

ad vitam

THE WEBZINE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN CANADA



Abuse in the Church: Between Crisis and Hope



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Speak, heal, rebuild

Sabrina Di Matteo, Assistant Director, Ongoing Formation, Canadian Religious Conference

I grew up in a Church that was not yet marred by the sexual abuse crisis. I happily remember moments in my parish, like youth ministry camps where we teenagers wrestled for fun with the young priest before throwing him into the lake. I remember my guitar lessons with a seminarian, in a closed rectory meeting room. I had no concerns. I know now that other children experienced something completely different, behind closed doors – and I cry.

mundi” (and its call for the implementation of prevention and reporting protocols), following the Summit on the protection of minors and vulnerable adults in February 2019.

All the baptized are called to rediscover their collective responsibility in the ecclesial body, and bishops and superiors of religious institutes will, more than ever, face the obligation of accountability.

Younger generations may never know a Church exempt of the shadow of abuse. However, those who commit themselves to it, people of consecrated life, lay people and ordained ministers, will surely, like Saint Francis of Assisi, be called to become a generation of reparation: “Go, rebuild my Church”.

All the baptized are called to rediscover their collective responsibility in the ecclesial body, and bishops and superiors of religious institutes will, more than ever, face the obligation of accountability.

Today, priests no longer dare to put a hand on a child’s shoulder or tie the cord of a young altar server’s alb. Policies for responsible pastoral ministry suggest meeting rooms with windowed doors, being minimally two people in the presence of a child, doing background checks of volunteers who will be in contact with minors, etc.

These practical measures are necessary, as is the establishment of long-awaited universal norms by the motu proprio “Vos estis lux

The webzine *ad vitam* is the new publication of the Canadian Religious Conference. This window into consecrated life in Canada features theological and pastoral reflections on issues relevant to the Catholic Church and to consecrated life. The articles are complemented by videos and audio files.

The Catholic Church and sexual abuse

Marie-Jo Thiel, MD, theologian



Novalis, 2019
720 pages

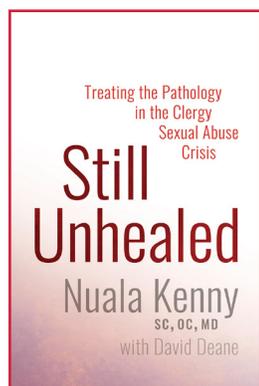
Marie-Jo Thiel is the founder and director of the European Center for Studies and Research in Ethics (Université de Strasbourg, France). Her recently published book (currently only available in French), *L'Église catholique face aux abus sexuels sur mineurs* (Novalis/Canada, Bayard/France), brings unique perspectives to analyzing sex abuse on minors in the Catholic Church, due to the intersection of the author's own expertise. A medical doctor by training, Marie-Jo Thiel's practice developed her interest in ethics, which steered her towards a theology degree.

Throughout her journey, she met victims of sex abuse (in Church or family contexts) as well as sex offenders. She was made aware of

the lack of resources pertaining to such cases and for helping the survivors of sex abuse and the offenders move forward in healing. Years of thorough research yielded this book. It first focuses on the developments of medicine and criminal justice, the psychological profiles of offenders and the consequences experienced by victims. This is followed by considerations specific to the Catholic Church: magisterial documents, abuse cases in various countries, ethical and theological issues relating to the causes of sexual abuse, as well as their prevention. The style and explanations make this book an enlightening and necessary read, where the faith and hope of Marie-Jo Thiel for a Church in search of just and healthy foundations shine through.

Healing the Church: the diagnosis of a sister

Nuala Kenny, SC, OC, MD



Novalis, 2019
176 pages

Nuala Kenny, Sister of Charity of Halifax, is a pediatrician and professor emeritus. A member of the Canadian bishops' committee that produced the world's first guidelines on child sexual abuse, she does not hesitate to define the crisis as pathological. With theologian David Deane, Sr. Nuala Kenny analyzes the systemic ecclesial causes of abuse, and calls to healing by a reform of governance and spiritual renewal.

1. You've been working in the area of policies and prevention of sex abuse since the 1980s. You bring your unique perspective as a doctor to this ongoing crisis. The abuse is a symptom of a deeper sickness. What's the diagnosis? What are the components of this sickness?

2. In 2012, you wrote *Healing the Church Diagnosing and Treating the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal*. Seven years later, what especially triggered writing your new book, *Still Unhealed*, and talking about a pathology in the sexual abuse crisis (no longer labelled a "scandal")?

3. When we speak of the Church as one Body, it's easy to understand how all its members are wounded by the sex abuse crisis: victims first and foremost, children and vulnerable adults, innocent clergy and laypeople who are "tired" of the crisis and compassion fatigue. However, in Pope Francis' Letter to the People of God, August 2018, the whole Church is called to responsibility in this crisis and in transforming the Church.

How do you understand this?

4. With regards to religious communities, many brothers and sisters alive today have to deal with the legal, financial and spiritual consequences of sexual abuse committed by people in their communities who are now deceased, whom they didn't even know. Their own mission in consecrated life is tarred by the scandals.



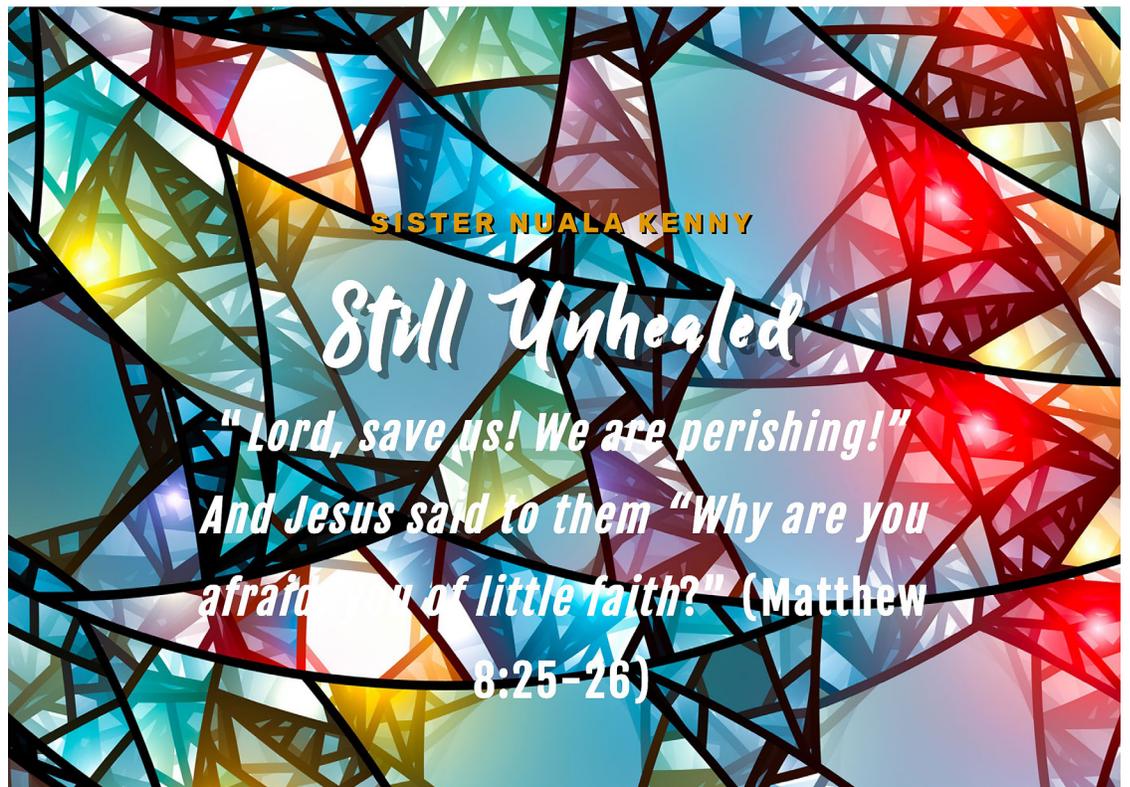
What would you say to those religious, and to community leaders, to cope with this reality, move forward and reclaim hope?

6. What would you say to the next generation of Catholic leaders, whether priests or bishops, religious and laity?

5. When a doctor diagnoses a sickness and recommends a prescription or a cure, the patient as well as his environment are taken into consideration, especially if the environment is what is causing the sickness. Conversion and transformation must happen at different levels: personal, parish, religious community, diocesan, bishops, Vatican. What would you recommend as priorities and who must lead in these responsibilities?

Following her latest book, Sr. Nuala Kenny recently launched her website to share resources and initiatives, in a spirit of healing for the victims of abuse and the Church.

www.stillunhealed.ca





Collateral damages

Alain Ambeault, CSV, Executive director, Canadian Religious Conference

The major crisis currently being experienced by the Catholic Church because of the various abuses committed by clergymen, men religious and women religious, is devastating for its credibility. The bearers of a message of truth cannot dissociate their behaviour from the testimony that their speech is intended to convey.

First, attention and help must undoubtedly be directed towards the victims, whether they are minors or adults. Any reparation or redress, long before being addressed in a pecuniary sense, must start with the reception and listening provided in response to people's expe-

rience and the common search for a way towards a possible healing.

Collateral victims

The tragedy of abuse also creates collateral victims. In no way should the following statements be construed as a desire to qualify this primary and necessary attention offered to the victims.

I would like, however, in this webzine intended especially for heads of religious congregations, to share my experience of having run a community both at the provincial level (in

Canada) and at the overall leadership level, where I was confronted more than once with situations of allegations and the need to manage cases of abuse.

I think about the people who assume the leadership of the congregations affected by these tragedies and of all those women and men religious who see the name they bear being tainted with a deep shame. To forget those elements in the sad phenomenon of sexual abuse would obscure some of the reality. The deplorable actions of some individuals do not make a whole community guilty, but all of its members suffer from it, many become discouraged and the community as a whole is affected by the concrete consequences.

Re-reading our history

Moments of personal crisis are complex and it becomes necessary to call out for help. Courageous indeed are the people able to resist the temptation to close themselves off from the world and endeavour instead to knock on the right doors for help. Religious congregations are also complex universes that have a tendency to erect protective walls around themselves so that problems can be solved *in the family*. In the short term, congregational leaders have to face the imperatives of



denouncing sexual or psychological abuse. In the medium and long term, a process is also needed to ensure that the history of a religious family—the mission it has carried out over the years, and the dedication of so many consecrated women and men—does not collapse. Indeed, the weight of a sentence that turns into shame can lead to discouragement and disengagement. What a sad life it is to no longer be able to look at oneself in the mirror of your community's history!

I dare to suggest one avenue: let's not try to re-read our history all by ourselves. We need the help of women and men who will bring us an enlightened, wise and just view. A look from the outside that airs out the interior and gives it back the taste to live. Not a vision of "Don't worry..." that would deny the gravity of the

Indeed, to accept the "other" who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word con-solatio, "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude.

Spe Salvi #38

 **On the paths where we are struggling, how good it is,
Lord, to meet your cross!
On the summits we seek, we know it Lord,
we will find your cross!
And when we finally see you in the light, Lord,
we will understand your cross!** 

Hymn of Good Friday

I am ashamed to bear the name of my community

One day, with tears in his eyes, a colleague confided to me: "All these scandals make me ashamed to bear the name of my community." That declaration pierced my heart! I felt then the weight of the solitude of this confrere whose suffering had become unbearable. Happy solitude when it creates the vital space of an encounter with oneself, a deep solidarity with the people around us and a time with God. What a chasm, otherwise, when solitude closes its eyes in order to no longer see the paralyzing fear.

situation, but a perspective that raises the eyes without denying the mistakes made. That is when prayer becomes spiritually powerful because a look of faith that knows how to identify the pitfalls of the road, but does not accept collapse, leads to a renewed future.

The way of consolation

In his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out the foundations of hope in this troubled world.

Indeed, to accept the "other" who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this

suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word con-solatio, "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude. (Spe Salvi #38)

Congregations always have a testimony to bear. Whether it be in their moments of joy or their moments of trial, they must testify to a hope that brings about what is promised to us in the present.

At the heart of all these painful situations of abuses committed in the Church, we—women and men religious—must be women and men with consoling hearts. Let us be with the people who are suffering, the direct victims of abuse, or those others, the collateral victims, who must also bear those trespasses. Let us give ourselves the means to calmly re-read our history with the "wise ones" of this world who will be able to remind us of the lesson of the Parable of the Weeds (tares) among the good Wheat.

*On the paths where we are struggling,
how good it is,
Lord, to meet your cross!
On the summits we seek, we know it Lord,
we will find your cross!
And when we finally see you in the light, Lord,
we will understand your cross!*
(Hymn of Good Friday)

A bishop's **view**

Remarks by the **Most Rev. Marc Pelchat**, Auxiliary Bishop of Quebec



Our Church has been plunged into a genuine crisis since we became aware of the scale of the sexual abuse of minors committed by priests, bishops and deacons, or other persons who had been given an ecclesial mission.

This awareness also extends to vulnerable adults, in particular women religious abused by priests and poorly protected by their superiors.

Sins unveiled and in the open, unbearable crimes, scandals that hurt all members of the Church—first and foremost, the victims—and our societies that expect better from religion. These abuses also demonstrate a dysfunction in the governance of our Church and in the exercise of the managerial ministry carried out by ordained ministers. These crimes are abuses of power, breaches of trust or abuses of conscience, and their concealment is not the least aspect of the scandal.

These facts have been known by many people in charge for a few decades, but their magnitude has been brought to the attention of most of us in the last few years, with an intensity that has shaken us. We cannot discharge ourselves of responsibility for this moral bankruptcy by considering that it is the work of only a part of our brothers, but we must recognize that we have a part of it and that we are engaged in a work of conversion, recovery and transformation.

From awareness to responsibility

Bishops and local churches must turn away from denial and silence to find ways to put victims first and to show concrete compassion for them by welcoming, listening and accompanying them towards healing.

In Canada, we also need to be aware of the scandal of the residential schools for Indigenous children, which has long been erased from our collective memory. This result of a colonial policy in which ecclesial institutions were complicit contributed to a cultural genocide that also encouraged abuses.

In our country, awareness dates back to the early 1980s with various cases of sexual abuse. The Canadian Bishops began to address the issue in 1987, and in 1992 published the document *From Pain to Hope* with guidelines and recommendations. A few years ago, the CCCB (Canadian Conference of

One of the great challenges remains healing, reconciliation and repair or amends, especially when the reporting occurs after a few decades and the perpetrator is dead. We meet victims, we offer support. However, some victims are asking for a more tangible reparation that is difficult for us to assess and grant. Our reality is also to work with insurers and legal counsel. In that respect, there is still a long way to go.



In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me

(Matthew 25:40)

Catholic Bishops) formed a new ad hoc committee to move forward. The document *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* was adopted by the Bishops in September 2018.

In the wake of the motu proprio “Vos estis lux mundi” published on May 7, 2019, dioceses and religious communities have a period of one year to implement “public, stable and easily accessible systems for submission of reports”.

In the field in the diocese

In the Archdiocese of Quebec, to cite our own work site in this regard, we created a diocesan task force in the fall of 2018 for the protection of minors and vulnerable people in order to create a safe pastoral environment, easier access to the reporting of particular situations, an effective process for the reception of victims and the handling of allegations and, finally, proposals for support that respect victims.

We have set up sessions to raise awareness and provide information on the sexual abuse issue for all people in charge of pastoral ministries and stakeholders, as well as for diocesan staff.

We still have to establish effective prevention processes with all our stakeholders and our thousands of volunteers in the parishes and in the various groups of faithful. We also want to

develop a code of ethics for our pastoral staff and codes of conduct for all stakeholders in the field.

The people in charge of priestly and diaconal formation continue to review their formation programs with respect to the question of the development of the psycho-sexual maturity of the candidates. We will be proceeding very soon with the revision of our diocesan protocol for handling allegations of sexual abuse and will evaluate the ease of access to the reports and the complaint-handling procedure.

We are also working on communicating to the public on the actions we are taking, the policies that are being applied and the statistics on situations handled by the advisory committee, in order to improve transparency.

As a Bishop and as a brother among the baptized, I hope that these concrete measures will help prevent other abusive situations and will lead our Church towards proposals of healing, in order to reconnect with the evangelical demand: “in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40).

Masks, restorative justice artwork by Céline Savard, 2018 exhibit in Montreal (Quebec).

A way of healing: Restorative Justice

Mathieu Lavigne, Centre for Services in Restorative Justice (Montreal)

The Centre for Services in Restorative Justice (CSJR), founded in 2001 in Montreal, is working to create spaces for expression, listening and sharing among people affected by criminal acts. The means that the Centre uses to achieve this goal are intended for those who have been victims of criminal acts, those who have committed them, as well as for members of the community who wish to engage in a restorative process based on encounter and dialogue. Victims of crime are supported in their need to express themselves and be recognized. Individuals

who have committed crimes are encouraged in their process of taking responsibility and their willingness to make reparation. Finally, the community is made aware of this form of alternative justice and is invited to participate in it. The restorative justice approach is thus aimed at contributing to social peace.

Since the restorative justice approach is based on the liberating voice of the crime victim speaking out, that same approach applied to the context of sexual abuse in the Church must also begin with that kind of testimony.

 **At the CSJR, we offer “Victim-Offender Encounters” [...] The dialogue in these meetings opens up spaces for answering questions haunting the victim. [...] By providing a transparent answer, the person who has perpetrated acts of violence helps the victim to repair himself and, in the process, the perpetrator repairs himself as well. Ultimately, it is the social fabric that is restored.** 

The excerpt available here comes from a podcast produced by the CSJR. In this excerpt, Gilles, who was sexually assaulted as a child (outside the religious context), describes what the restorative justice approach has given him in his life.



Liberating one's voice to liberate oneself

Restorative justice allows the creation of spaces in which a safe dialogue can take place. At the CSJR, we offer “Victim-Offender Encounters” (VOE), which are group meetings, and we also propose meetings in a “Face-to-Face” format.¹ These meetings bring together people who have committed a crime with people who have suffered similar crimes. In other words, in our meetings, we do not bring together an offender and his or her own victim—a process proposed by Correctional Service Canada. A meeting organized by the CSJR could, for example, bring together assailants and victims, or guilty murderers with people whose lives have been overturned by the violent death of a loved one. These individuals meet on several occasions spread out over a period of a few weeks, at the CSJR or in a penitentiary, and are supervised by trained volunteers.

Why propose such meetings around crimes suffered or committed in a similar way? In

some criminal cases, the offender may not be known to the victim, or the victim may not want to see him or her again, the perpetrator is dead or has not been disclosed, or does not acknowledge the acts perpetrated. The meetings proposed by the CSJR therefore allow people who have been victims to experience a restorative justice process that they might not otherwise have experienced.

The dialogue in these meetings opens up spaces for answering questions haunting the victim: “Why did you do such a thing?,” “Are you aware of the suffering that your action caused?” or “Why me?” By providing a transparent answer, the person who has perpetrated acts of violence helps the victim to repair himself and, in the process, the perpetrator repairs himself as well. Ultimately, it is the social fabric that is restored where crime had broken the trust necessary for living together. This social dimension is included thanks to the presence of citizens who, in the dialogue, represent the community. That makes it tangible that crime affects us all and that we are all responsible for it.

¹ The services of the CSJR are free and the entire process, whether one is victim or offender, is voluntary. Also, the procedure does not affect the file of a detained person, because it is a personal approach.

Finally, while restorative justice is often associated with the notion of forgiveness, that is not the goal of the approach. For some people who have been victims, the idea of forgiveness is experienced as a pressure or even a need of the offender who would like to appease his conscience. For others, forgiveness will be experienced as a very personal gesture that is intended primarily to liberate oneself.

Restorative justice is not opposed to traditional justice: rather, it is complementary to it. Restorative justice gives the person the freedom to change and heal internally. It is not a question of denying or trivializing reprehensible acts, but of going beyond punishment alone.

Restorative justice in the Church?

In the face of sexual abuse, the Catholic Church has set up abuse-prevention policies and pastoral ministries responsible for establishing safe pastoral environments. Working on prevention means showing victims that we are aware of the impact of the acts that have been inflicted on them.

However, what about repair in the Church? Assaults have already taken place: lives have been turned upside down, the social fabric of many communities of faith has been severely weakened, offenders have been tried. Those are the three key elements of restorative justice: it includes victims, offenders and the community, and it proposes a process in which everyone will find some appeasement.

Among the possible ways of repairs in the Church, here are two of them:

1. Restorative circles

This initiative has been observed in particular in France and the United States. On November 3, 2018, in Lourdes, during the plenary assembly of the Bishops of France, the Bishops met

victims of sexual abuses committed by the clergy. In four different sessions, four circles of bishops listened to victims testify about their experiences and suggest ways of prevention and healing. The meeting's format did not inspire unanimity, neither from the victims nor from the bishops, but the moment will have been important for having listened to the words of the survivors of such tragedies. "I felt to a certain extent reintegrated into the body of the Church from which I had felt rejected," said Véronique Garnier, abused by a priest for two years in early adolescence.

In the United States, on May 1, 2019, a similar meeting was held at Catholic University of America. For a whole day, there were discussions among victims, a dozen bishops, canon law experts, youth protection specialists and victim assistance coordinators.

Would it not be possible to organize such "talking circles," providing anonymity and confidentiality, in dioceses or with religious congregations? These circles could include survivors, members of the clergy, persons of consecrated life, as well as representatives of the community, both civil and church. It would even be possible to include carefully selected offenders. The challenge is great but here is a restorative track to explore.

2. Masses of Reparation

This line of action is more in line with the symbolic and restorative impact of rituals. Normally, a Mass of Reparation is held when a serious act has been committed in a sacred place. In 2019, the Archdiocese of Hartford (Connecticut, USA) held Masses of Reparation, including in one parish in particular where five aggressor priests (out of 48 identified by the diocese) had been abusive. The archbishop appeared before the assembly, on his knees, then prostrated himself and asked forgiveness from



“Prayer with future husband”. Work of art therapy in restorative justice, March 2018 / Julie Ann Carpini.

God, the assembly, the entire community, and of course the victims and their families. According to Alain Ferron, priest and prison chaplain in Laval (Quebec), the gesture would have been even more powerful if people in the assembly had also prostrated themselves in front of the victims along with the archbishop. That would have symbolized the community’s responsibility, in both the crime and the reparation.

A space of humanity

Restorative justice is not magic. It is not made for all individuals who have been victims, nor for all those who have committed a crime. It is not an approach to begin a path of healing. Restorative justice proposes, in freedom, a path of hope to open up a space of humanity, one not tainted by the violence suffered or perpetrated.

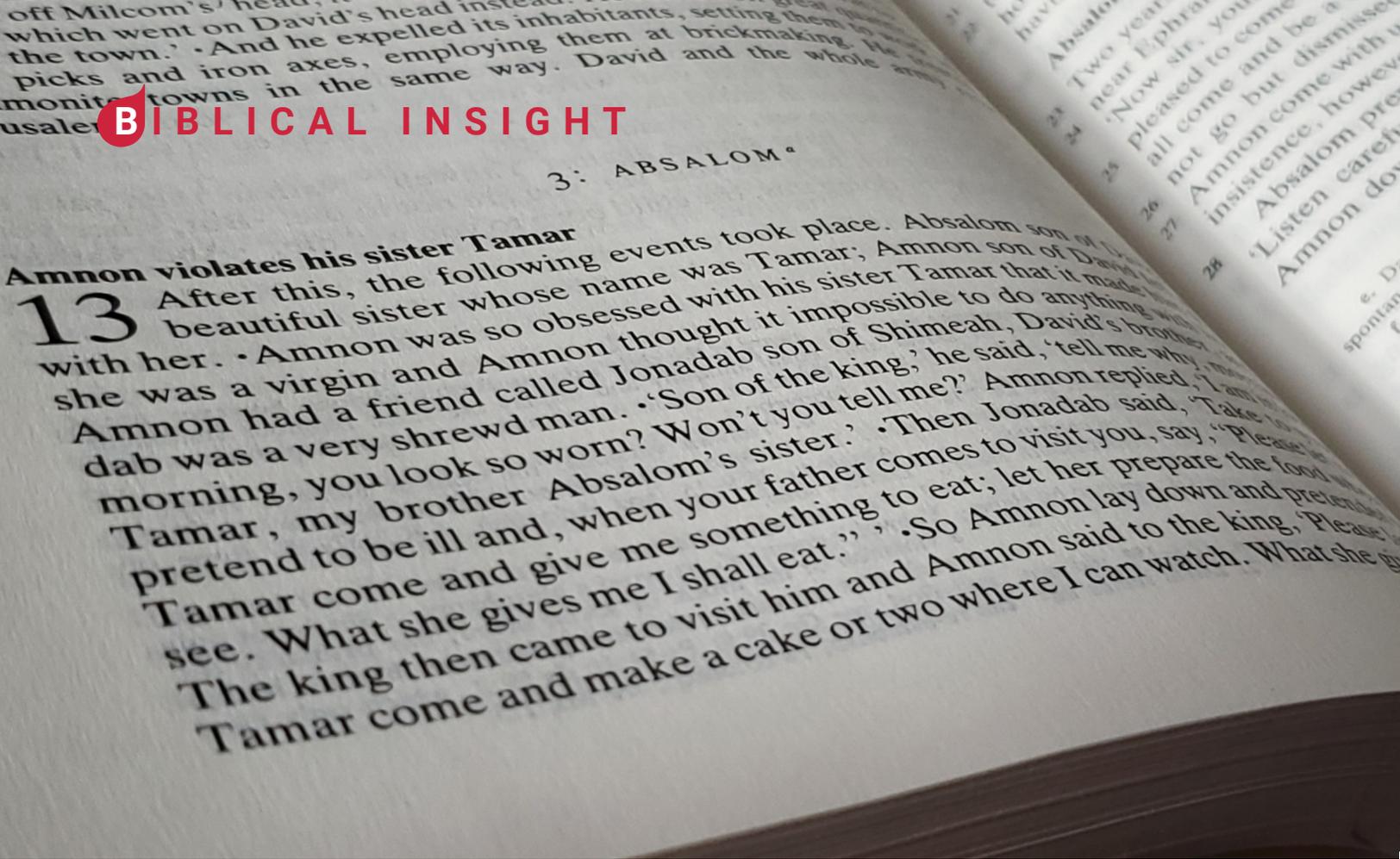
Finally, here is an excerpt from the testimony of an offender, Jean-Paul. It is with him that

Gilles, the survivor of sexual assaults introduced at the beginning of the article, undertook a restorative justice approach. The word at the end is his, to open a space of humanity. Let us hope that the Church will know how to create such spaces in the near future.



Find more information in the *Testimonies* section of the Centre for Services in Restorative Justice’s website.

- 🔊 Listen to the podcast where Jeremy, a sex offender (not in a Church context), shares his experience of restorative justice. Originally in French, dubbed in English.
- 🔊 Listen to Julie Ann, a survivor of sex abuse (not in a Church context), recount her experience of restorative justice. Originally in French, dubbed in English.



Suffering in silence: the story of Tamar

Sabrina Di Matteo, Assistant Director, Ongoing Formation, Canadian Religious Conference

Like a library of literary genres, the Bible also contains surprising texts, particularly in the Old Testament, in which violence sets the stage. How should we view these stories? Why were they included in the biblical canon (determined in 1546 at the Council of Trent, for the Roman Catholic Church)?

The account of the rape of Tamar, daughter of King David, is an eloquent example. This little known text, never read in our liturgies, is especially relevant today. Its place in the biblical canon allows us to reflect on the dark sides of our human condition, with a faith perspective.

In the context of sexual abuse in the Church, but also considering all sexual violence against women, minors and vulnerable persons, Tamar's story sheds light on the power relations, suffering and silence experienced by victims of abuse.

The following is a proposed discussion guide to facilitate a biblical reflection in your community or faith group¹.

¹ Thank you to the young women of the Centre étudiant Benoît-Lacroix (Montreal), where I was a university campus minister, who allowed me to delve deeper into the story of Tamar, in the winter of 2019, during a Bible study and discussion on sexual abuse in the Church.

📖 **Read Tamar's story in the Second Book of Samuel (2 Sam 13:1-22)**

Note: Tamar and Absalom are sisters and brothers, children of David and the same mother. Amnon is their half-brother, son of David and another mother.

Suggested questions for discussion:

📖 **What leads Amnon, Tamar and Absalom's half-brother, to rape Tamar?**

Consider: Amnon's sickly desire linked to a forbidden practice (sleeping with his virgin half-sister²), the manipulation and planning of the aggression with Jonadab's complicity.

📖 **How does Absalom react when he learns that Tamar was raped by their half-brother?**

Consider: Absalom minimizes his sister's suffering and silences her (v. 20), but takes her into his home, where she lives, abandoned. King David is «irritated» but does not intervene (v. 21).

📖 **Did Tamar have a voice and agency (control over her actions) at any time?**

📖 **Where was the collectivity or community that could have reacted to this violence?**

📖 **Complement:** Read the remainder of the story (2 Sam 13:23-39). Amnon hates Tamar after raping her; Absalom hates Amnon and conspires to have him killed; David mourns Amnon and no longer speak to Absalom. From the rape plot to the murder of Amnon, the reader witnesses a cycle of violence.

📖 **Does Tamar's story change our outlook on sexual abuse in the Church?**

Consider: Victims are generally manipulated and «groomed» by their abuser, who establishes a trusting relationship with the victim and his/her family. This explains why in some cases, victims may normalize the abuse and only remember it years later. It also explains why some parents do not believe the child who reveals the abuse, since they themselves have established a friendly relationship with the abuser.

Did the ecclesial community or the Church leaders, to whom victims courageously revealed their abuse, minimize the suffering and experience they endured? Did abusers or Church leaders impose or buy silence? Did the larger Church community react to the violence or was it only "angry", like King David?

Have victims really been heard in our Church, not only in legal contexts, but in restorative justice processes?

Is there a cycle of violence at work in sexual abuse as experienced in the Church?

Do Tamar's story and this discussion encourage us to make changes, to demand better practices, as a people of God and ecclesial community?

📖 Read some online references on Tamar at Sojourners and in this essay focused on the account's use of verbs.

📖 To discover other controversial stories featuring women with new perspectives, we suggest reading the French book *Une bible des femmes* (Labor et Fides, 2018) where French-speaking theologians, Protestants and Catholics (from Europe, Africa and Quebec) revisit various biblical texts in light of recent research and feminist theology. This book was inspired by Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* (1895 and 1898), which aimed to challenge the subservience of women in religious orthodoxy and liberate women.

² An ancient custom would have permitted Amnon to marry his half-sister, Tamar. However, the laws of Leviticus (18 : 9 and 11) and of Deuteronomy (27 :22) forbade it.

A timeline of references

The following chronology documents a number of resources related to the prevention of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. These were produced at different times, by the Holy See and in North America especially.

📌 **Primitive Church (1st-2nd centuries):** The clergy as we know it is not yet established. The *Didache* (“teaching”, in Greek) explicitly condemns sexual relations between men and boys, at a time where “corruption of young boys” and promiscuity are current in Greco-Roman culture.

📌 **Council of Elvira (c. 305 A.D.):** Prohibition of pederasty and first obligation of priestly continence. During the Middle Ages, many councils sought to sanction corrupted clergy (Lateran councils of 1179 and 1215, among others). In 1741, Pope Benedict XIV promulgates *Sacramentum Poenitentiae*, quoted in 1962 by Pope John XXIII in *Crimen sollicitationis* on sexual solicitation by clerics – an instruction not made public at the time. The Canon Law of 1917 and 1983 both condemn sexual abuse by clergy.

📌 **June 8-9, 1985:** Report and recommendations *The problem of sexual molestation by Roman Catholic clergy: Meeting the problem in a comprehensive and responsible manner*, by Rev. Thomas P. Doyle, O.P.

📌 **May 1989 - June 1990:** Winter Commission Report (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John’s, Newfoundland), *The Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy*.

📌 **June 1992:** Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, CCCB, *From Pain to Hope*.

📌 **2002:** Adoption of the Charter for the Protec-

tion of Children and Young People by the USCCB. Publication of the report of the National Review Board on *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors*.

📌 **2015:** The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada shows the abuses (psychological, spiritual and sexual) committed by Christian Churches and Canadian religious communities in the residential school system implemented by the Canadian government.

📌 **August 20, 2018:** *Letter to the People of God*, Pope Francis.

📌 **September 27, 2018:** CCCB publishes *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation*

📌 **February 19, 2019:** Statement prior to the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in Rome, UISG/USG.

📌 **February 21-24, 2019,** Rome: Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church.

📌 **February 27, 2019:** Canadian Jesuits, *Sexual Abuse in the Church: Paths of Healing and Transformation*.

📌 **May 7, 2019:** Motu proprio “Vos estis lux mundi” released by the Vatican to implement new international norms of prevention and reporting.

Abuse in the Church on the big screen

There is a surprising number of feature-length films and documentaries on the theme of sexual abuse (and other forms of abuse) in the Church. The following productions are suggested because they are opportunities to raise awareness on the experiences of victims and to reflect on this painful Church reality. In this way, these films prove that media can play a necessary and relevant role in understanding and moving forward.

The Dazzled (Fiction, 2019, France)

Camille, 12, passionate about circus, is the eldest of a large family. One day, her parents enter a religious community based on sharing and solidarity in which they invest fully. The girl must accept a way of life that calls into question her desires and her own torments. Gradually, regimentation becomes sectarian. Camille will have to fight to assert her freedom and save her brothers and sisters.



Prey (Documentary, 2019, Canada)

Basilian priest Father Hodgson Marshall was convicted of abusing boys throughout southern Ontario during his decades-long career. *Prey* follows survivor Rod MacLeod, and his lawyer Rob Talach, as they pursue justice through a public trial in the hopes of forcing the dark and hidden story of clergy sexual abuse to light. You can watch the documentary [here](#).



Examination of Conscience (Docuseries, 2019, Spain)

Allegations of child sexual abuse in Spain's Catholic institutions are examined in interviews with survivors, clergy, journalists and other experts. You can watch the series [here](#).



Abused Sisters, the Other Church Scandal

This 97-minute documentary, directed by Éric Quintin and Marie-Pierre Raimbault, was broadcasted in March 2019 on Arte TV (France).

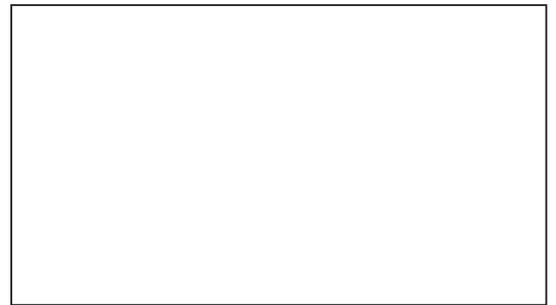
After keeping silent for a long time, nuns from several continents recount how they were raped by priests who abused their power. The Church (the Vatican) had been aware of this abuse for a few decades, yet did nothing. Besides the physical abuse, some sisters who became pregnant were forced to have an abortion by their rapist or by the major superior of their community.

In April 2019, following a legal proceeding by a German priest who complained he was identifiable in the documentary, the Hamburg District Court issued a temporary injunction prohibiting Arte TV from continuing to broadcast the documentary. It is, therefore, unavailable at this time.



By the Grace of God (Fiction, 2018, France)

Alexandre lives in Lyon with his wife and children. One day he learns by chance that the priest who abused him when he was in scouts is still working with children. He decides to take action and is soon joined by two other victims of the priest, François and Emmanuel. They band together to “lift the burden of silence” surrounding their ordeal. But the repercussions and consequences will leave no one unscathed.



The Keepers (Docuseries, 2017, USA)

This docuseries examines the decades-old murder of Sr. Catherine Cesnik and its suspected link to a priest accused of abuse.

You can watch the series [here](#).



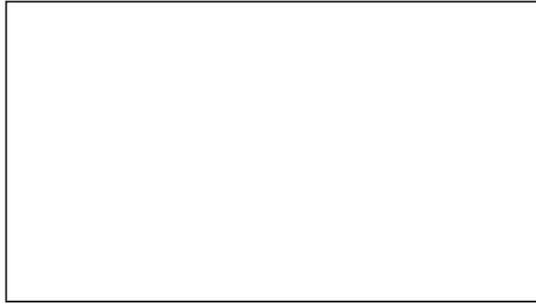
Spotlight (Fiction, 2015, USA)

A team of investigative reporters at the *Boston Globe* relentlessly investigate a shocking child molestation cover-up by the Catholic Church in Boston, also implicating the legal and government establishments. Based on the true story of the “Spotlight” investigative team that set off other revelations around the world.



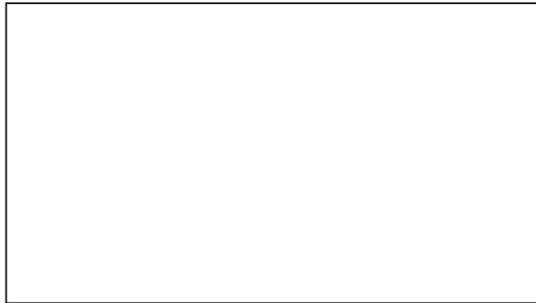
Bad Education (Fiction, 2014, Spain)

In the early 60s, two boys - Ignacio and Enrique - discover love, movies and fear in a Christian school. Father Manolo, the school principal and Literature teacher, both witnesses and takes part in these discoveries. The three characters come against one another twice again, in the late 70s and in 1980. These meetings are set to change the life and death of some of them.



Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God (Documentary, 2012, USA)

Alex Gibney explores the charged issue of pedophilia in the Catholic Church, following a trail from the first known protest against clerical sexual abuse in the United States and all the way to the Vatican.



Doubt (Fiction, 2008, USA)

Set at a Catholic school in the Bronx, it centers on a nun who grows suspicious when a priest begins taking too much interest in the life of a young black student. Is she being overly protective or not protective enough? And can she work within the system to discover the truth?



Twist of Faith (Documentary, 2004, USA)

A man confronts the trauma of past sexual abuse as a boy by a Catholic priest only to find his decision shatters his relationships with his family, community and faith.



The Magdalene Sisters (Fiction, 2002, Ireland)

The film follows the stories of four young women - Margaret ("guilty" of being raped by her cousin), Rose (unmarried mother), Bernadette (too beautiful and coquettish) and Crispina (mentally-handicapped single mother) - who are all forced by their families or caretakers to go to the Magdalene Asylum.



About

The CRC

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

"The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe."

Mission statement adopted in 2010

ad vitam

Launched in 2019 by the Canadian Religious Conference, *ad vitam* is a webzine and a window into consecrated life in Canada. Featuring articles and audio-visual media, *ad vitam* proposes theological and pastoral reflections on the Catholic Church and consecrated life. This resource aims to serve religious communities and their leadership, as well as readers interested in consecrated life and Church issues.

Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

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