”, put on the agenda by pediatric radiologists. The publication of an influential paper by C. H. Kempe et al. in 1962 made it clear that the abuse of children was far more common than previously believed (Whittier 2009, 21).

A renewed focus on incest and CSA particularly grew out of the women’s rights movement and its advocacy for adult victims/survivors of rape (Grondin 2011) and other sexual and physical assaults. Within a feminist framework, incest was viewed as a practice that concretized men’s control over women’s sexuality (Scott 2001). Children’s issues were considered women’s issues, and both fell under the umbrella of feminism. Feminist groups contradicted historical understandings of CSA as infrequent acts perpetrated by sexual deviants. They argued that sexual violence was indicative and symptomatic of patriarchal societal attitudes towards women and children and the unequal distribution of power. These groups sought to raise awareness and increase understanding of sexual violence, they were openly critical of government and the criminal justice system’s responses to victims of violence, and they contested legal definitions that did not integrate non-penetrative acts (Angelides 2004, 141).

Within the feminist framing, CSA became a problem endemic to nuclear patriarchal families and therefore widespread (Scott 2001, 352). Feminists put great hope in the media and indeed they received much public attention. But the media dropped the political argument and portrayed the abuse “as a medical or a criminal problem rather than a political one” (Whittier 2009, 9).

Though society had difficulty accepting that the abuse of children had systemic causes, the feminist argument that sexual abuse is also an abuse of power became an insight accepted to this day; however, instead of being linked to societal structure as such, or to patriarchally structured families, it was connected to individual characteristics or to dysfunctional fam-



ilies (Scott 1995). This hermeneutical change was also reflected in U.S. legal practices. Psychiatrists had to cede their place to psychologists and social workers who counsel the family as a whole.

The feminist construction of CSA suggested the following: the offender is male and the victim female; he is not a stranger but someone who is trusted; the child is innocent, as opposed to the libertarian analyses of child sexuality; the abuse is not rare but widespread; non-penetrative acts must be considered abusive; and the individual etiological interpretation must be replaced by systemic causes.

From seduction to victim and survivor

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, two opposing discourses circulated simultaneously. The first stressed the innocence and purity of a child, meaning also desexualization. According to the second, the child was bad (sinful), inclined to evil and required tough education; thus, a child could also seduce an adult, who fell victim to the child's tricks (Whittier 2009, 5).

Freud's discovery of infant sexuality led to the opinion that sex between adults and children might be sought by the latter and that children are the actual seducers rather than the ones seduced. An important study of child abuse victims, of which 80 % were female, at the Langley Porter Clinic (California) described "the majority of the victims as 'seductive,' 'flirtatious,' and sexually precocious" and found that "in almost five-sixths of the cases" the child victim was "a participating member in the sexual act" (Weiss et al. 1955). Sexual abuse in that interpretative framework became defined as a problem of the perception of the victim (Conte 1994, 226).

Feminists insisted that the child is not willingly participating, but innocent. The term "victim" was used to make clear that the abused child, overpowered by the perpetrator, is without guilt. Feminists were mostly interested in female victims, which led to a binary interpretative framework of men as abusers and women/girls as victims. The victim/offender dyad strengthens the "politics of purification", in which the sanctity of the child is re-enforced as well as the profanity of the offender, the man, the pedophile. Only later, when research was done on clerical sexual abuse, in which the majority of victims are boys, it became clear that this gendered discourse is incorrect (McAlinden 2014, 184), or at least it needs to be more nuanced. The victim/

offender dyad also came under scrutiny when research indicated that a victim could turn into an offender (McAlinden 2014, 186).

Victims have to respond to certain norms to be recognized as a victim, and the qualities of weakness, respectability and blamelessness are part of that. Claiming victimization often leads to an evaluation of the behavior of the victim prior to, during and following the victimization. S/he must prove that s/he corresponds to the image of the "ideal" victim. Many have perceived this as a second victimization (Dunn 2010, 161).

The characteristics of weakness, passivity and non-responsibility, however, do not fit well into a Western culture that celebrates strength and responsibility. That is why the term survivor emerged. Dunn suggests that it might be easier for people to identify with this term.

As a sign of agency, survivors spoke for themselves. They testified on television, in newspapers and at conferences. They wrote books in their own name or together with other victims, and they were considered to have an expertise that could not be replaced by study or any other experience. Some also claimed that for this reason, they were the only ones with the right to speak up.

Clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and practical theology

Although there were some earlier cases, the 1984 case of Father Gilbert Gauthé¹ in Louisiana and the subsequent cover-up by his bishop, Gerard Frey, is usually considered the start of the contemporary CSA scandal. In the following paragraphs, I would like to look at some of the discourses within the Catholic Church and the resulting tasks for practical theologians.

1. Perpetrators: from sin to pathology

For many centuries, the Catholic Church has focused on the perpetrators, the sinners and the possi-

¹ "Fr. Gauthé had in fact been reported to the bishop several times since 1972 and before long, it was discovered that he had abused scores of young children, all prepubescent and all boys with the sole exception of one little girl. In the end, he pleaded guilty to 39 counts." http://www.awrsipe.com/Doyle/pdf_files/Manual-History%20%202010-12-2010.pdf



bility of forgiveness. The priority given to the perpetrator was rooted in a theology of the cross that concentrates almost exclusively on the theology of atonement, which states that Jesus enabled the forgiveness of sins through his suffering. In the U.S., at the onset of the crisis, the perpetrator was considered a sinner (Demasure and Maisha 2015). Within this interpretative framework, the decision to abuse someone depended on an act of the will. The solution was confession, conversion, penance, absolution and forgiveness. Because of the seal of confession, the abuse remained secret. No measures capable of solving the problem were taken, and bishops aware of the abuse chose fraternal correction or a pastoral approach (Doyle 2006; Geary 2011, 84; Jones 2015, 244). T.W. Jones argues that the 1917 and 1983 Codes of Canon Law provided measures for punishing clerics who engaged in sexual relations with minors under sixteen years of age (2015, 245). Pope Benedict XVI was of the same opinion, writing in his 2010 pastoral letter to Catholics in Ireland that “a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, [resulted] in failure to apply existing canonical penalties when needed” (Benedict 2010). However, questions have been raised about the degree to which the law could have been helpful due to the short statutes of limitations (five years) and high standards of proof and imputability.

As shown above, the empirical scientific research on pedophilia and CSA is quite recent. Therefore, before the 1980s U.S. bishops might be excused for not having taken the right decisions by giving multiple chances to those who committed sexual abuse, considering it a sin comparable to that of adultery. This led to a politics of geographical relocation by which abusing clergy were sent to another parish. Meanwhile, Th. Doyle, M. Peterson and R. Mouton were working on a document with the title “The Problem of Sexual Molestation by Roman Catholic Clergy: Meeting the Problem in a Comprehensive and Responsible Manner”, usually called the “Manual” (Doyle 2010), to inform U.S. bishops about the real problematic situation of CSA by members of the clergy. The final draft of the “Manual” was completed on May 14, 1985. So, from 1985 onwards adequate information was available.

In the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, with the media focusing on clerical sexual abuse, offending priests also became characterized as pedophiles, men suffering from a pathology, in need of care, not punishment. One can question to what extent a person is responsible for his actions, but a

more important point is why individualization, through the definition of deviant behavior, excludes systemic questions.

In the 1990s, a new discourse that looked at systemic causes within the cultural realm became dominant (Terry 2015). In 1993, in Denver, Pope John Paul II talked about the “sins” of the members of the clergy and put the blame on a (American) culture that no longer recognized truth, which consequently led to moral decay (Doyle 2006, 200–201). But soon it became clear that CSA was a global problem: Ireland (1994) was the first European country to suffer from the CSA crisis. In 2010, several other European countries followed, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria. The magisterium reacted with an adaptation of canon law,² which led to a politics that aimed at the prevention of CSA and cover-up.

To my knowledge, only a few articles have been written by practical theologians about members of the clergy who have abused others (Geary, Giarrochi and Scheers 2006; 2011; Demasure, Joulain and Phillips 2016). However, many pastors have to deal with perpetrators in prisons and in psychiatric institutions, so there is much work to be done.

2. Victims and survivors

Also, when discussing the victim, psychological language became dominant: s/he suffers from a trauma. Therapy assures confidentiality, but at the same time risks reinforcing silence and stigmatization. Furthermore, it risks reinforcing the opinion that the abuse is a mere personal matter, keeping the victim in isolation. It does not contribute to social change. Pastoral care for victims is deeply rooted in a therapeutic or hermeneutic model, mainly focusing on the individual, but if we want to take into account the socio-political dimension, we might opt for a different model. L. Bridgers (2001) and J. Pais (1991) examined pastoral care in line with liberation theology, which may be better in cases of sexual abuse.

In her article “The resurrected life: toward a theology of liberation for the traumatized”, Bridgers argues that although oppression and traumatic experience cannot be conflated, they are “extremely close companions” (Bridgers 2001, 64). Both victim-

2 *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*: (2001) Grave delictis reservato to the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. Apostolic Letter, *Motu Proprio*, by Pope JP II, revised in 2010 by Pope Benedict



ize the powerless and in both cases the police and the justice system do not always respond adequately. Even when oppression is not considered the cause of abuse (contrary to feminist analysis), in many situations, oppression is certainly a problem after the abuse has taken place. Victims are forced to keep silent and not denounce the abuse. After disclosure, victims might be paid under the condition that they remain silent. If oppression can be defined as a loss of voice, then victims of abuse are certainly oppressed.

During pastoral care, survivors express their difficulties with traditional God images, such as God the Father or God the Almighty (Pais 1991; Flaherty 1992; Nandau, Golding and Rochon 2012). In liberation theology, God is on the side of the oppressed. Pais wants theologians to produce a theology that respects the child. God came to us as a child. While disadvantage and weakness will never be overcome, they must be respected and embraced. The child is Christ, and whoever abuses a child abuses Christ. As E. Borgman argues, CSA is the ongoing suffering of Christ (Borgman 2011, 15). I suggest integrating these insights into catechesis, liturgy and pastoral care.

Furthermore, atonement theology has been criticized (Brock and Parker 2001) because it often fosters a spirituality of martyrdom and sacrifice, which allows abuse to continue. These insights have consequences for catechesis; e.g., Christ's death on the cross should not be explained only in terms of forgiveness of sins because victims are the ones who have been sinned against (Coulter 2001).

Sacramentology also needs some attention. Victims deplore the fact that perpetrators can rely on the sacrament of confession, while they feel left behind. We might consider whether the sacrament of the sick could be helpful in this regard. It is also important to make use of the hermeneutics of suspicion with respect to exegesis and the texts used in liturgy, i.e. which biblical texts receive attention in the liturgy and which are left out. Prevailing interpretations may have excluded important passages.

3. What about the systemic causes?

In her critical analysis of the sexual abuse crisis, M. Keenan focuses on the Catholic Church's organizational structure. She considers the hierarchical structure a major systemic cause of the abuse crisis. This structure has consequences for accountability, which is organized from the bottom up, easily lead-

ing to a culture in which the organization as such is protected, while victims of abuse are not properly taken care of (Keenan 2012, 24–53).

Clericalism has been pointed to as another factor that enables CSA. Clericalism has to be distinguished from clerical culture, which is a subculture and not necessarily negative. Doyle describes clericalism as “grounded in the erroneous belief that clerics constitute an elite group and, because of their powers as sacramental ministers, they are superior to the laity” (Doyle 2006, 190). Keenan defines clericalism as “the situation in which priests live in a hermetical world set apart from and set above the non-ordained members of the Catholic Church” (Keenan 2012, 42). An important element in these definitions is the power differential. K. Seasoltz argues that the teachings of Vatican II brought about important changes, but that even newly ordained priests have a hard time accepting them theologically, as well as practically, and continue to adopt the former lifestyle (Seasoltz 2010, 141).

Seminary admission and formation is also considered a systemic cause of abuse. At the 1970 Synod of Bishops at the Vatican, Dr. C. Baars and Dr. A. Terruwe presented a paper based on their forty years of psychiatric practice. They found that 60 % to 70 % of priests suffered from emotional immaturity (Baars and Terruwe 1970, 3). This concurs with E. Kennedy's study commissioned by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States. He concluded that 7 % of American priests are psychologically and emotionally developed, 18 % are developing, 66 % are underdeveloped and 8 % are maldeveloped (Kennedy 1972, 11). These numbers are important since it has been suggested that emotional immaturity is a key factor in the etiology of sexual abuse of children.

Conclusion

The major discourse circulating in society also dominated the discourse within the Catholic Church. All priests who abused were portrayed as pedophiles, meaning they suffered from a pathology. In the public forum, there was no space for a more nuanced discourse that acknowledged the complexity of the phenomenon of sexual abuse. In addition, even when accepting that CSA was a crime, the influence of the psychiatric discourse remained influential.

However, with regard to clerical sexual abuse in the Church, two distinct discourses can be identi-



fied. In the first, sin is considered a cause of abuse, reducing it to a matter of the will. The second discourse restricts CSA to the North American context, suggesting that moral decay has contaminated the clergy in that region.

Within the Catholic Church, the discourse about victims/survivors also mainly followed society's attitude: initially, such discourse was avoided, and silence was expedient to avoid scandal. When victims/survivors were finally listened to and believed, the psychological discourse became dominant, stressing the psychological consequences of abuse, such as PTSD, and the need for victims to receive therapy, thus leaving out systemic factors.

To conclude, given the prevalence of CSA (1 in 5 girls; 1 in 13 boys), I suggest that in the formation of practical theologians, CSA should be addressed both as an individual issue and as a systemic issue. I hope that not only care, but also prevention, becomes part of the formation. This would certainly help make the world a safer place for children.

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