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The (Im)Possibility of Forgiveness: Just Peace and Reconciliation in a Culture of Sexual Violence

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THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF FORGIVENESS:

JUST PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN A CULTURE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Sexual violence is often viewed as an individual sin, which problematically ignores the sinful structures that enable and incentivize perpetrators and restrict victim-survivors. These social structures hamper the possibility of forgiveness, as the operative cultural norms do not change even if a perpetrator repents, meaning cycles of harm continue. Reforming sinful structures means naming the embodied vices of those in power and subsequently building a framework to create lasting change. This framework places priority on victim-survivors, employs principles of just peace, and strives towards right relationship and reconciliation but not necessarily forgiveness. The Catholic Church has rich pastoral and sacramental resources that can be used to put this framework into action, offering support for victim-survivors while creating space for perpetrators and communities at large to repent and work for just peace that mirrors the reign of God.

Julie Rubio, PhD, Director Date

With love and gratitude for all the strong women who
supported me throughout the writing process.

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Introduction

> "When violence is done to women,
> to their bodies or their spirits,
> it is an insult to divine glory."[1]

Yet the Catholic Church does not have a systemic response to sexual violence committed against women. There are fragmented attempts to confront the problem. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has issued statements on violence against women, but they are not well-known nor are they particularly substantive. Like many theologians who write on acts of sexual violence, the USCCB focuses on the sins of the perpetrator, assuming that the perpetrator acknowledging and atoning for his sins is enough to change his ways and to eventually eliminate the problem. There is little focus on victim-survivors and even less focus on social structures and systems that enable sexual violence.

Some theologians, like Margaret Farley, have touched on the topic of sexual violence in their broader work on sexual ethics, but it has not been their main focus. They do no more than glimpse at structures that enable sexual violence, nor do they devote great time to what should happen after sexual violence takes place. This thesis looks to change this. To do so, it presents sexual violence as a form of structural, not simply individual, sin. It then explores frameworks that can be used to bring truth to light about sexual violence, centering the experiences of victim-survivors, looking towards just peace and social reconciliation. Finally, it offers myriad solutions for addressing sexual violence in the pastoral and sacramental realms, demonstrating that the Catholic Church has the resources to work towards structural reform while simultaneously caring for the most harmed. Throughout, the topic of

[1] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 96.

forgiveness is discussed – can it be required? Is it a possibility? What conditions make forgiveness more attainable?

Before embarking on this journey, we must build a firm foundation, creating a common understanding of the reality of sexual violence today, of the limitations of this thesis, and of terminology, both with regards to sexual violence and to reconciliation and forgiveness.

In her lifetime, one in six women in the United States will experience an attempted or completed rape.[2] This does not account for women who experience sexual coercion or sexual assault that does not meet the criteria for rape. Given the prevalence of these statistics, it is no wonder that sexual violence permeates the everyday fabric of women's lives, altering the ways in which they move, act, and simply be. Using the language of Catholic Social Teaching, sexual violence is a blatant violation of human dignity. Living precariously does not allow for human flourishing, impeding a person's ability to fully participate in society.

A couple other statistics are helpful to know from the start. First, 73%[3] to 80%[4] of adult victim-survivors knew their perpetrator before violence occurred. This becomes particularly relevant in discussions of forgiveness and reconciliation – a victim-survivor is generally not being asked to forgive an unknown stranger but rather someone she knows, which is often more complicated. Second, only 23% of sexual assaults are reported to the

[2] "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN," accessed December 5, 2020, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence.
[3] National Sexual Violence Resource Center, *What Is Sexual Violence? Fact Sheet*, 2010, 1, accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Factsheet_What-is-sexual-violence_1.pdf.
[4] "Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN," accessed April 6, 2021, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/perpetrators-sexual-violence.

police.[5] This underreporting has many causes, but most important here is that, for whatever reason, there is a culture operative that diminishes violence done to women.

Given the space limitations of this thesis, many topics had to be excluded. This includes rape as an act of war, clergy-perpetrated sex abuse, and child sex abuse. There is not room here to sufficiently analyze the role of race, despite the fact that multiracial, Native, and Black women are statistically more likely to experience sexual violence than white women,[6] due in no small part to the historic and current oppression of women of color, particularly Black women.[7] Rather than treat race inadequately, I have reluctantly omitted it here and flagged it for future research, where I can do the topic the justice it deserves. In addition, both for the sake of simplicity and because most existing sociological research does so, I focus on heterosexual instances of sexual violence. This is not to imply that sexual violence is not a problem for LGBTQ persons but rather a reflection on both the inadequacies of available sources and the disturbing prevalence of sexual violence – I need not look further than heteronormative spaces to find a plethora of examples of wrongdoing and pain.

There is also much to add in a more explicitly theological realm – on the perils of atonement theology and how it relates to justification of suffering, on how employing feminine images of God can remind us that the bodies of women are just as holy as those of men, on how liberation theology and eschatological hope provide visions of a future where

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[5] "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics | RAINN," accessed December 14, 2020, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system.
[6] "About Sexual Assault," *National Sexual Violence Resource Center*, accessed March 9, 2021, https://www.nsvrc.org/about-sexual-assault.
[7] For more on this topic, see M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Caroline Randall Williams, "You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2020, sec. Opinion, accessed October 31, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/opinion/confederate-monuments-racism.html; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013).

sexual violence is no more. These are all very worthy topics of study and are areas for further exploration, but sadly do not find space here.

This thesis focuses on adult women and takes a victim-survivor-centered approach. Following the in the footsteps of Megan McCabe, Kaya Oakes, and other theologians who write on sexual violence, I will primarily use female pronouns in this paper. Sexual violence victimizes both men and women and this choice is not meant to diminish that truth. However, the harsh reality is that approximately ninety percent of victims of sexual violence are women.[8] Tied in with this, I place victim-survivors at the center of my analysis, prioritizing their needs. Even if a potential solution could be beneficial in terms of eliminating sexual violence, I prioritize protecting victim-survivors and seek other solutions that will not cause harm to those who have already been victimized.

As has already been made apparent, I will employ a specific set of terminology in this thesis. This begins with the term sexual violence. Instead of focusing primarily on rape (which has a varying legal definition based on location) and sexual assault, I use sexual violence as a more all-encompassing term that includes not only rape and sexual assault but also unwanted sexual contact/touching, sexual harassment, voyeurism, and any nonconsensual exposure to sexual content.[9] Using such a broad term is important because it underlines that all forms of sexual violence are unacceptable, not simply the most egregious ones, and that social structures create many forms of sexual violence. In addition, as will be discussed in chapter one, victim-survivors often struggle to label their experiences as rape or assault. Though the term sexual violence does not solve this problem, I think it helps insofar as it offers a broader spectrum of experience with which women can more easily identify.

[8] "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN."
[9] "About Sexual Assault."

Despite its bulkiness, I use the term victim-survivor rather than victim or survivor on their own. Victim-survivor speaks to the fullness of the whole person, who is both victimized when she experiences sexual violence but also survives and works to find meaning in her new reality. It would be unfair to refer to her simply as victim (which would define her by the action of another) but also unfair to refer to her simply as survivor, as many victim-survivors are still in the process of identifying as a survivor, often dealing with significant mental health issues along the way.[10] I use the term perpetrator in lieu of attacker or rapist primarily because literature in the field makes the same choice. In addition, sexual violence is not always explicitly violent (as implied by the term attacker) and it is broader than rape.

I use three notions of reconciliation in this thesis: individual, social, and sacramental. I define reconciliation between two individuals as entering into right relationship by repairing past damages and working towards a more just future. Social reconciliation is thus enacting this process on a structural level, involving both relationships between individuals and structures that enable or encourage sins to gain tacit approval. Sacramental reconciliation, which will not be broached until the third chapter, speaks specifically of the sacramental process in the Catholic Church wherein a sinner confesses their sins to a priest, who in turn absolves the sins, restoring the relationship between the sinner and God.

Forgiveness moves further past reconciliation, to a place where the victim-survivor has experienced healing so profound that she no longer holds anger or resentfulness towards her perpetrator. Forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals should not be conflated. In this framework, forgiveness is about letting go of all negative feelings regarding a specific event and vocalizing that to the perpetrator. Though the internal work on the part of the

[10] "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN."

victim-survivor is a time-consuming journey, the relational element is a single moment. Reconciliation is more of a process, a rebuilding that acknowledges there is still harm to be sorted through and dealt with and that those involved are on the way.

Cultural narratives of forgiveness in the United States today are dichotomous. In one sphere, forgiveness is exalted. Here, we draw upon biblical narratives that tell us to "turn the other cheek," which are often used to emphasize forgiveness over retaliation. A concrete example of this valorization of forgiveness is the story of Thordis Elva, who gave a well-circulated TED talk with the man who sexually assaulted her.[11] Though Elva explains in interviews that she does not intend for others to follow in their example but rather to show that healing and forgiveness are possible,[12] critics say that her public forgiveness creates a standard where other victim-survivors are expected to work towards a similar resolution.[13] Elva's bravery became the model that other women need to live up to and those who cannot or do not forgive are made to feel like they should.

And yet simultaneously we see what has recently been dubbed "cancel culture" – the movement to remove power from those who do or say things that are unacceptable in any way, with acts of sexual violence understandably included in the category of unacceptable. This has generated many political and cultural debates that are not directly pertinent here, but the underlying notion is that "a traditional approach — apology, atonement, and

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[11] Thordis Elva and Tom Stranger, "Transcript of 'Our Story of Rape and Reconciliation,'" accessed March 11, 2021, https://www.ted.com/talks/thordis_elva_and_tom_stranger_our_story_of_rape_and_reconciliation/transcript.
[12] Heather Leighton, "A Rape Survivor and the Man Who Raped Her Teamed up to Write a Book and Tell Their Story," *CHRON*, last modified February 9, 2017, accessed March 18, 2021, https://www.chron.com/life/health/article/A-rape-survivor-and-the-man-who-raped-her-teamed-10920806.php.
[13] Alia E. Dastagir, "A Rape Survivor and the Man Who Assaulted Her Talk Weinstein, #metoo and Even Redemption," *USA TODAY*, accessed March 11, 2021, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/11/28/rape-survivor-and-man-who-assaulted-her-talk-weinstein-metoo-and-even-redemption/897169001/.

forgiveness — is no longer enough."[14] In this paradigm, something is inadequate about the process of apology, atonement, and forgiveness, as the life of the person apologizing and seeking forgiveness never really changes. Perpetrators maintain power and status while victims and groups of victims (in the case of more structural sins) deal with the harm. "For those who are doing the calling out or the canceling, the odds are still stacked against them. They're still the ones without the social, political, or professional power to compel someone into meaningful atonement."[15] Cancel culture thus gives a voice to the most marginalized, even if it is polarizing.

How do we reconcile these vastly different takes on forgiveness, especially in the complexity of the harms of sexual violence? First, we acknowledge that both are insufficient. An expectation for forgiveness puts an undue burden on the victim-survivor and can lead to premature or false forgiveness, causing even greater harm to the victim-survivor and to some degree condoning the actions of the perpetrator. And yet completely excluding the possibility of forgiveness denies the role of grace and the unpredictable nature of healing. Forgiveness cannot be controlled – but we can create circumstances that may make forgiveness easier.

Acts of sexual violence cannot be forgiven in the context of a societal paradigm that continues to condone such violence and to objectify women in particular, but this does not preclude a path to just peacemaking, social reconciliation, and reform. In a tradition that advocates forgiveness and values reconciliation, sexual violence presents particular problems – from perpetrators that do not know the wrongs they commit to victim-survivors who find forgiveness impossible. In this thesis, I widen the scope from the individual victim-survivor

[14] Aja Romano, "Why We Can't Stop Fighting about Cancel Culture," *Vox*, last modified December 30, 2019, accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/12/30/20879720/what-is-cancel-culture-explained-history-debate.
[15] Ibid.

and the individual perpetrator to look at structures that contribute to sexual violence and that influence moral agents. By taking such a structural approach, I can offer novel solutions tied to just peacemaking and social reconciliation, understanding that forgiving sexual violence in a culture that condones such violence does nothing to prevent future violence. This analysis will then allow me to offer concrete pastoral and sacramental solutions that can begin to change cultural norms while supporting victim-survivors and making forgiveness a more real possibility, though never a requirement.

Chapter 1

Structures: Male Aggressivity, Rape Culture, and Embodied Vice

Introduction

Sexual violence is simultaneously an individual sin and a manifestation of social sin. While an individual commits an act of sexual violence, such an act does not come out of nowhere. Rather, the act is influenced by cultural norms and sanctioned modes of violence and marginalization, particularly violence against and marginalization of women. However, these social structures often go unnoticed. As peace studies sociologist Johan Galtung writes, "structural violence may be seen as about as natural as the air around us."[1] It is therefore easy to miss the structures and to see simply the sin, to focus solely on the perpetrator and ignore the ways in which such behavior is either implicitly or explicitly condoned by society as a whole and by those who hold power. This is the route the Catholic Church commonly takes, as historically evidenced by the manualist tradition, which provided manuals for priests hearing confession. These manuals looked to offer clarity on the sinfulness of various actions, defining what is right and what is wrong so that the priest might better advise congregants on both the sinfulness of their previous actions and whether future acts being considered are or are not sinful. They were a way of judging the act itself, not analyzing what caused the act.[2] This approach of analyzing specific actions (or inactions) is still exemplified by some

[1] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 173.
[2] James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 11.

theologian-ethicists today, like moral theologian Albino Barrera's focus on individuating responsibility for collective harms.[3]

Within the field of this paper, for instance, USCCB resources on domestic violence and sexual abuse speak of the failures of the perpetrator, including the ways in which such men misinterpret scripture and Church teachings – yet never admitting that the Church itself has taught incorrectly or encouraged subordination of women.[4] This could possibly make sense as a pastoral response to an immediate situation of harm but it fails to make long-term change, as it does not address the root causes of sexual violence.

Sexual violence is perhaps unique as a form of structural sin. Other examples of structural sin, like structural racism and flawed economic systems, rarely have an identifiable individual perpetrator. Take, for instance the outsize impact of Hurricane Katrina on Black populations in New Orleans. Obviously, the storm did not choose to target persons of a particular race. As sociologist Michael Eric Dyson explains in *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*, cascading systemic failures led to the devastating impact of Katrina on Black persons. This includes the historical forces that concentrated bleak poverty in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward,[5] media outlets that consistently portray the activities of Black persons as criminal and suspicious,[6] and national political structures that grew out of Reagan's domestic policy stances.

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[3] See Albino Barrera, "Individuating Collective Responsibility," in *Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics*, ed. Daniel Finn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 220–239.
[4] See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women," last modified November 2002, accessed December 10, 2020, https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence. It should be noted that this document does mention that "Domestic violence is learned behavior. Men who batter learn to abuse through observation, experience, and reinforcement." However, this is the extent of the structural analysis it employs.
[5] Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2007), 10-12.
[6] See Ibid, Chapter 9.

Though we can scapegoat certain individuals who are involved in the process – which Dyson does not shy away from doing – they are simply the most visible present-day leaders responsible for current failures. They are not personally responsible for the generational harm perpetuated by social structures. President George W. Bush and FEMA director Michael Brown were responsible for failures in appropriate short-term preparation and response to Hurricane Katrina, but they were not at fault for the gentrification of New Orleans nor for the lack of economic and physical resources available to poor Black populations in the city. They are not directly at fault for the fact that the zip codes in New Orleans with the highest rates of both poverty and of the death penalty are the same exact areas that had the highest populations of enslaved persons pre-Civil War.[7] Rather, they inherited hundreds of years of consistently sinful structures. They are undoubtedly complicit, as the policies of their administration did not aid in rectifying the past nor in creating a more equal society, but they did not personally create racial inequality in the first place.

How does this transfer to situations of sexual violence? Even if a victim-survivor of sexual violence cannot name the person who assaulted her, it was still an individual or a group of individuals, not an indistinct, amorphous system. And yet the actions of the perpetrator did not appear out of nowhere. Much like the racist individual is taught racial slurs by a society that constantly devalues those who are non-white, the perpetrator of sexual violence is taught his ways by a society that condones the objectification of women. This plays out in seemingly innocuous ways in everyday life. When a parent polices a daughter's choice of clothing ("you're too young for a bikini," "those shorts are too short"), she is implicitly taught that her body is an object. Parents make sure the books their teenagers are reading

[7] Alexander Mikulich, "Slavery Walking Tour of New Orleans" (New Orleans, October 22, 2018).

and the shows their teenagers are watching are not too racy or sexual, knowing that they may learn attitudes towards sex that do not accord with the values parents hold. Similar questions arise in debates about sex education – what material is appropriate at what age, what is morally right or morally wrong, how the subject should be taught. These are all ways in which notions about sex, whether good or bad, are formed by society.

This chapter examines the structures that influence a culture of sexual violence. It will first look at social ethicist Daniel Finn's notion of structures creating incentives, enablements, and restrictions for agents and how that plays out in terms of rape culture and male aggressivity. Once these sinful structures are explored in greater detail, I will look specifically at their effects on victim-survivors.

Once this groundwork is established, I will then bring in Katie Walker Grimes' notion of embodied vice, arguing that elements of rape culture, like antiblackness supremacy, are automatic but voluntary actions performed by those in power. These explorations of structures and their effects will demonstrate that sexual violence is not simply an individual action committed by a perpetrator but also is a culturally conditioned phenomenon. Though this does not absolve the perpetrator of wrongdoing, it does change the way in which the problem must be approached.

Current Reality: Male Aggressivity and Rape Culture

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center explains, "Social norms that condone violence, use power over others, traditional constructs of masculinity, the subjugation of women, and silence about violence and abuse contribute to the occurrence of sexual violence.

Oppression in all of its forms is among the root causes of sexual violence."[8] They explicitly maintain that sexual violence is influenced by unhealthy social norms and unequal power dynamics. Yet how does this influence perpetrators? What is the interaction between structures of oppression and individual action?

The primary understanding of structures in this thesis is derived from Daniel Finn's argument that structures are causal but not deterministic. In his approach, he seeks to find a middle ground between overly deterministic models and overly individualistic models. In what he views as overly deterministic models, a person's agency is severely restricted by cultural norms and institutions, to the point that individuals have little to no say in how they act. Such an approach eliminates free will, which we understand cannot be the case with sexual violence. There are many people who do not commit acts of sexual violence, despite living in the same social contexts as perpetrators. On the other end of the spectrum, the overly individualistic models Finn seeks to avoid place too much emphasis on free will, virtually ignoring the impact of social structures on agents. He writes, "only persons are agents, but social structures exert causal impact through enablements, restrictions, and incentives, which in turn have an effect only through the decisions people make in response to them."[9] This interplay of enablements, restrictions, and incentives means that actions taken by a moral agent are part of a complex web. The person as agent acts but is influenced, consciously or not, by the social structures that surround them.

In other words, "causal impact occurs only because conscious human persons make decisions in light of those restrictions, enablements, and incentives – decisions that might be

[8] "About Sexual Assault."
[9] Daniel Finn, "Social Causality and Market Complicity: Specifying the Causal Roles of Persons and Structures," in *Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics*, ed. Daniel Finn (Oxford University Press, 2014), 258.

quite different had this person been facing different restrictions, enablement, or incentives."[10] Human persons act based on what their environment most easily allows or most greatly encourages. When a moral agent is in a position of power (gender, race, etc.), it is easy to fail to see the impact on the oppressed populations impacted by an action. Those who face the greatest restrictions or endure the greatest harms are often those who are willing to risk resistance.[11] These persons often can most clearly see the issues (and in the case of sexual violence, are often those who have first-hand knowledge of the harms) and have little incentive to support the erring structure. We see this in the #MeToo movement – it is those who have faced sexual violence and are most harmed by structures that allow it who worked towards change. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

However, it is important to remember that these social structures are pervasive but not deterministic. Theological ethicist Conor Kelly both cautions and explains, "one can identify sinfully racist structures while still acknowledging that good people can and do exist within them. The challenge, however, is that the structures make the good choices of good people more difficult to make and to sustain while simultaneously encouraging the bad choices of both good and bad people."[12] The same can be said of social structures that condone sexual violence (and various other forms of oppression). Just because an individual exists within a sinful social structure does not mean the individual automatically embodies those sinful values, but the structure makes it harder to make good choices.

Finn writes, "If week after week we make the same sinful choices encouraged by the restrictions we face within a sinful social structure, we slowly become the *kind* of person who

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[10] Daniel Finn, "What Is a Sinful Social Structure?," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (March 2016): 151.
[11] Ibid, 153.
[12] Conor Kelly, "Pinpointing Structural Racism," *Catholic Moral Theology*, June 16, 2020, accessed February 14, 2021, https://catholicmoraltheology.com/pinpointing-structural-racism/.

makes such sinful choices,"[13] taking a virtue ethics approach and implying that our moral formation is deeply affected by the structures that surround us on a daily basis. Here, the importance of recognizing and reforming sinful structures becomes even more apparent. Without constant resistance on the part of moral agents, the incentives, enablements, and restrictions present in a social structure begin to change the behavior of the agent, allowing the agent to internalize values and create habits that become progressively harder to break and that can even escalate.

How does this work with regards to sexual violence in particular? Sexual violence is not simply an individual problem; it is intricately linked with societal structures that condone such violence, particularly in the gendered form of masculine aggression. This does not suggest that all men will be sexually violent or that society as a whole approves of said violence. However, "a given culture's *sanctioned* expressions of aggression can generalize to unsanctioned, illegitimate aggression among some individual members of that society."[14] In the context of sexual violence, this implies that, while a culture itself does not condone sexual violence, norms of masculine aggression can easily spill over into such violence. The same study continues, "the primary causative factors of male aggressivity and sexual coercion are conceptualized in terms of external determinants that include male economic and political dominance in societies that both value and emphasize aggressivity."[15] There is thus an explicit link between cultural influence and sexual violence.

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[13] Daniel Finn, "'What Can You Do?:' Understanding Sinful Structures," *Commonweal Magazine*, last modified September 20, 2018, accessed December 30, 2020, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/what-can-you-do.
[14] Matthew Hogben et al., "Legitimized Aggression and Sexual Coercion: Individual Differences in Cultural Spillover," *Aggressive Behavior* 27, no. 1 (January 2001): 27, emphasis in original.
[15] Ibid.

It is here that we locate rape culture, which is defined as "a culture in which sexual violence is treated as the norm and victims are blamed for their own assaults."[16] This culture assumes that the problem of sexual violence can be solved through changing the behavior of potential victims rather than that of perpetrators. Concretely, this takes the form of teaching women how to avoid dangerous situations rather than teaching men to obtain enthusiastic consent, asking a victim-survivor what she was wearing when she experienced violence, and myriad other ways women are said to be "asking for it." Rape culture also fails to adequately punish perpetrators for their actions. Only 23% of sexual assaults are reported to police and only 2.2% of cases reported receive a conviction (which means approximately 0.5% of perpetrators are ever convicted for their crimes).[17] Institution like schools, universities, and the military likewise fail to punish perpetrators. Between being taught they must change their behavior and the lack of consequences for perpetrators, women learn they must restrict their own choices in order to protect themselves.

Rape culture is thus not sexual violence but rather a system that allows sexual violence to flourish. It is a structure that enables and even incentivizes potential perpetrators and restricts the actions of those who could potentially be harmed. Rape culture is sustained by "assumptions of male aggression and dominance and female acquiescence and passivity as well as contempt for male qualities, rape myths, and ambiguities about what constitutes rape and how to define consent."[18] As such, "patterns of sexuality that are infused with violence, coercion, and abuse are seen as typical, normal expressions of heterosexual relationality and

[16] Amanda Taub, "Rape Culture Isn't a Myth. It's Real, and It's Dangerous.," *Vox*, last modified December 15, 2014, accessed April 9, 2021, https://www.vox.com/2014/12/15/7371737/rape-culture-definition.
[17] "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics | RAINN."
[18] Manuela Thomae and G. Tendayi Viki, "Why Did the Woman Cross the Road? The Effect of Sexist Humor on Men's Rape Proclivity," *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology* 7, no. 3 (2013): 250.

encounters."[19] Perpetrators, as moral agents, are enabled and incentivized to act in harmful ways by these cultural norms and the norms are subsequently supported by the actions of agents.

Sexual violence is thus not simply an instance of misjudgment by a perpetrator against a victim, as the Catholic manualist, individualist tradition might lead one to believe. Such a view is not exclusive to the Catholic Church. As discussed in the introduction, popular dialogue today often speaks of canceling those who have committed wrongs of many sorts, including those who have perpetrated sexual violence. This presupposes that this violence is completely separate from the culture and that banishing perpetrators is enough to solve the problem. Though individuals are ultimately responsible for particular instances of sexual violence, focusing solely on the sins of individuals ignores the structures at work and allows sexual violence to continue to be endemic.

Effects on Victim-Survivors

The structures outlined in the previous section not only influence the actions of perpetrators of sexual violence, but they likewise affect victim-survivors in myriad ways. Rape culture affects all in society, not just perpetrators. As already mentioned, women restrict the risks they take and the opportunities they pursue due to the pervasiveness of rape culture.[20] Put another way, "People come to know who they are by virtue of what other people tell them they are. The fact is that self-image is largely a social construct."[21] Rape culture teaches

[19] Megan K. McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 2018): 638.
[20] Taub, "Rape Culture Isn't a Myth. It's Real, and It's Dangerous."
[21] Joan Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 154.

women that they are objects of male aggression, a notion that becomes internalized, linking self-worth with the prescribed norms of a patriarchal society.[22] "In the end, women, like other minorities who have been taught their natural limitations by the dominant culture in which the live, turn their anger against themselves. They come to realize their weakness, their defects […] mistrusting themselves."[23] This is yet another form of restriction, as it prevents women from living into their fullest selves and it is impossible to flourish when women cannot even trust themselves. Psychology studies make a link between internalized misogyny and psychological distress in the face of sexist events, underlining the detrimental effects of the internalization of patriarchal norms perpetuated by rape culture.[24]

For victim-survivors, internalized norms about how they should or should not be treated influences how they interpret injurious events. Experiences of sexual violence are difficult for victims to identify and label. In one study of thirty undergraduates, twenty-seven participants described at least one personal experience that met the criteria for sexual violence but only two labeled said experience as such – and even these two women failed to appropriately label other experiences.[25] Though they all "used words like "rape" and "victimization" to describe the experiences of *other* women, while saying things such as "'let's just call it a bad night' or 'things just went really badly'" when reflecting on themselves."[26]

Another study explains, "Rape acknowledgement—or the recognition of an individual's own victimization as a rape—may be influenced by several factors, including the

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[22] See B.L. Frederickson and T. Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21 (1997): 173–206.
[23] Chittister, *Heart of Flesh*, 156.
[24] Dawn Szymanski et al., "Internalized Misogyny as a Moderator of the Link between Sexist Events and Women's Psychological Distress," *Sex Roles* 61, no. 1–2 (July 2009): 107.
[25] Lynn M Phillips, *Flirting with Danger: Young Women's Reflections on Sexuality and Domination* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 7.
[26] McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," 638, emphasis in original.

victim's personal rape script and rape-related beliefs, the nature of the assault, reactions received from the victim's close friends and family, and the sociocultural context in which the rape occurred."[27] When rape does not fit a victim-survivor's vision of a stereotypical rape, she struggles to acknowledge it as sexual violence. Returning to a story we encountered in the introduction to this thesis, Thordis Elva, the woman who gave a TED Talk and is writing a book with the man who raped her, explains, "Despite limping for days and crying for weeks, this incident didn't fit my ideas about rape like I'd seen on TV. Tom wasn't an armed lunatic; he was my boyfriend. And it didn't happen in a seedy alleyway, it happened in my own bed."[28] Her personal experience failed to fit the dominant narrative of rape taught to women – to be afraid of the stranger walking down the street behind you, to avoid poorly lit areas, to avoid wearing revealing clothing so you do not tempt men who see you. Statistically, we know these narratives are untrue. 80% of rapes are committed by someone known to the victim-survivor.[29] Yet because her experience was discordant with the norms of rape culture and her own personal rape script, Elva was initially unable to label it as rape.

This denial or intentional (though sometimes unconscious) mislabeling is apparent in many narrative accounts of sexual violence, intertwined with cultural norms around gender roles and rape cultures. Reporter Becca Andrews writes of her own upbringing, "Every slipup is a strike against any hope of a successful marriage. My body was not my own, not really. It belonged to God and to some featureless specter of a future husband."[30] Such a description

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[27] Sapir Sasson and Lisa A. Paul, "Labeling Acts of Sexual Violence: What Roles Do Assault Characteristics, Attitudes, and Life Experiences Play?," *Behavior & Social Issues* 23 (January 2014): 36.
[28] Elva and Stranger, "Transcript of 'Our Story of Rape and Reconciliation.'"
[29] "Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN."
[30] Becca Andrews, "Evangelical Purity Culture Taught Me to Rationalize My Sexual Assault. Then I Discovered #ChurchToo.," *Mother Jones*, October 2018, accessed December 16, 2020, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/08/evangelical-purity-culture-taught-me-to-rationalize-my-sexual-assault/.

points directly to problematic structures that objectify and commodify women and create a strict patriarchal hierarchy, devaluing women in the process. Andrews also explains that evangelical culture deeply engrained notions of passivity and submission. As such, she was not able to understand her own experience of sexual violence as sexual violence until years later. She writes that when it happened, "I knew it was significant. I registered that something had been taken from me, but I couldn't identify it—maybe I didn't want to."[31] It was not until the #MeToo movement and a discussion with friends that she realized, "I had been working to rationalize—and minimize—what had happened to me."[32] Again, we see a direct link between internalized misogyny, rape culture, and objectification of women and an inability to label experiences of sexual violence. Though purity culture as described in this thought piece may be an extreme example, similar pressures on women exist throughout all echelons of society. As writer Rebecca Solnit says in *Men Explain Things to Me*, the all-pervasive presumption of male power and authority "keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare; […] crushes young women into silence by indicating […] that this is not their world."[33] From there, women are trained in "self-doubt and self-limitation."[34] It is thus only natural for women to carry this culturally-conditioned self-doubt with them when reflecting on experiences of sexual violence, questioning if their perception of the incident is valid, trying to rationalize what happened, and generally continuing to place power in the hands of perpetrators.

Adding to the difficulty of labeling experiences is the frequent ambiguity of sexual encounters. There is not a magic line where consensual sex becomes sexual violence. Some

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 4.
[34] Ibid.

scholars have worked to create distinct categories of "rape" and "unjust sex" to differentiate between what are commonly imagined as nonconsensual, often violent encounters and sexual encounters that involve coercion, pushing of boundaries, and lack of enthusiastic consent.[35] This reflects the experiences of many women, who sometimes avoid labeling encounters as rape by pointing to the ambiguity of the incident.[36]

In a similar vein, others use the term "bad sex" to discuss sex that, while consensual, is based on unequal power dynamics, coercion, and begrudging consent. "Bad sex emerges from gender norms in which women cannot be equal agents of sexual pursuit, and in which men are entitled to gratification at all costs […] it trades on unequal power dynamics between parties."[37] As such, "much sex that is consented to, even affirmatively consented to, is bad: miserable, unpleasant, humiliating, one-sided, painful. "Bad sex" doesn't have to be assault in order for it to be frightening, shame-inducing, upsetting."[38] If women are conditioned to view such "bad sex" as the norm, it makes it even more difficult to identify and process instances of sexual violence, as they do not differ greatly from the standard experience of sex – it is simply the way they have been taught they should be treated, even if it upsetting and painful. It is against this backdrop of "bad sex" that discussions of improved consent have emerged, particularly on college campuses. In particular, activists are striving to make consent not a one-time yes or no but rather a process that is affirmative, active,

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[35] See Ann J. Cahill, "Unjust Sex vs. Rape," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 746–761; Nicola Gavey, *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, Women and Psychology (New York: Routledge, 2005).
[36] Thomae and Viki, "Why Did the Woman Cross the Road?," 251.
[37] Katherine Angel, "Why We Need to Take Bad Sex More Seriously," *The Guardian*, last modified March 11, 2021, accessed March 11, 2021, http://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/mar/11/why-we-need-to-take-bad-sex-more-seriously-metoo.
[38] Ibid.

ongoing, and enthusiastic, removing questions of pressure and consent.[39] Though this is not yet the norm, it takes the first step of acknowledging the unequal power dynamics present in heterosexual encounters and the need to create a new, more equal standard.

Victim-survivors who cannot label or acknowledge their experiences "are less likely to disclose their assault to friends and family, which has been shown to heighten the risk for poorer psychological outcomes and prevent victims from getting needed support and services."[40] Assigning a label to a sexually violent experience is thus not simply a pedantic exercise. Failing to acknowledge violence done to her own body has negative long-term consequences for a woman. And yet sexual violence is so endemic, so normalized that victim-survivors often struggle to identify it as violent and to admit to themselves the violence they have experienced. However, victim-survivors are not the primary moral agents, perpetrators are, so now we must examine the actions of perpetrators, understanding that it cannot be the responsibility of victim-survivors to change the actions of those in power.

Sexual Violence as Embodied Vice

In her book *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice*, theologian Katie Walker Grimes inverts Thomistic virtue ethics to speak of antiblackness supremacy as embodied vice. Though her work focuses on questions of racist structures, institutions, and persons, her analysis of virtue and vice can be applied to sexual violence.

In classic virtue theory, "vices impede an individual's capacity to pursue flourishing."[41] Grimes goes further, focusing particularly on vices of domination, which

[39] Collier Meyerson, "#MeToo Is Changing the Definition of 'Bad Sex,'" January 24, 2018, accessed April 16, 2021, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/metoo-is-changing-the-definition-of-bad-sex/.
[40] Sasson and Paul, "Labeling Acts of Sexual Violence," 37.
[41] Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 89–90.

"uniquely allow their bearers to amass power and privilege."[42] Sexual violence, by its very definition, is a vice of domination. It exists because of a power-over dynamic that enables and incentivizes perpetrators to exercise masculine aggression, employ coercion, and place gratification of self above all else.

As demonstrated in previous sections, sexual formation is a form of habituation that occurs through ordinary, everyday activities, which are charged with cultural norms. In a Thomistic framework, habits do not have to be acquired consciously in order to be considered voluntary, as moral freedom allows human agents to align willingly with values even if they did not choose to acquire them – there might be restrictions that make it difficult, but it is still a free choice. All this harkens back to Finn's statement that "If week after week we make the same sinful choices encouraged by the restrictions we face within a sinful social structure, we slowly become the *kind* of person who makes such sinful choices."[43] This is where we locate Grimes' notion of the "automatic, yet voluntary."[44] Those who make sinful choices that are enabled by sinful structures voluntarily acquiesce to said structures. Over time, this acquiescence becomes an automatic, unthinking response yet remains voluntary in that it is a habituated vice that can be unlearned or acted against, if the moral agent so desires and so chooses. This maps onto a culture of sexual violence for both perpetrators and victim-survivors. For perpetrators, acts of sexual violence may be automatic but voluntary, a result of years of cultural conditioning that condones their behavior, making it easier to act sinfully. For victim-survivors, the same automatic but voluntary reaction can occur after experiencing sexual violence, automatically diminishing their pain in deference to the

[42] Ibid., 90.
[43] Finn, "'What Can You Do?'"
[44] Grimes, *Christ Divided*, 93.

perpetrator (or for many other culturally conditioned reasons), without having the space to question the cultural norms that were operative. This is not to place blame on the victim-survivor but rather to acknowledge the broad reach of the sinful structure and to again underline the need to reform the structure.

Grimes pushes even further, exploring the physical separation that whites seek from Black populations, explaining that antiblackness supremacy is an embodied vice, enmeshed in the very way in which white people act in the world. The parallel to masculine aggression is evident. Power structures of male aggressivity and dominance allow men to move more freely in the world, maintain positions of power, and to avoid spaces where vulnerability or equality are required. Power allows men drawn in by this vice to self-isolate and never be challenged in their thinking. They do not face restrictions in the same way women do (for example, the ways women are taught to act in response to rape culture) but are instead incentivized and enabled to maintain the status quo.

It is here that Grimes departs from Thomistic thought, saying that Thomas does not sufficiently appreciate the ways in which vices (and virtues) can be learned through the body. Instead, Grimes uses modern science to explain that "consciousness 'lags behind the action execution process.'"[45] In other words, in some cases, the body acts before the mind consciously chooses to act; "intentions arise in the body before they gather together in the mind. They represent not mental causes of actions but embodied characteristics of them."[46] Vices of domination such as sexual violence are thus embodied not only because of the spaces that those in power occupy but because bodies act before the mind can consciously choose to do so (again, performing actions that are automatic yet voluntary).

[45] Ibid., 99.
[46] Ibid., 100.

Yet moral agents are still responsible for their actions, as they have the moral freedom to work against embodied vices and the automatic yet voluntary. "The average […] person's lack of conscious awareness of their […] actions renders them not innocent but perfectly habituated and entirely culpable […] they do not possess an awareness of their voluntary actions because their environment does not interrupt them."[47] In other words, "people's wills have been conformed to the world's injustice."[48] This does not nullify the injustice nor does it absolve the moral agent. As Finn reminds us, structures are causal but not deterministic. Agents have both the free will and the duty to resist structural harms. Neither habituation nor lack of awareness (ignorance) are sufficient excuses; the agent remains morally culpable. Here, we can speak of what Thomas calls culpable ignorance – the notion that moral agents fail to recognize a vice or sin "not because they cannot, but because they do not want to."[49] Those who buy into and embody norms of masculine aggression and rape culture have chosen ignorance and are culpable for that choice and any actions that might flow from that choice, including acts of sexual violence.

Barrera uses a similar term, vincible ignorance. In doing so, he claims knowledge refers "not only to what the person knows but also to what the person should have known given the resources available to that person."[50] Vincible ignorance is not an excuse for immoral action because it is vincible; an agent is still responsible when he is capable of learning and has the appropriate resources but nonetheless refuses.

Theologian Alexander Mikulich goes even further, speaking of unlearned ignorance and making explicit connections to a moral agent's relationship with God. Drawing on

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[47] Ibid., 101.
[48] Ibid., 102.
[49] Ibid., 93.
[50] Barrera, "Individuating Collective Responsibility," 223.

Nicholas of Cusa, he writes, "Unlearned ignorance […] represents a foolishness that smacks of smug knowledge that remains unresponsive to the divine tree of life."[51] Unlearned ignorance is thus a form of egoism, where the moral agent believes himself to already possess all the necessary knowledge and is unresponsive to outside input, even from the divine. He goes on, "Unlearned ignorance of white male privilege bespeaks an absence, if not a refusal, to participate in God's being and love."[52] The sinful structures discussed in this chapter are thus not simply sinful because they cause deep harm to others but also because they alienate the moral agent from God.

Those in power are still responsible for educating themselves and not simply following the structures that already exist so long as they have reasonable means to learn to do better and to be better. This is a divine mandate, understanding that a refusal to learn and a desire to cling to smug knowledge is not simply causing harm to victim-survivors but is also a refusal to engage with God. A moral agent is not absolved from sinful actions because he followed sinful cultural norms, as he has free will to recognize them and act contrary to them. He cannot blame harms he causes on structures.

Taking all this together, we can say that norms of sexual violence are structurally shaped but then embodied, becoming even more integrated into the life of a moral agent. Either way, these norms are always vicious. Because of the nature of sexual domination as embodied vice, the embodied automatic yet voluntary must be disrupted. A vital part of this disruption is confronting culpable and vincible ignorance and thus recognizing the automatic nature of embodied vice.

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[51] Alexander Mikulich, "(Un)Learning White Male Ignorance," in *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*, ed. Laurie M. Cassidy and Alexander Mikulich (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 168.
[52] Ibid., 169.

Conclusion

It is thus evident that sexual violence is not simply a personal sin. Yes, perpetrators choose to commit acts of sexual violence and should be responsible for their actions. However, those actions are also the result of cultural conditioning. Without treating the underlying issues of rape culture, structural sin, and embodied vice, the problem of sexual violence can never truly be solved, as structures will continue to enable and incentivize such violence and it will continue to be an automatic but voluntary reaction.

When perpetrators fail to unlearn vincible ignorance, victim-survivors continue to suffer, whether or not they are able to label and acknowledge their experiences, as they are still restricted by norms of masculine aggression and rape culture. It is these restrictions that complicate the question of forgiveness. Forgiveness at an individual level could be attainable and could even been viewed as noble, but it cannot be an expectation because of these structures that continue to enable and incentivize sexual violence and restrict those who are most at risk of harm. Victim-survivors who manage to forgive still must live in a world that objectifies, blames, and shames them, that rewards male aggressivity, and that teaches women to be silent.

How do we begin to change these harmful structures? In the chapter that follows, we will explore frameworks for acknowledging and dismantling sinful structures, examining how said frameworks can be adapted to sexual violence. The process of change includes bringing forth information that disrupts the culpable ignorance of those in power while simultaneously protecting the most vulnerable and most restricted, victim-survivors.

Chapter Two

Frameworks to Address the Problem

Introduction

As the previous chapter demonstrated, sexual violence is not simply an individual sin but a structural phenomenon. As such, it must be addressed through a framework that sufficiently addresses underlying structures and works to modify said structures with an eye towards eliminating violence. However, the current frameworks used to work towards rectifying sexual violence are each insufficient on their own. In this chapter, I briefly explore a handful of these current frameworks – from the #MeToo movement to truth and reconciliation commissions – and where they fall short in the case of sexual violence. This is not to say that each framework is ineffective. In fact, the opposite is the case. Each has many aspects that were useful in the particular time and place in which they were employed and, in some cases, produced results beyond the wildest imaginations of those who created the frameworks. Yet sexual violence has its own particularities, such as the simultaneous individual and social elements of the act, that make existing frameworks inadequate.

I then work to rebuild a framework from the ground-up, beginning with the lived experience of victim-survivors. This will particularly focus on what it means to remember and re-member such trauma, drawing on the multiple meanings of the term dangerous memory and problematizing forgiveness in the process. Once this foundation is set, I will build outwards, continuing with the understanding that sexual violence is not simply a personal sin but is also socially conditioned. To do so, I employ a just peace ethic, working from the notion that sexual violence is a form of structural warfare. The ultimate goal is to create a framework where principles like reflexivity and right relationship are used to achieve just

peace – a world where sexual violence no longer exists or, at the very least, is no longer normalized.

Existing Frameworks and Truth-telling Models

A process of truth-telling is central to most models of healing, since it is not possible to have genuine reconciliation unless all parties know all the harms that occurred and the full impact of said harms. In the realm of peacebuilding, John Paul Lederach writes, "In healing, there is no replacement for straight honestly, even when it hurts."[1] Lederach also includes public truth-telling as a component of the "how will we get there?" branch of his expanded framework for peacebuilding.[2] Archbishop Desmond Tutu takes a similar approach, maintaining that clinging to a "national amnesia" with regards to the horrors of apartheid would stand in the way of societal healing.[3] Put another way, peace is not simply the absence of overt conflict but is rather deep change and right relationship.

Truth-telling has historically taken a variety of forms. The default example for truth-telling is the process led by Archbishop Tutu in post-apartheid South Africa. Today, in the era of social media, truth-telling often takes place in the online sphere, through both named and anonymous posts, most famously in the #MeToo movement. These historical instances of truth-telling offer us insights as to what works and as to how to protect victim-survivors in the midst of seeking justice. Proclaiming truth breaks the narratives constructed by those in power, showing that things are not always as they appear.[4] And yet truth-telling about sexual

[1] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 160.
[2] Ibid, 144.
[3] See Chapter Two of Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
[4] Ibid., 179.

violence poses particular difficulties, meaning that we also must be attentive as to what may cause harm to victim-survivors in these established approaches, examining them critically rather than adopting them wholesale.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

The process of truth-telling is most famously exemplified by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) following apartheid. In this process, both victims and perpetrators were invited to testify to the sufferings they experienced and to the harms they caused, respectively. As part of the parliamentary act that established the TRC, perpetrators of violence during the apartheid era were offered amnesty if their actions were both politically motivated and followed the norm of proportionality and if they offered a full disclosure of all the relevant facts to the commission.[5] As such, if perpetrators wanted amnesty, they could not tell a half-truth or part of the truth; the horrors of their acts had to be fully explained and perpetrators had to accept responsibility.

The TRC was an extensive, years-long process that involved thousands of public testimonies in front of a committee of seventeen commissioners who represented the entire racial, political, and religious spectrums of the country. The testimonies were also open to the public and were broadcast across the entire country – this was by no means a secretive process but was rather a national reckoning. The commissioners considered amnesty on a case-by-case basis. Given the strict criteria for amnesty, some perpetrators failed to meet the requirements. The commissioners also approved reparations for victims and families of

[5] Ibid., 49–50.

victims, but these reparations were primarily symbolic, the monetary amount was a pittance compared to the sufferings inflicted.

Archbishop Tutu explains that the results of the TRC included redeeming the memory of the dead,[6] forgiveness of the perpetrators by victims or the families of victims, and uncovering the full stories of killings, bringing a form of closure to families left behind. Tutu often remarks that he was overwhelmed by the vulnerability and truthfulness of all involved, by the deep healing generated by the process, and by the enduring presence of God in the face of such pain, violence, and suffering – all elements necessary for social reconciliation. Though testimony was often hard to listen to – Tutu often writes of holding back tears and of crying – it resulted in great healing of both individuals and of a country. Though the past could not be changed, acknowledging the wrongs perpetrated meant questions were finally answered and doubts were replaced by certainty and closure. Simultaneously, offering amnesty meant the cycle of violence was broken – the goal was restorative rather than retributive justice.

Other examples of truth and reconciliation commissions exist, such as the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was charged with investigating the violence of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the National Socialist Party of America (Nazi) clashed with members of the Communist Workers Party (CWP), leaving five dead and at least ten wounded. Again, this commission was time bound, looking only at the events of the day in question. Though there had already been three trials around the events of November 3 that found the local police department jointly liable with the KKK for the death of one victim, the community felt justice was never served (unlike the TRC in

[6] Ibid, 142.

South Africa, this was not a question of amnesty and was not related in any way to the criminal justice system). The commission was assembled to review evidence from the trials, to perform both public and private interviews of those involved, and to do academic research on related topics. The goal was to uncover and tell the truth of what happened and to subsequently propose ways forward. However, the commission ran into resistance from certain parts of the community and faced resource limitations, meaning that it could not do all it wished. Though it did what it could, there are still many lingering questions and the commission was not fully satisfied with its work.[7]

Comparing these two truth and reconciliation commissions, we see the need for community support and buy-in, understanding that the fullness of truth cannot emerge unless all parties are willing to participate. We also see that present-day structures and dynamics are crucial. In South Africa, there was a major governmental shift post-apartheid. Though many who previously held power were reluctant to relinquish it, the society as a whole was primed for reform. In contrast, racism was still the norm in Greensboro at the time of the truth and reconciliation commission and whites in power knew that resisting efforts to work towards justice meant they could easily retain their power. Given operative social norms, they were enabled and incentivized to work to maintain the status quo.

Today in the United States, there is great discussion about truth and reconciliation commissions about race, institutional roles in sustaining racial sin (like slavery and segregation), and reparations.[8] Though the long-term results of these studies and commissions

[7] Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report Executive Summary* (Greensboro, NC, May 2006), 2–3.
[8] For examples, see "Georgetown Reflects on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation," *Georgetown University*, 2021, accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.georgetown.edu/slavery/; "Enslavement," *Society of the Sacred Heart*, last modified August 8, 2018, accessed April 22, 2021, https://rscj.org/history-enslavement.

have yet to be borne out, this push for historical truth underlines the notion that we cannot work for healing unless we are fully aware of the wrongs that took place.

#MeToo, #ChurchToo

In the age of social media, truth-telling can look different. Unlike with the South African or Greensboro TRCs, everyone has a way to make their voice heard, to tell their story. A victim-survivor need not wait for a commission to call upon her to testify, she can rather tweet or post about her experiences on her own terms and in her own time. These posts can coalesce into movements, as famously happened with #MeToo. #MeToo was thrust into the public eye in fall 2017, when hashtag began to trend across social media platforms.[9] #MeToo drew from actress Alyssa Milano's tweet, which read "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet."[10] The outpouring was immediate and overwhelming. For days, it was impossible to open any form of social media without seeing #MeToo, often by itself but sometimes with an accompanying remark saying it was the first time the poster had shared this fact publicly.

We have already seen this movement mentioned in chapter one of this thesis – Elva speaks of how the movement was an awakening for her, Andrews describes the movement as allowing her to realize the ways in which she rationalized and minimized her own experience. Women heard other women of all walks of life publicly proclaiming that they too had experienced sexual harassment or assault.[11] What had been a burden borne alone, in

[9] "#MeToo: A Timeline of Events," *Chicagotribune.Com*, last modified February 4, 2021, accessed February 28, 2021, https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmlstory.html.
[10] Alyssa Milano, "Twitter / @Alyssa_Milano," October 15, 2017, accessed April 21, 2021, https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976.
[11] In this section, I use the terms sexual harassment and sexual assault rather than sexual violence, as it is the terminology used by the movement.

isolation, suddenly became a shared experience. Many women no longer felt obligated to ignore their pain and trauma, understanding that they were not alone. The previous structural restriction of suffering alone, in silence, was being broken.

In the religious sphere, #MeToo inspired #ChurchToo, a hashtag victim-survivors used to share stories of sexual violence within church spaces, particularly sexual violence perpetrated by pastors and others who held power. This hashtag, created by an ex-evangelical queer woman who was groomed and abused as a teenager by a youth leader at her mega-church, was embraced primarily in evangelical (and ex-evangelical) circles.[12] This movement, like #MeToo, called out the toxic nature of masculine aggressivity and rape culture, but it also focused on the structural sins tied up in evangelical purity culture, which focuses not only on purity but on the subservience of women.

With both #MeToo and #ChurchToo, we are reminded of Finn's idea that those who face the most harms or restrictions are those who are most willing to risk resistance. Though being publicly vulnerable about sexual violence is emotionally and socially[13] perilous, there is greater risk in staying silent and continuing to experience violence.

Both these movements were forms of truth-telling, though not in the fullest sense. It was generally only victim-survivors speaking and even then often in the vaguest of terms. Perpetrators did not enter into vulnerable spaces, instead denying, justifying, or occasionally half-heartedly apologizing for their actions while claiming, "that's not who I am anymore." The most basic posts and tweets did not tell a story, merely sharing the hashtag to show the

[12] Becca Andrews, "As a Teen, Emily Joy Was Abused by a Church Youth Leader. Now She's Leading a Movement to Change Evangelical America.," *Mother Jones*, May 25, 2018, accessed February 28, 2021, https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2018/05/evangelical-church-metoo-movement-abuse/.
[13] Here, I think of victim-survivors who put their jobs at risk by speaking out, as well as those who were cut off by friends and family, either for naming their perpetrator or by being blamed for their own experiences.

sheer number of persons who have experienced sexual harassment or assault. Outside of the biggest names, like Harvey Weinstein, perpetrators were often not named. This is not to suggest that victim-survivors need to tell these stories – they do not. Yet we cannot label this as the fullest form of truth-telling if stories are not told in their entirety.

In my own newsfeeds, none of my friends explicitly named a perpetrator. Most did not even tell a story, instead using their posts to point towards the all-pervasive nature of sexual harassment and assault and to stand in solidarity with others who have had similar experiences. Those few who chose to tell their story in detail still did not name perpetrators, instead focusing on their own experiences and saying that close friends (rather than their larger network of social media acquaintances) knew the identity of the perpetrators and had been asked to cut ties. We thus see that, even within this nascent movement, questions were asked about the proper response to revelations of sexual violence. Support of victim-survivors was a given, but what about perpetrators? They could be "canceled," but it is unclear how much impact canceling an individual has on his life. He may lose friends, but he retains structural power while his victim-survivors still face the restrictions imposed by rape culture. Cancel culture does nothing to change underlying structures.[14]

Social ethicist Julie Hanlon Rubio explains, "After the necessary outing of perpetrators of obvious and less obvious kinds of violence, after the outrage, after the cries of #TimesUp, there is no obvious place to go."[15] Post-#MeToo, there have been no major changes in laws. Sexual violence is still prevalent, even if victim-survivors are able to speak with others about their experiences. Rubio writes that #MeToo was effective in terms of

[14] Romano, "Why We Can't Stop Fighting about Cancel Culture."
[15] Julie Hanlon Rubio, "#MeToo, #ChurchToo: A Catholic Social Ethics Response to Sexual Violence," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 16, no. 2 (2019): 151.

"increasing support of women who break the silence and decreasing tolerance for violence."[16] However, it fails to go further.

#MeToo and #ChurchToo are valuable forms of truth-telling. Victim-survivors are heard directly and are heard in great number. Yet it is still a limited approach that only sees part of the story and does not engage both victim-survivors and perpetrators. Reconciliation and structural change cannot happen unless all parties are involved and committed.

The Catholic Church's Current Approach

Given that the third chapter of this thesis will discuss Catholic Church-based solutions and ways forward, we should also glance briefly at the Church's current approach to truth-telling with regards to its own sex abuse crisis. The Church sex abuse crisis in the United States was first revealed on a large scale through investigative reporting by the Boston Globe's Spotlight team in 2002. This reporting showed not only the scope of the sex abuse crisis but also the ways in which priest-perpetrators were shuffled around and their actions covered up by the hierarchy. Secrecy was the norm.

This resistance to truth-telling has persisted, purportedly for the sake of the faithful. The Church often reveals truth because its hand is forced, as seen concretely in the Pennsylvania grand jury report of 2018 and in the 2020 *Into Account* report on David Haas.[17] It has only been in the last few years, almost twenty years after the Boston Globe's initial reporting, that dioceses and religious orders have begun to release lists of accused priests.

[16] Ibid., 137.
[17] See "David Haas Report," *Into Account*, last modified October 1, 2020, accessed October 2, 2020, https://intoaccount.org/davidhaas/.

Historically, when addressing sex abuse, the Church has placed an emphasis on the personal sin of the individual priest and violation of the norms of sexual ethics. This overshadows the fact that concrete harm was done to victim-survivors. This is evident when the hierarchy uses terms like misconduct rather than abuse or violence, as misconduct makes it seem as if the most egregious harm was breaking the rules rather than committing acts of sexual violence. In the wake of the 2002 scandal, priest and victim-advocate Thomas Doyle explains, "Many bishops have admitted to thinking of sexual abuse solely in terms of *moral fault* and *sin*."[18] This is attitude is a trend rather than an outlier. In the 1980s and 90s, "The true victims were displaced by the institutional leaders who saw themselves as the suffering victims of dysfunctional clerics."[19] Within the hierarchical Church, truth became so distorted that truth-telling likely would not have revealed what actually happened, only the narratives constructed that made institutional leaders, not victim-survivors of sexual violence, victims.

There has been some progress post-#MeToo. The Vatican's 2019 sex abuse prevention summit invited abuse survivors to testify to bishops as to their experiences, with one bishop recognizing, "wounds have been inflicted by us, the bishops, on the victims. ... We need to help them to express their deep hurts and to help heal from them."[20] A vocal survivor of clergy sex abuse was recently appointed to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors,[21] indicating a willingness to listen to victim-survivors even when they speak out

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[18] Thomas P. Doyle, "Roman Catholic Clericalism, Religious Duress, and Clergy Sexual Abuse," *Pastoral Psychology* 51, no. 3 (January 2003): 191. Emphasis in original.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Amy Held and Sylvia Poggioli, "'A Life Destroyed': Survivors And Pope Address Clergy Sex Abuse At Vatican Summit," *NPR*, last modified February 21, 2019, accessed April 23, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2019/02/21/696723194/a-life-destroyed-survivors-and-pope-at-vatican-summit-address-clergy-sex-abuse.
[21] Joshua McElwee, "Francis Adds Vocal Chilean Survivor Cruz to Papal Abuse Commission," *National Catholic Reporter*, last modified March 24, 2021, accessed April 23, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/francis-adds-vocal-chilean-survivor-cruz-papal-abuse-commission.

strongly against the actions of the Church. Dialogue is finally slowly turning towards how to learn from victim-survivors. The Church's habitual resistance to truth-telling is not gone by any means, but there are glimmers of hope for potential change.

Shortcomings and Ways Forward

The shortcomings in the Catholic Church's approach to truth-telling are obvious. Victim-survivors who dared to tell the truth were either not believed or had their experiences diminished. Forced truth-telling on the part of perpetrators and their supporters leads to mis-truths and half-truths, with the potential to do more harm than good. Though progress is being made, the historical reality of the Church as hostile space for victim-survivors means that the road ahead is long and precarious.

And yet, with regards to sexual violence, truth and reconciliation commissions also have many shortcomings. To begin, there is implicit a notion that the violence has passed. The South African TRC enforced time boundaries; the Greensboro commission addressed the events of a particular weekend. Even today, as institutions in the United States investigate their own ties to racial inequality, they tend to focus on historical manifestations of said inequality, such as slavery. Commissions also need the buy-in of a community. The Greensboro commission could not do all it set out to do because of community resistance.

In truth and reconciliation commissions, perpetrators speak of atrocities that all acknowledged occurred. In contrast, those speaking truth about sexual violence must not only give details of their experience but also convince observers that the incident even happened. Even if testimony on the part of victim-survivors is believed, this truth-telling is only a first step. The process cannot stop when truth is exposed; commission reports must not be written simply to gather dust on library shelves. Truth and reconciliation commissions must lead to

concrete actions that reform structures and cultural norms, using the truths told to ensure that such harms do not continue to happen. This is similar to criticism levied against the #MeToo movement – once truth was told, very little changed.

But what can and should be brought forward into a new framework? From #MeToo, we retain the notion that victim-survivors should only tell their story to the extent they are comfortable. A victim-survivor should never be required to share her story nor to share all the details of her story. Protecting the most vulnerable takes precedence over the fullness of truth-telling, particularly understanding that rape culture has so colored the experiences of both perpetrators and victim-survivors that "truth" for each side may look different. A victim-survivor is not required to justify why an experience of sexual violence was harmful and was, in fact, sexual violence. #MeToo allows solidarity with other victim-survivors without the requirement of unreasonable self-revelation.

From truth and reconciliation commissions, we retain the notion that truth is important and is the only way we can understand the fullness of the violence committed. Hearings held by truth and reconciliation commissions also provide crucial space for a community to confront horrors together, lament what was lost, and see communal pain. It is thus important that commission members are representative of the entire community, not just of those harmed (as they could easily be ignored) nor of those who committed harm (as this simply maintains existing problematic power structures and does not create a space for victim-survivors to tell truth). This sense of community is augmented by a focus on restorative justice over retributive justice, which looks towards building a new future based on right relationship rather than continuing the cycle of violence through punishment. In this way, truth-telling is a beginning rather than an end, an opening towards growth rather than an exercise in revelation then amnesia.

From South Africa's TRC in particular, we can retain the idea that "if perpetrators were to be despaired of as monsters and demons, then we were thereby letting accountability go out the window because we were then declaring that they were not moral agents to be held responsible for the deeds they had committed."[22] This dovetails with our knowledge of structures discussed in chapter one. Structures are causal but not deterministic, the moral agent still possesses freedom to act correctly. In addition, demonizing perpetrators becomes an obstacle to restorative justice, widening divisions in a community and only exacerbating the problem at hand.

Dangers of Truth-Telling with Regards to Sexual Violence

As alluded to in the previous section, there are particular dangers and difficulties around truth-telling for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Sexual violence is hard to speak of because the experiences of the victim-survivor and the perpetrator are so different. The internalized norms of rape culture teach victim-survivors to be deferent, meaning the narrative of the perpetrator often wins out. As such, the difficulties of labeling experiences, as described in the previous chapter, pose major challenges to the truth-telling process. A victim-survivor cannot speak truth about her experiences if she is not able to label them as violent. This does not mean she does not feel the effects but rather that she is unable to explicitly name the cause as violent, instead internalizing what happened as "normal," "simply the way things work." This is a tangible effect of rape culture at work.

Even for those women who are able to label their experiences as more than simply ambiguous or "a bad night," truth-telling poses major risks. Psychologists Brianna Delker et

[22] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 83.

al. explain, "sexual violence survivors do not benefit, to the same degree as other survivors, from telling their stories with the culturally valued narrative template of redemption."[23] This study demonstrates that, across standardized narrative frameworks (negative ending, redemptive ending, and survivor identity ending), narrators of stories of sexual violence are perceived as less likeable than those who tell stories of other forms of trauma. The researchers conclude, there is "something about the experience of sexual violence itself, then, that remains a "mark of failure or shame," no matter what meaning can be made of it."[24] The process of public truth-telling therefore carries severe risk of shame, self-blame, and weakening of the victim-survivor's identity.

Here, there is hope. There is a correlation between lower levels of rape myth acceptance (false beliefs about rape that correspond with the norms of rape culture – victim-survivors are "asking for it," rape is committed by strangers, masculine aggression is justified, etc.) and more positive attitudes towards victim-survivors.[25] We can thus imagine that changing these structures will mean victim-survivors can begin to escape the "mark of failure or shame" that sexual violence represents and truth-telling might someday pose less of a risk. For now, however, risks abound for victim-survivors who desire to tell their truths.

For those select perpetrators who are aware of the harm they caused, there is little incentive for truth-telling. Even if amnesty is offered, as was the case with the TRC, it is not an advantage when an estimated 99.5% of perpetrators of sexual violence will walk free.[26] Yet the risks of acknowledging wrongdoing are many, particularly in a cultural milieu that

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[23] Brianna C. Delker et al., "Who Has to Tell Their Trauma Story and How Hard Will It Be? Influence of Cultural Stigma and Narrative Redemption on the Storying of Sexual Violence," *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 6 (June 5, 2020): 1.
[24] Ibid, 15.
[25] Sasson and Paul, "Labeling Acts of Sexual Violence," 43.
[26] "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics | RAINN."

prefers to cancel offenders rather than deal with the messy work of reconciliation. Some victim-survivors hesitate to name their perpetrator because of this dynamic, not wanting to ruin the life of the person who harmed them, believing that one transgression should not have an outsized effect on the perpetrator's life. These victim-survivors acknowledge the harm done to them and do not want to cause harm to another, breaking the cycle of violence.

Obstacles that stand in the way of truth-telling are thus many – from the victim-survivor's ability to label her experience to society's views of victim-survivors to potential disproportionate harm to perpetrators. In the face of these shortcomings, we will now take a step back and focus on victim-survivors and memory, understanding that the first step towards a constructive framework for reconciliation and healing is the ability of the victim-survivor to name her experiences and the effects of her experiences.

Dangerous Memory, Remembering, and Re-membering

Any form of healing in the realm of sexual violence begins with the victim-survivor herself and her memory of her experience. Given the nature of rape culture, it is likely she is the only one with a memory of the experience as sexually violent, as perpetrators have been taught narratives of male dominance that condone power-over and aggressivity and thus see their actions as acceptable and normative. How might a victim-survivor confront, process, and interpret her memories?

Johann Baptist Metz claims that, because of his solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, the memory of Jesus' death and resurrection is dangerous to those in power and to the status quo. This "dangerous memory" is twofold. "First, by keeping alive [the victim-survivor's] story against the inclination of tyrants to bury it, it robs the masters of their

victory."[27] In other words, the victory of the oppressor does not have the last word; the oppressed rise again and can work to shape the narrative, counteracting the story put forth by those in power. Second, through the explicit connection of the stories of victim-survivors with that of Jesus, "memory awakens the realization that each one of them is precious, galvanizing hope that in God's good time they too will be justified."[28] Those who do harm do not have the last word.

Theologian Flora Keshgegian, however, explains that Metz's analysis is insufficient, as memory can also be dangerous to the victim-survivor. She explains, "if all that is remembered is the suffering and loss, then those who remember are still caught in the victimization."[29] Suffering itself is not redemptive. Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk writes, "The essence of trauma is that it is overwhelming, unbelievable, and unbearable."[30] Simply revisiting trauma through memory and sitting in it is thus the same, causing concrete harm to the most traumatized. We must keep in mind what Kaya Oakes, a journalist writing on religion issues, dubs "the corrosive nature of trauma."[31] Trauma and revisiting trauma impacts the very being of victim-survivors, not just as a single event but as an ongoing, detrimental unfolding. In claiming their memory of trauma is dangerous to perpetrators, we ignore the harm remembering causes victim-survivors. In the worst of cases, this prioritizes societal healing, social reconciliation, and the possibility of forgiveness over the concrete well-being of victim-survivors, which is unacceptable.

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[27] Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 66.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 121.
[30] Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 197.
[31] Kaya Oakes, "On Forgiveness, Clergy Abuse, and the Need for New Understandings," *The Revealer*, March 2, 2020, accessed February 2, 2021, https://therevealer.org/on-forgiveness-clergy-abuse-and-the-need-for-new-understandings/.

We can thus speak of dangerous memory as being dangerous to both the perpetrator and the victim-survivor. For the perpetrator, dangerous memory means his power is threatened, as he does not have the final word. For the victim-survivor, remembering experiences of sexual violence unearths trauma that is difficult to process and is dangerous in that it causes emotional distress. To deal with the danger of memory for victim-survivors, Keshgegian differentiates between remembering and re-membering. Remembering alone can perpetuate victimization and suffering. Re-membering instead strives to put both the victim-survivor and her memories back together, integrating memories of pain with memories of resistance and resilience in instances of suffering and trauma. In this framework, victim-survivors are encouraged to be gentle with themselves, understanding that their own actions were greatly restricted because of both cultural norms and the particular situation in which they found themselves. Victim-survivors draw upon acts of resistance, however small. For instance, a victim-survivor might beat herself up for remaining silent rather than saying "no" during an experience of sexual violence, but she can also reframe this as resistance in that she did not say "yes" – she refused to consent. Resilience then looks towards the victim-survivor's post-sexual violence life experiences, celebrating accomplishing anything that felt overwhelming in the moment. There is life after horror. Both of these demonstrate to the victim-survivor that she is more than what happened to her, that she is more than a victim.

This re-membering must be done in a supportive, loving community of witnesses, as it is an emotionally difficult and often pain-staking process of putting one's entire being back together. Keshgegian explains, "What makes it possible to remember, despite the threats, internal and external, is not only courage and hope and the desire for life, but relationships

and communities of witness and shared remembering."[32] It is through this relationality that a victim-survivor is supported through the process of finding her voice and naming her traumas.

Biblical scholar Kathleen O'Connor brings this a step further in her analysis of the Book of Lamentations, writing, "to gain a voice means to come into the truth of one's history corporately and individually, to recover one's life, to acquire moral agency by naming one's world."[33] Re-membering is the process of this recovery and coming into the truth of one's history, supported by a community of witnesses. In structures defined by enablements and incentives for perpetrators and restrictions for victim-survivors, acquiring moral agency as a result of re-membering means the victim-survivor is less restricted and has the ability to challenge the enablements and incentives of those in power.

Remembering and re-membering need not be tied to the public telling of a victim-survivor's story. The aim here is not naming perpetrators but rather personal healing and growth. The victim-survivor is to be prioritized. Yet this does not preclude public testimony. For some victim-survivors, such public uncovering of sinful acts is an important part of the healing journey, whether as a way to show solidarity with other victim-survivors, to be a symbol of hope for those still suffering, or to unmask the egregious deeds of her perpetrator with the goal of helping others victimized. Public truth-telling by the victim-survivor, if chosen, is to be done only after doing the difficult interior work of re-membering and after a period of discernment. Any form of truth-telling needs to be accompanied by right intention. It cannot be done with the intent to harm the perpetrator but rather should be performed

[32] Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 124.
[33] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 83.

when the victim-survivor senses "God's mercy is waiting to overflow,"[34] with the goal of working "with all people of goodwill to bring about the necessary changes."[35] In the language of Ignatian spirituality, any desire for truth-telling needs to be a movement of the good spirit, not the bad spirit.

Dangers of Forgiveness, Hope of Reconciliation

This developing framework does not expect forgiveness. Individual forgiveness can never be dictated to or expected from a victim-survivor. False or premature forgiveness can do more harm than good in a variety of ways. Quick forgiveness can implicitly condone the behavior of the perpetrator, as it can imply the harm is quickly processed and forgotten. It can cause emotional distress to the victim-survivor, as "the onus for forgiving, over and over again, is laid at the feet of the victim,"[36] placing the emotional burden on the most harmed. In the worst of cases, "Forgiveness is pitiless. It forgets the victim."[37] Kaya Oakes, explains, "Women do not have to forgive those who rape, abuse, and harass us, because in those acts, in their reduction of our humanity, they deny us a fully lived life. But we can see abusers as sinful, broken, and flawed–and as our fellow human beings."[38] She points towards the inviolable dignity of all persons, this time underlining that it is neither necessary nor even good to forgive violations of said dignity.

Here, terminology can become confusing. As clear and convincing as arguments around the danger of forgiveness are, some feminist scholars argue for forgiveness. Social

[34] Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 61.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Kaya Oakes, "Forgiveness in the Epoch of Me Too," *Killing the Buddha*, May 10, 2018, accessed October 31, 2020, https://killingthebuddha.com/mag/damnation/forgiveness-in-the-epoch-of-me-too/.
[37] Cynthia Ozick in Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), 216.
[38] Oakes, "Forgiveness in the Epoch of Me Too."

ethicist Karen Lebacqz, for example, states that Christians cannot truly love their enemies until they forgive said enemy but also that forgiveness must address injustice. She writes, "Forgiveness means that we must be willing to set things right so that there can be a fresh start. Forgiveness is essentially restorative."[39] What she describes is closer to the notion of reconciliation in this paper. She speaks of justice and restoration and she defines forgiveness as being able to fully enter into new relationship, which is nearly analogous to the definition of reconciliation as establishing right relationship.

And yet her framework it is not enough. Lebacqz's discussion acknowledges the shortcomings of our society and of individuals, but it focuses change on the interior disposition of the survivor. It is she who must reconcile her past trauma with the reality of the world, yet the world is not asked to change itself. This maintenance of the status quo of rape culture and masculine aggression means that change never fully happens and justice is not achieved on a broad level. The onus remains on the victim-survivor, who must adapt over and again to a world that restricts her actions while perpetrators can simply say they are sorry and move on with their lives, not necessarily having to change their day-to-day habits or actions.

Similar shortcomings are present in Keshgegian, who prioritizes remembering by the victim-survivor and finding safe, supportive environments for this process. However, Keshgegian does describe reconciliation as an end product of remembering and writes, "if talk of forgiveness gets in the way of remembering fully, then it is problematic […] reconciliation does not necessarily have to entail forgiveness."[40] The end goal is thus not

[39] Karen Lebacqz, "Love Your Enemy: Sex, Power, and Christian Ethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 253.
[40] Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 195.

forgiveness but the ability to remember and reconcile with the past, to break the cycle of violence, and to enter into right relationship despite previous pain.

Forgiveness is always a possibility, thanks to grace, but it cannot be an expectation or necessity when our truth-telling models are so lacking and when social structures still deeply enable sexual violence. When forgiveness is sought, it should be for the good of the individual seeking it, not because it is a duty. Premature forgiveness simply perpetuates a cycle of violence wherein the victim-survivor feels as if she must forgive for the sake of the perpetrator, leaving her under his power.

Maintaining our primary focus on victim-survivors means "vulnerability due to power differences must be a factor in deciding about whether and how to give trust."[41] This connects with Lederach's notion of well-grounded pessimism, which explains that pessimism based in the lived reality of oppressed populations is useful, as it ensures change is not superficial or disguising other intentions.[42] It also ensures that the oppressed population is protected from harm when necessary. Unrealistic optimism in the realm of peacebuilding and social reconciliation can unintentionally put victim-survivors in precarious positions, expecting them to place themselves in spaces of emotional harm (like dialogue with their perpetrator) in order to make progress towards reconciliation. Again, the priority should always be the needs of the victim-survivor, who has already been victimized by the influence of sinful structures as well as the sin of an individual and must not be revictimized in misguided attempts at healing.

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[41] Nancy M Rourke, "Environmental Justice: May Justice and Peace Flow like a River," in *A Just Peace Ethic: A Primer to Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, ed. Eli S McCarthy (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 96.
[42] Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 60–61.

Oakes, drawing on parts of the Jewish tradition, underlines the need for atonement. She writes, "Atonement is the first step toward understanding that survivors do not, in fact, owe abusers anything. Abusers owe their victims much."[43] Without making legitimate amends, perpetrators indicate they are not capable of making real change. This becomes extremely difficult in the realm of social sin – how can constructs like rape culture and male aggressivity show they are capable of real change? Are those who derive power from these constructs ready to sacrifice their power on a large scale as a form of atonement?

Yet too much focus on atonement moves the conversation away from victim-survivors and recenters it on perpetrators, putting them back into a position of power. "If I show I've changed," they posit, "she will forgive me." This is yet another exercise of power-over, using the actions of those in power to dictate the actions of those without power. In this situation, a victim-survivor may feel pressured to forgive even if she is not emotionally ready to do so because she has been conditioned comply with the desires of those in power. Forgiveness must rather be a "freely chosen enactment."[44] As an act of freedom, the victim-survivor exercises moral agency and chooses to participate rather than being obligated to do so.

When Archbishop Tutu writes, "True forgiveness deals with the past, all of the past, to make the future possible,"[45] we must keep in mind that, in the case of sexual violence, we must also deal with the structures operative in the past, not simply historical facts. In the case of the TRC in South Africa, both governmental structures and cultural norms were changing. Tutu also writes, "if the process of forgiveness and healing is to succeed, ultimately

[43] Oakes, "On Forgiveness, Clergy Abuse, and the Need for New Understandings."
[44] James K. Voiss, *Rethinking Christian Forgiveness: Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Explorations* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 364.
[45] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 279.

acknowledgment by the culprit is indispensable."[46] Part of this acknowledgement is the acknowledgement of harmful social norms and the subsequent push to change them, even when it means those who benefit will lose power.

We can thus say that even if social reconciliation and reconciliation of the victim-survivor with her past experiences (i.e., re-membering) are both attained, which is no easy feat, forgiveness still cannot be an expectation. This seems counterintuitive to many Catholics, who are taught, without nuance, from childhood that "Jesus tells his followers they need to forgive anyone who has wronged them"[47] and that they must do the same. However, as Lederach reminds us, "it is not possible to cognitively plan and control […] healing;"[48] we must also accept the role of serendipity. Forgiveness involves grace, the working of the "transcendent holy mystery [who] is engaged in all the realities of the world around us, being concerned especially with the desperate and the damned."[49] Any attempt to control the Holy Spirit will ultimately be in vain.

Our developing framework thus begins with the victim-survivor and focuses on her own re-membering. From there, external work can begin, with the aim of social reconciliation. This framework does not expect forgiveness but rather works towards reformation of cultural norms that allow sexual violence to continue to exist. How can we concretely strive for social reconciliation?

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[46] Ibid., 270.
[47] Oakes, "On Forgiveness, Clergy Abuse, and the Need for New Understandings."
[48] Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 160.
[49] Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 42.

Moving Towards Just Peace

Without greater context, a just peace framework might seem a strange way to approach sexual violence and rape culture, as it implies that the current context is one of war. In fact, given the constraints of this paper, it is necessary to set aside instances where sexual violence is used as a weapon for warfare, as in the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[50] And yet chapter one of this thesis demonstrated that sexual violence, like many other forms of violence, threatens the everyday wellbeing of women and causes measurable harm.[51] Sexual violence and rape culture alter the day-to-day functioning of those experiencing restrictions. Theologian Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite goes as far as to call women's bodies battlefields, writing, "the bodies of women and girls are tuned into battlefields […] Bodies are damaged, flesh is ripped apart, and minds and lives destroyed."[52] In the face of such violence and war-like atrocities, just peace language gains authority and urgency.

Just peace language is undergirded by theology. Elizabeth Johnson writes, "The reign of God […] involves justice and peace among everyone, healing and wholeness everywhere, fullness of life enjoyed by all. It is what the scriptures call the situation of *shalom*, peace experience not only as the absence of war but as the fullness of life."[53] In other words, for

[50] For more information on this topic, see Léocadie Lushombo, "Virtue-Based Just Peace Approach and the Challenges of Rape as a Weapon of War: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo," in *A Just Peace Ethic: A Primer to Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, ed. Eli S. McCarthy (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 227–242.
[51] See Thomae and Viki, "Why Did the Woman Cross the Road?," 251.
[52] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield: Christian Theology and the Global War on Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.
[53] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1990), 52.

Catholics, "Peacemaking is not an optional commitment."[54] In the case of sexual violence, victim-survivors are denied fullness of life. Just peace works to change that.

Ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill offers a list of just peace principles that includes reflexivity, "protecting human life, dignity, and the common good; right intention; inclusive political participation; restoration; right relationship; reconciliation; and sustainability."[55] Some of these principles can be placed aside when using just peace to address systemic sexual violence. Restoration, for instance, implies that there was a previous point in history when right relationship existed, which is not the case with the structural power imbalances we see today.

The objectification of women present in rape culture is a violation of human dignity, ignoring the free will of women and treating them as objects, ignoring the Catechism teaching that each person possesses "inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator."[56] In situations of sexual violence, the antidote to objectification is free consent, which acknowledges the free will and full humanity of the woman. The notion of *free* consent is important, as consent achieved through deception and betrayal is coercive and not truly a free choice nor reflective of the norm of mutuality.[57]

Reflexivity reminds us that the goal of nonviolence cannot be achieved through violent means, that compassion and empathy towards both victims and perpetrators are

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[54] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," May 3, 1983, para. 333.
[55] Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Just War, Pacifism, Just Peace, and Peacebuilding," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (March 2019): 182.
[56] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), no 369.
[57] Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2012), 218-220; also see McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture" for discussions of the blurriness of consent and the need to strive for enthusiastic consent.

crucial in developing solidarity and peace.[58] This is where Catholic teaching stands as prophetic witness, demonstrating that exiling or "canceling" the perpetrators to support victim-survivors only continues the cycle of violence, moving us farther from the paradigm wherein "a world without sexual violence is the hope, belief, and aim."[59] Liberation theology undergirds the hope for a future free from oppression and violence, working towards the eschatological vision – not towards the now-oppressed lording power over their current oppressors. Reflexivity is a first step.

Truth can still be spoken; prophetic denunciation, for instance, has a long scriptural and historical tradition in the Church, "bringing to light the evils of reality, its victims and its perpetrators."[60] This denunciation, however, must be oriented towards healing rather than harm, towards revealing truth to effectuate change rather than to blame. It "has ultimacy, because it is done 'in God's name;' and as denunciation it is compassionate, because it is done against the perpetrators, but in defense of the poor."[61] From the New Testament, we can look to Jesus who calls out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who proclaim their holiness but neglect mercy, justice, and faith.[62] In a more contemporary example, Saint Oscar Romero prophetically denounced the actions of the US-backed Salvadoran government against poor campesinos, striving to expose the horrors of lived reality. Though Romero was assassinated as a result of his denunciation, his prophetic voice lives on today.

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[58] Eli S McCarthy, "Just Peace Ethic: A Virtue-Based Approach," in *A Just Peace Ethic: A Primer to Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, ed. Eli S McCarthy (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 61.
[59] Karen Ross, Megan K McCabe, and Sara Wilhelm Garbers, "Christian Sexual Ethics and the #MeToo Movement: Three Moments of Reflection on Sexual Violence and Women's Bodies," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39, no. 2 (2019): 353.
[60] Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 28.
[61] Ibid.
[62] See Matthew 23.

Thistlethwaite explains that victim-survivors are stuck in a cycle of violence that cannot be escaped through forgiveness, since "the 'forgive, forgive' dynamic […] fails at the crucial step of recognizing that unequal power relations are at the root of violent relationships, whether personal, national, or international. The 'spiral of violence' will not be interrupted unless the power inequalities that helped give rise to the violence are changed."[63] Without prophetic denunciation of harmful social structures, the spiral of violence she describes will continue.

On a more personal level, Oakes writes, "I do not forgive [the perpetrators], but I do not want them to hurt as much as they hurt any woman, do not want them to feel the guilt, rage, self-blame and self-loathing that so many women feel."[64] This is the first step of these just peace principles in action, using empathy and compassion to break the cycle of violence and acknowledging the human dignity of both perpetrator and victim-survivor. The response to violence is not more violence but rather to break out of the spiral of violence. Refusing to get caught in the cycle of violence is not a form of passivity but rather a conscious choice to deescalate, striving to create a new dynamic of mutual non-violence.

Two other justice peace principles are right relationship and reconciliation, which are connected in this paper, since I have defined reconciliation as involving the restoration of right relationship. We must remember that just peace is a virtue ethic that constantly strives towards betterment, moving against the structural enablements and incentives that encourage vice. This is helpful because it makes the problem approachable. Instead of having to fix the entire structure at once, individuals are invited to develop healthy practices that ultimately encourage flourishing. Conversion thus occurs through experience rather than persuasion

[63] Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield*, 189–190.
[64] Oakes, "Forgiveness in the Epoch of Me Too."

and "we will be better motivated and prepared to creatively imagine nonviolent ways to transform conflict, to choose, and to sustain those ways through difficult situations."[65] Just peace and reconciliation are thus processes, not edicts. To be clear, this required growth in virtue is on the part of the perpetrator and the community, not the part of the victim-survivor.

Right relationship and reconciliation do not mean looking towards compromise. As Pope Francis writes, "a compromise does not *resolve* a contradiction or a conflict."[66] In the case of sexual violence, there is a clear perpetrator and a clear victim-survivor. Compromise would do injustice the victim-survivor and would stand in conflict with the inherent dignity of all persons. Right relationship is rather built on justice and equality, replacing power-over with genuine mutuality.

In some cases, establishing right relationship might involve just and necessary punishment of some sort for the perpetrator, a form of atonement for the sins committed. As Pope Francis explained in his 2015 address to the United States Congress, "A just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation."[67] Though here he speaks of the death penalty, the notion can be applied to frameworks to deal with sexual violence. Punishment may be necessary, but the promise of rehabilitation should never be excluded. Yet rehabilitation should not be sought as a means to obtain forgiveness from a victim-survivor, but rather as a process important for the perpetrator himself to grow and to be a better person. Rehabilitation of the perpetrator does

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[65] Eli S McCarthy, "Just Peace Ethic: A Virtue-Based Approach," in *A Just Peace Ethic: A Primer to Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, ed. Eli S McCarthy (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 69.
[66] Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, 21.
[67] Pope Francis, "Transcript: Pope Francis's Speech to Congress," *Washington Post*, September 24, 2015, accessed April 26, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/transcript-pope-franciss-speech-to-congress/2015/09/24/6d7d7ac8-62bf-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html.

not mean a victim-survivor must forgive, as "battered women […] have been so often pressed to forgive their batterers to the point where it becomes part of the abuse."[68]

Holding human dignity at the core of our framework means that our initial concern is for victim-survivors, though we are careful to not demonize perpetrators in the process. This means that forgiveness cannot be an expectation (because of the currently operative structural norms) but also cannot be excluded, since perpetrators are also humans with dignity and are not outside the reach of God's redemptive grace. Reflexivity compels us to break the cycle of violence, understanding that non-violent interaction allows us to build right relationship and creates space for potential reconciliation, working together for a more just future.

Conclusion

A framework of social reconciliation with regards to cultures of sexual violence thus has two distinct but interconnected goals. First, taking a victim-survivor-centered approach, it seeks to reconcile victim-survivors with a culture that has wronged them, processing trauma and working towards reentering relationship, as described by Lebacqz. Second, it works to modify cultures and systems themselves to orient them to just, sustainable peace, remembering that peace is not simply the absence of violence. This mimics a standard reconciliation process in that two "sides" come towards a center to reestablish right relationship (or establish it for the first time). However, it is unique in that one side of this equation is a structure rather than an agent.

Given the dominant operative social structures, forgiveness cannot be an expectation. Rather, the focus is first put on the needs and healing of the victim-survivor, keeping in mind

[68] Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield*, 189.

that memory of sexual violence is just as dangerous for her as it is for the perpetrator. As psychotherapist André Stein clearly states, "We must stop dictating moral postures to the survivors. The opposite of not forgiving is neither cruelty, nor wallowing. It is a way of healing and honoring our pain and grief."[69]

Holding up principles of just peace as ideals for perpetrators and entire communities to strive towards provides a vision of a future free from sexual violence, where sinful structures are transformed into right relationships, built on the norms of non-violence and mutuality. Yet this nascent framework must have a space to be put into action, which is where we now turn.

[69] André Stein in Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, 253.

Chapter Three

Pastoral and Sacramental Church-based Solutions

Introduction

Creating a framework combining re-membering and just peace is not sufficient; it is merely a step in a longer process. In order to work towards a world where sexual violence is eliminated and where forgiveness is a tenable goal, this framework must be put into practice. It is not enough to speak of reflexivity and of social reconciliation when the Catholic Church fails to model these principles in its own daily existence. As Pope Francis puts it, we must create a culture of care. He clearly asserts, "there must be no more abuse – whether sexual, or of power and conscience – either inside or outside of the Church."[1] The Catholic Church can become a place of healing and hope for victim-survivors if and only if the Church intentionally works towards eliminating sexual violence.

Using the metaphor often employed in praxis theology, here, "like an owl flying forth at dusk, theology arises as a second act that reflects on what has been learned in the heat of the day. This knowledge sees and fertilizes a new day of praxis in an enriching cycle of ever-deeper understanding."[2] We have already learned from the heat of day – from statistics, from sinful structures, from the stories of victim-survivors, from already established frameworks for truth-telling. From this, a theoretical framework for truth-telling has been developed. We must now explore concrete ways in which the slow but necessary work of change can happen. At the end of the metaphorical tomorrow, after these solutions are practiced, new reflecting and acting will take place, a spiral that moves the Church ever closer towards greater care

[1] Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, 25.
[2] Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 83.

and healing. But tomorrow, the enacting of this theology and knowledge, cannot come until a theology is offered in response to today. As such, none of the solutions offered in this chapter are set in stone. The hope is that the solutions offered here continue to grow and develop in response to lived experience and that new solutions might be proposed in the future, particularly as structures change, as greater healing occurs, and as the Holy Spirit moves.

In this chapter, I propose a series of solutions tailored for Catholic spaces for enacting the framework proposed in the previous chapter. In doing so, I keep parish settings at the forefront of my mind, understanding that the parish is the location where the majority of the Catholic faithful encounter Church teachings and interact with their faith. This is not to exclude other pastoral settings – many of the solutions proposed are easily transferred to other contexts such as campus ministry programs and Catholic educational institutions.

These proposed solutions fall under two broad umbrellas – creating pastoral responses and reimagining of selected sacraments. The pastoral section of this chapter begins with a discussion of the role of the pastoral minister before offering a series of potential approaches and programming, adaptable as ministers see fit. The sacramental portion posits that multiple sacraments within the Catholic tradition are currently inadequate for victim-survivors of sexual violence and will re-vision elements accordingly.

And how might all of this connect to forgiveness and social reconciliation? By developing into a location of care and healing, the Church has the potential to create both physical and emotional space for these processes. It can model the difficult work of confronting the past with the goal of building a more just, equitable future wherein social reconciliation is achievable and forgiveness more plausible.

Pastoral Solutions

Strengths and Limitations of Ministerial Roles

Before pastoral solutions themselves can be proposed, we must first discuss both the particular gifts and limitations of the roles of ministers[3] within the Catholic Church. This is crucial because the minister plays an active role in any pastoral care situation. The comfort-level of a victim-survivor with a minister from whom she receives pastoral care deeply affects the outcome of said care, both for good and for ill. For the purposes of this section, I will consider two types of minister, priests and lay ecclesial ministers. The discussion of lay ecclesial ministers will be followed by a discussion of religious sisters, who are considered lay within the framework of the Catholic hierarchy but have an identity that is distinctly different from that of the lay ecclesial minister. This is not an exhaustive list but is rather meant to cover the majority of those in pastoral roles in the Church in the United States today.

By definition, Catholic priests are men who have taken a vow of celibacy. This automatically puts them at a distance from victim-survivors, who are predominately women and who are or have been sexually active (even if said activity was exclusively non-consensual). In addition, the male nature of the priest statistically aligns with the gender of perpetrators of sexual violence, potentially creating barriers in the pastoral care process. Victim-survivors may hesitate to place confidence in a male who holds power, especially considering the link between power and sexual violence. Though many priests exercise power in healthy, respectful ways, they are still part of a hierarchical church, still receive sacramental power by virtue of their ordination, and hold the primary leadership role in the

[3] I choose to use the term minister here rather than differentiating between priests and lay persons. Though there are major differences between these two categories (which will be discussed), the term minister refers to all those who provide pastoral care and function, rather than clerical status, is of utmost importance.

majority of parishes. This power is often reflected back in the attitudes of the non-ordained, who fall back on a "father knows best" attitude. Whether explicitly stated or implicitly known, this deference to ordained power can create an unequal dynamic between priest and victim-survivor, a person already vulnerable to such dynamics due to previous experiences.

There are also institutional shortcomings that must be kept in mind when considering the pastoral role of the priest in response to sexual violence. Seminary formation discourages deep relationships with non-clerics, particularly with women. First-person accounts of time spent in seminary explain that women are regarded as distracting and as temptation.[4] Rather than building relationship with all kinds of people (an integral part of human formation, one of the four areas of formation as defined by both the Vatican[5] and the USCCB[6]), seminarians are thus taught to not develop healthy adult platonic relationships with women, both due to the possible appearance of impropriety or the potential for impropriety itself.[7] This attitude towards women does not simply stop when a man graduates seminary and is ordained but is internalized and carried forward into active ministry. Victim-survivors may sense this emotional distance and discomfort and internalize it.

In addition, the priest functions as a symbol of the institutional Church. This has both positive and negative implications. He has a distinct sacramental role, and, for some victim-survivors, sacraments are a place of healing. The priest is thus indispensable in certain pastoral contexts. And yet this same sacramental role may be seen as harmful for other

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[4] Paul Blaschko, "Inside the Seminary," *Commonweal Magazine*, last modified February 17, 2015, accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/inside-seminary.
[5] Pope John Paul II, *I Shall Give You Shepherds (Pastores Dabo Vobis)* (The Holy See: Papal Archive, March 15, 1992), accessed April 26, 2021, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.
[6] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006).
[7] Blaschko, "Inside the Seminary."

victim-survivors, as it places a male in power with no alternative for the victim-survivor other than to cut herself off from the sacramental life of the Church.

As representative of the institutional Church, the priest is also (likely unwillingly) linked to the sex abuse crises in the Church and the subsequent cover-ups and mishandlings of said scandals. This can generate distrust on the part of the victim-survivor, as the Church time and time again sided with perpetrators, closing ranks to protect their own rather than supporting those who were harmed and working towards reform. These past sex abuse scandals can also render priests reticent to talk about sexual violence.

These descriptions, of course, are generalizations. Not every priest is exactly as described above. Many priests maintain healthy platonic relationships with women. Many intentionally acknowledge and set aside their priestly power, instead viewing their priesthood as service to the priesthood of the faithful[8] and viewing weakness, rather than power, as an asset.[9] However, the structural hierarchy in which priests exist and are formed inevitably affects the priests themselves as well as the layperson's comfort with priests. To some degree, the victim-survivor's view of the priest is more important than his actual disposition. She will not approach him for pastoral care (or will avoid events run by him) if she perceives the priest as representative of or complicit in a flawed hierarchy that has covered up sexual violence in the past.

None of the limitations discussed above make it impossible for a priest to be a pastoral leader or pastoral caregiver in the aftermath of sexual violence. Yet they do render the task more difficult. Priests must be aware of these limitations and work to counteract them when

[8] Michael Buckley, "Jesuit Priesthood: Its Meaning and Commitments," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 8, no. 5 (1976), https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/jesuit/article/view/3697/3275.
[9] Michael Buckley, "Are You Weak Enough to Be a Priest?," in *To Be a Priest: Perspectives on Vocation and Ordination*, ed. Robert Terwilliger and Urban Holmes (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 125–130.

appropriate, both through personal growth (where necessary) and by making their support of and pastoral availability to victim-survivors publicly known in parishes. However, priests must also have the humility to step back and allow others to lead when it would be beneficial for victim-survivors.

Priests are not the only pastoral caregivers in the Church. In recent decades, lay ecclesial ministers have increasingly taken on leadership roles, particularly in parishes. Lay ecclesial ministers are defined as appropriately formed and prepared lay persons authorized by the hierarchy to ministerial leadership roles in the local church, publicly serving in close collaboration with clergy.[10] Lay ecclesial ministers have identities that intersect more with those of victim-survivors. According to a 2015 report from Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), eighty percent of lay ecclesial ministers are women, a number that has remained more or less steady since 1990.[11] The same CARA report indicates that lay ecclesial ministers are marginally more likely than priests to be persons of color, though priests and lay ecclesial ministers are significantly whiter than the general population of adult Catholics.[12]

Lay ecclesial ministers operate with different authority than the ordained. The USCCB underlines that "the sacramental basis [for lay ecclesial ministry] is the Sacraments of Initiation, not the Sacrament of Ordination."[13] Because they are not ordained, lay ecclesial ministers cannot perform the sacraments (with certain provisions made in cases of emergency). This non-sacramental role means that lay ecclesial ministers can often lack

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[10] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, ed., *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, D.C: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 10.
[11] Mary Gautier and Mark Gray, *Research Review: Lay Ecclesial Ministers in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, February 2015), 5.
[12] Ibid., 6. The report does note that lay ecclesial ministers currently in formation are more ethnically diverse than their predecessors and will continue to grow more diverse in the future (26).
[13] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 11.

authority in a Church that links sacramental authority and power. In addition, all the faithful have taken part in the sacraments of Initiation, which means that lay ecclesial ministers are not differentiated sacramentally from the entirety of the congregation. This is not to discount the years of training and schooling many lay ecclesial ministers have, but it does demonstrate that lay ecclesial ministers do not have authority bestowed on them by the Church in the same way as priests.

For victim-survivors, this (perceived) lack of authority could be seen as either a positive or a negative (or even both simultaneously). This lack of authority means that lay ecclesial ministers may seem less intimidating to victim-survivors, making it easier to reach out, ask for help, and share their stories. For victim-survivors who see priests as carrying immense sacred power, a lay ecclesial minister may seem more approachable, meaning that a victim-survivor could receive support sooner. In addition, there is a candor afforded by this non-ordained role. Lay ecclesial ministers are not bound to Church teaching in the same way; they do not feel like they need to toe a doctrinal line (around premarital sex, for instance). Their vocations as non-ordained ministers are deeply influenced by the Holy Spirit and thus can be more responsive than the rigid Church hierarchy. Theologian Ed Hahnenberg goes as far as to suggest that the vocations of lay ecclesial ministers simply do not fit within the current Church structure. He explains this is not bad, rather it suggests an opening towards flexibility and newness.[14]

And yet, for some victim-survivors, the non-sacramental and potentially less powerful role of lay ecclesial ministers could be problematic. These victim-survivors may yearn for

[14] Edward P. Hahnenberg, "The Holy Spirit's Call: The Vocation to Lay Ecclesial Ministry" (Keynote Address presented at the National Symposium on Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, Collegeville, MN, August 2007), 3.

sacramental healing or for a person with greater authority to acknowledge the harm done and the pain caused. It is thus important to listen to the needs of the victim-survivor rather than assuming that one minister or another will be most helpful.

Another power difference to be aware of is that of parish employee (lay ecclesial minister) versus parishioner (layperson). In some cases, a parishioner with appropriate ministerial training might be an important resource for victim-survivors in that a layperson does not have any "official" connection with the Church in terms of employment or authority granted to the lay ecclesial minister by the bishop.

Religious sisters[15] have leadership roles in many parishes. Though technically laity, the faithful often view them has having more authority than other laypersons, since they have taken perpetual vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience and have committed their entire lives to their faith. On a spectrum of authority, religious sisters can be seen as falling somewhere between priests and the standard lay ecclesial minister. For some victim-survivors, this could be a helpful middle ground.

However, the authority of religious sisters, like the authority of priests, could be intimidating to some victim-survivors, as sisters can be viewed as "too holy" and thus not understanding of the difficulties, ambiguities, and traumas of day-to-day, "normal" life. There are also still stories circulating of overly strict teaching sisters who whacked students' knuckles with rulers for misbehaving – not exactly a welcoming image for victim-survivors.

Yet religious sisters are women, which makes them more approachable for some victim-survivors. And some sisters and some congregations are becoming increasingly known for their social justice work. Examples are many. Simone Campbell, SSS runs NETWORK,

[15] Here I intentionally only speak of religious sisters (and not of nuns), as they are not cloistered perform apostolic ministry rather than working in the confines of a convent.

lobbying for "tax justice, healthcare, economic justice, comprehensive immigration reform, voter turnout, bridging divides in politics and society, and mending the gaps in wealth and access in our nation."[16] Helen Prejean, CSJ has become nationally known for her work against the death penalty. Various congregations of religious sisters can be found at immigration rallies, Black Lives Matter protests, marches for greater gun control, and climate justice protests.[17] This focus on social justice and siding with the oppressed and marginalized taken by some (but not all) religious congregations demonstrates to victim-survivors that sisters are "on their side," opening up avenues for pastoral care.

There is no "perfect minister" when it comes to pastorally caring for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Each of the categories of ministers brings different identities and authorities to ministerial work. In many ways, the underlying traits of all ministers are most important – presence, empathy, understanding. Yet victim-survivors may have strong preferences as to who to entrust with their story and these preferences may evolve over time, as healing happens and as different needs surface. These preferences and boundaries must be respected, and victim-survivors must be given options with regards to their pastoral care, since not respecting boundaries and lack of options is an integral part of the trauma they have experienced.

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[16] "Sister Simone Campbell Biography," *NETWORK Lobby*, n.d., accessed March 23, 2021, https://networklobby.org/about/srsimonebio/.

[17] For examples, see Eva Mastromatteo, "Local Nuns Arrested, Freed While Fighting For Dreamers," *Erie News Now*, last modified February 27, 2018, accessed April 26, 2021, https://www.erienewsnow.com/story/37607330/local-nuns-arrested-freed-while-fighting-for-dreamers; Carol Zimmermann, "Mercy Sisters See Moral Issue behind Climate Change Protests," *Crux*, September 24, 2019, accessed April 26, 2021, https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2019/09/mercy-sisters-see-moral-issue-behind-climate-change-protests/.

Concrete Pastoral Approaches

Given the above discussion, the first element considered with regards to any pastoral activity, solution, or approach is leadership. Will an activity be lay-led or led by a priest? Will a solution be spearheaded by an employee of the parish or by a parishioner? What theological and/or pastoral training is necessary to guide a new approach? Is it possible to reach out to victim-survivors in the parish (if they are known) to ask for their input before these decisions are made?

A first set of concrete pastoral approaches focuses directly on (self-identified) victim-survivors. These approaches are to be prioritized, both because they are the persons who have been most harmed and need the most healing and also because wider community activities, as broached in the second part of this section, could be harmful to victim-survivors who have not already had the opportunity to process their experiences in smaller, more supportive environments. Though perpetrators also need healing, here, in line with Catholic Social Teaching, we employ a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, a population that includes victim-survivors.

Beginning with the Victim-Survivor

At the most basic level, churches should support both spiritual direction and therapy, understanding that the two are complementary rather than diametrically opposed. The attitude that exists in some parish communities that "God enough suffices" or that "God heals all ills" is simply insufficient.

The underlying question of spiritual direction, according to Jesuits William Barry and William Connolly is "Who is God for me, and who am I for God?"[18] The spiritual director is simply there to help the directee discern this question and facilitate deeper prayer and articulation of prayer experiences. Spiritual direction, according to Barry and Connolly, is primarily between God and the directee, which the spiritual director serving as wise guide only when necessary.

Thus, at its core, spiritual direction is about communication with God. Though experiences of sexual violence can be discussed in such a framework (often as a blockage in prayer or communication with God), spiritual direction is not a place to process such experiences. The vast majority of spiritual directors are not trained therapists and even those who are view direction and therapy as distinct practices. Spiritual direction is not about learning triggers and coping mechanisms nor about how to recover from trauma. Claiming this as the goal of spiritual direction is harmful to the victim-survivor directee, who does not get the support she needs and is told that God is the solution, which will be ultimately harmful to her relationship with God in the long term.

Moving from the individual victim-survivor to small groups of victim-survivors, churches must be locations for women to remember and re-member, to be supported by witnesses to their pain, and to enter into spaces that facilitate healing. A variety of programs at a variety of levels of commitment could support these goals. Here, I will offer three examples, which range from a simple afternoon activity (with an ongoing commitment from the parish) to the potential for a multi-week journey.

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[18] William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 5.

At the most basic level, parishes must create spaces to support lament, spaces where it is acceptable and even encouraged to "not be okay," in the words of counseling psychologist Megan Devine.[19] Though Devine focuses primarily on the grief and loss that accompanies the death of a loved one, her lessons are still applicable to those who are experiencing feelings of grief post-sexual violence. Like Keshgegian, Devine speaks of the need for others to bear witness to suffering. She writes, "the way to truly be helpful to someone in pain is to *let them have their pain*. Let them share the reality of how much this hurts, how hard this is, without jumping in to clean it up, make it smaller, or make it go away."[20] Put differently, O'Connor explains, "Acknowledging and reflecting back suffering restores the humanity of the victims because it validates their perception of the way the world has fallen away from under their feet."[21] Here, we see the importance of supportive witness to pain. Without this verbalization of trauma and attentive witness, there is little space for the victim-survivor to make progress towards wholeness. O'Connor continues, "Reverent attention by witnesses creates trust and safety necessary to retrieve and heal painful memories."[22] Witnessing cannot happen without experiences being voiced and lamented, without pain being expressed in communities of care.

In the Catholic tradition, this process of voicing pain is best exemplified in prayers and cries of lament. The aggrieved express the depths of their sorrows to God with the primary goal of being seen and heard. Solutions come later; the hurt must first be expressed and others – both God and other humans – must bear witness. Lament is present throughout

[19] Megan Devine, *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018).
[20] Ibid., 202.
[21] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 102.
[22] Ibid., 103.

scripture, from Daughter Zion crying out to God in the Book of Lamentations – "See, O LORD, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me"[23] – to the Psalms of lament – "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"[24] – to Jesus' famous cry on the cross – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[25] Lament is not monolithic: it conveys everything from anger to despair, from feelings of abandonment to those of hopelessness. But voicing said feelings is the crucial first step. Theologian Aaron Anastasi writes, "finding ways to discover and express one's own affliction is imperative to the sufferer. If he does not find ways to face and express his pain he will either be destroyed by it or will be overtaken by apathy."[26] There is a rich precedent in scripture for voicing pain to God in order to not be consumed by it.[27]

In a modern, post-Shoah context, this need for proper lament becomes even more imperative. Johnson summarizes Metz's view of the importance of lamentation, explaining, "Rather than settling for rational explanations, lamenting unto God, unto *God* in spite of everything, keeps hope alive. Such prayer has the capacity to nurture ongoing resistance to the victimization of others, past and present."[28] Lament becomes not only a tool for

[23] *Lamentations* 1:20, NRSV.
[24] *Psalms* 13:1-2.
[25] Matthew 27:46.
[26] Aaron P. Anastasi, "Adolescent Boys' Use of Emo Music as Their Healing Lament," *Journal of Religion and Health* 44, no. 3 (2005): 308.
[27] For testimony of the fruits of using the psalms to heal from sexual violence, see Sophia Stein, "I Am a Sexual Assault Survivor. The Psalms Gave Me New Words to Define Myself.," *America Magazine*, last modified October 20, 2017, accessed April 26, 2021, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/10/20/i-am-sexual-assault-survivor-psalms-gave-me-new-words-define-myself.
[28] Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 67, emphasis in original.

individual healing but a step towards resistance, towards erasing the oppressor-victim dualism, and towards creating a more just world.

And yet lament in Catholic spaces is often relegated to Good Friday. Even then, the all-pervasive knowledge of the coming resurrection tempers the lament and grief, as the congregation can see a light at the end of the tunnel, can feel hope for the redemption of the world. But the narrative arcs of victim-survivors are not yet written, do not yet have happy endings to hold in sight during the darkest hours. They remain in the messiness of the post-crucifixion, pre-resurrection world, a time where deep lament is voiced and where the words "it will be fine soon" should never be uttered. This space of survival and voicing of pain must not contain platitudes but is instead a place of deep companionship and accompaniment,[29] by God and by other persons. Here, we might draw upon the work of theologian Shelly Rambo, who explains that the Holy Spirit is deeply present in the unfathomable pain of Holy Saturday, when Jesus has died on the cross but has not yet risen. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is intimately present to those who have experienced trauma and remain in the depths.[30]

Ideally, lamenting of experiences of sexual violence occurs with other victim-survivors in small, supportive prayer spaces, where each person knows that the others understand and will not judge but witness and support. But this should be tailored to the needs of each individual. For some, an individual process of lament might be a more appropriate place to start, placing vulnerability and intimacy with God ahead of vulnerability in a group setting. As such, parishes should have resources available – prayers for lament, lists of psalms of lament, music, etc. Such resources should be available on a parish's website so that they are more readily accessible and can be accessed anonymously. In addition, descriptions of parish

[29] See Devine, *It's OK That You're Not OK*, 225.
[30] See Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

grief ministry, which often appear in weekly bulletins, should explicitly name sexual violence as an event to be grieved and direct contact information of grief ministers should be provided.

Once the pain is voiced and lamented for the first time, deeper healing can begin. Here, I will propose two avenues for such healing: retreats and pilgrimages.

Churches advertise retreats for those recovering from abortions (which shows retreats are a viable option for a stigmatized, vulnerable topic), for young adults, for married couples wanting to build on their marriage preparation retreat, yet I have never seen a parish create a similar space for those who have experienced sexual violence. It may come up on some retreats (as I write, I am part of a team building a retreat for women called to leadership roles in the Catholic Church and it is completely possible that experiences of sexual and gender-based violence will bubble up during the course of the retreat) but without a baseline understanding that everyone in the room has experienced such violence, which changes the way in which it is discussed. Creating retreat spaces where victim-survivors know from the beginning that everyone participating understands their lived experiences means that retreatants enter retreat time with greater freedom, the ability to be truer to oneself, and a feeling of ease.

The goal of retreat is encountering the presence of God,[31] which moves past lament in many ways. Sadness, anger, and grief may still arise, but in different ways than they would in a space specifically designed for lament. Here, in the extended time of retreat, these emotions can arise and be acknowledged but can be more deeply prayed with, can be discussed in spiritual direction, and can be held in compassionate community.

[31] Nicki Verploegen, *Planning and Implementing Retreats: A Parish Handbook* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 17.

There are specific pastoral considerations to keep in mind when designing and running a retreat for victim-survivors. As is the case with any retreat on a difficult topic, you do not open what you cannot close over the course of a retreat or, at the very least, you have ongoing resources available after the retreat. A victim-survivor should not leave a retreat feeling more wounded than when she arrived. The retreat leader must also give special attention to parts of a retreat that would be normal but could be difficult for victim-survivors, such as anointing or rituals that involve touch. Though some victim-survivors may crave healthy touch, it may make others profoundly uncomfortable and could even be triggering. Elements of a retreat that involve touch can either be dispensed with or be offered with a choice of forms. For example, a victim-survivor receiving a blessing would be given the choice between a hand on her shoulder or head, hands extended over her but not touching her, or her simply bowing her head, with no action on the part of those doing the blessing. She would have the option of closing her eyes or leaving them open, whichever is most comfortable for her. Of course, providing these options for retreat activities is always best practice, but it is particularly crucial when working with those who have experienced sexual violence.

In addition, if it is at all possible, at least one of the retreat leaders (or, at minimum, one of the available spiritual directors) should be a victim-survivor of sexual violence. This creates greater mutual understanding among all parties involved, has the potential to create a more supportive environment, and avoids creating a dynamic wherein those with privilege (those who have not experienced sexual violence) are taking pity on those without privilege. Savior complexes do not make for a good retreat.

Moving past retreats, a third and final suggestion[32] of a concrete pastoral approach focused exclusively on victim-survivors is that of healing pilgrimage. There is a rich tradition of connecting women's bodies with pilgrimage. Israeli Jewish women make pilgrimage to the tombs of Jewish female saints to improve their sense of connection with their bodies, women in northeastern Brazil journey to the shrine of Saint Francis of the Wounds to find relief from physical ailments that result from their societal marginalization, and women the world over make pilgrimages related to miscarriage, birth, and maternity.[33] Pilgrimage as healing journey after sexual violence is a logical twenty-first century continuation of these long-held traditions.

These pilgrimages could be to places of healing (most famously Lourdes in France, but also local shrines, like the one of Saint Francis of the Wounds or the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré outside of Québec City). And yet pilgrimages for victim-survivors should not be restricted to traditional locations of healing, as healing can occur in many ways on pilgrimage, in churches and shrines but also in the act of walking the road and being in nature, exposed to the elements. Pilgrimages like the Camino de Santiago or even a constructed pilgrimage to a location of personal significance are thus also opportunities for healing. Anthropologists Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman explain,

> symbolic threats [like past trauma] generally don't allow for a physical struggle, so chemicals generated by symbolic occurrences arouse the body but are not used. Symbolic management of these emotional effects is central to the healing of pilgrimages providing a sense of assurance of well-being that can directly stimulate the limbic brain, reducing fear, anxiety, and the physiological dynamics of stress.[34]

[32] Again, it is important to remember that the suggestions offered here are not exhaustive and, following a praxis model, can evolve over time.
[33] Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman, *Pilgrimage and Healing* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2005), xxiii–xxiv.
[34] Ibid., xxx.

In other words, the physical motion (and in the case of a walking pilgrimage, the physical stress) of pilgrimage activates the autonomic nervous system in such a way that emotional threats (like lingering emotional pain from sexual violence) have an avenue through which to be processed, in tandem with physical motion.

Dubisch and Winkelman also speak of the altered states of consciousness that occur on a pilgrimage, the result of extended periods of walking, praying, and physical exhaustion. Writing from a secular perspective, they explain that these altered states of consciousness have a variety of therapeutic effects: "reduction in stress, anxiety, and psychosomatic reactions; regulation of psychophysiological processes underlying emotions, social attachments, and bonding; providing access to subconscious and unconscious information; and integration of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes."[35] All of these effects have healing potential for victim-survivors of sexual violence. In Catholic spheres, this is where we can speak of connection with the Divine. In the physical exhaustion and emotional vulnerability of the pilgrimage experience, emotional walls constructed between everyday life and God begin to crumble. Intimacy with the Divine follows and God is present in the process of integration towards fullness.

In terms of practical concerns, a local pilgrimage need not take more than a day. However, a longer journey has more potential for healing, as it removes victim-survivors from their standard spaces and roles, allowing them to focus on themselves and on God. Longer pilgrimages also make space for building relationships with other pilgrims. Pilgrimages away from home offer greater opportunities to take risks and to be open to newness and challenge, all of which are integral to personal growth.

[35] Ibid., xxxiv.

Ideally, a pilgrimage is done with a community that has been built up over time, that has trained, prepared, and prayed together and can offer support along the way. But this is not the only option: encouraging a victim-survivor to take such a pilgrimage on her own or in a small group makes more space for serendipitous encounters along the way and perhaps more room for introspection. There is even potential for a group of victim-survivors to train and pray together before embarking on pilgrimage individually, depending on personal schedules and pilgrimage preference. In any case, the pilgrim should never feel alone in her journey.

Pilgrims should not approach a pilgrimage expecting to be healed. Healing is a serendipitous process and cannot be dictated by our expectations. If a pilgrim is expecting healing in a very particular fashion, she will be disappointed when it does not happen. However, healing may happen in unforeseen ways and may not even be recognized in the moment, only when looking back over the pilgrimage experience. A pilgrimage does not end at the final destination but continues to unfold over time, as the journey is processed and reflected upon. Pastoral care thus does not end with the pilgrimage but is ongoing, like many of the approaches discussed in this section.

In all of these – lament groups, retreats, pilgrimages – confidentiality must be respected. This might mean framing an event with delicacy (using terms such as healing), making sure the membership of the group is not made public, and reaching out one-on-one to invite victim-survivors to events when appropriate. Yet this discretion should not amount to shame. Instead, it needs to be the choice of each victim-survivor as to who can know that she is a victim-survivor and who can hear what parts of her story. She should not hesitate to join in community with other victim-survivors for fear of public knowledge of her victimhood.

In all of these spaces, lament, remembrance, and encounter with God are forms of reconciliation of the victim-survivor with herself and her experience, allowing direct dialogue with God and movement towards healing. It removes the priest from the process, rendering it more accessible to those who struggle with the sacramental version of reconciliation. From this space of personal healing, victim-survivors and the ministers who accompany them can begin to look outward.

Moving out towards the Community

Once appropriate care has been provided for victim-survivors and journeys toward healing have begun, a community must expand its view and look to reform itself, to provide prophetic witness against the dominant structures of rape culture and male aggressivity. Throughout this process, victim-survivors must be given priority. As is the case with racial justice, it is not the responsibility of the harmed to educate those who perpetrate harm. Victim-survivors should participate to whatever extent they are comfortable.

The first step towards educating community and creating communal change is establishing constructive spaces for truth-telling. Such spaces look to avoid the pitfalls discussed in chapter two of this thesis and must be run with care and intentionality. There are ways in which those participating in truth-telling can be protected – through first telling stories in safe spaces with other victim-survivors before speaking to the wider community, through anonymous structures that allow stories to be told without names being attached, through truth-telling in intimate "brave spaces" à la The People's Supper.[36]

[36] Krista Tippett, "Jennifer Bailey and Lennon Flowers — An Invitation to Brave Space," *The On Being Project*, last modified October 17, 2019, accessed December 16, 2020, https://onbeing.org/programs/jennifer-bailey-and-lennon-flowers-an-invitation-to-brave-space/.

The first of these is to some degree covered in the previous section. When safe spaces are created for lament and sharing, stories tend to come forth. In the process of sharing, lamenting, and praying with other victim-survivors, some select victim-survivors may want to make their stories know to the wider community, with the intention of helping the community work towards justice. The parish can then decide the best way to share these stories, a process that will vary depending on the parish and structures it already has in place, keeping in mind the guiding question of both The People's Supper and Jesus' public ministry: "What needs healing here?"[37]

When shared with the permission of victim-survivors, anonymously or with names attached, the experiences raised and remembered in spaces of truth-telling can influence preaching and social justice initiates within a parish. Like all things associated with sexual violence and healing, preaching must be thoughtful and intentional, understanding that it can be triggering to those who have experienced sexual violence, especially when said preaching is done by a celibate man. There therefore must be opportunities for women to preach and to proclaim truth, whether personal or the collective truth of all women, reflecting the lived experiences of women from the pulpit.

The process of sharing with the wider community must seek to frame victim-survivors as victim-survivors, not simply victims. This avoids the reduction of the victim-survivor to simply the harm committed against her, showing instead that sexual violence is merely a part of her journey. It acknowledges the complexity of the situation while showing they are more than what has happened to them. This has the potential to create more supportive

[37] "The People's Supper — About Us," *The People's Supper*, last modified 2021, accessed April 26, 2021, https://thepeoplessupper.org/about-us.

communities and parishes, where more women are willing to process their trauma and tell their stories. Breaking the culture of silence is a critical step towards ending sexual violence.

In terms of social justice initiatives, parishioners may be more invested in an initiative supporting victim-survivors of domestic violence, for example, if they know that others in the community have experienced it. Names need not be mentioned, the communal care that exists in many parishes suffices.

A final form of truth-telling is one that is inherently not anonymous – brave spaces. These spaces differ from much-maligned safe spaces in that they create room for discomfort and room to encounter other life experiences and viewpoints intimately and with respect of all persons involved, which is not a common choice in the United States at this time. These brave spaces are venues of witness and accompaniment. Brave space pioneer Reverend Jennifer Bailey explains the importance of teachability in these spaces, saying "We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow. We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know. We will not be perfect."[38] These criteria are particularly crucial for non-victim-survivors entering brave spaces, as their views and opinions will likely be put into question as they hear victim-survivors speak and as they enter into conversation with them.

In the case of sexual violence, there are two types of brave spaces: spaces where victim-survivors and the general population of a parish share space and one where perpetrators are also included. The goal of such spaces is for non-victim-survivors to better understand the lived experiences of victim-survivors, to understand the restrictions they face and the ways their lives have changed after experiencing sexual violence. This is similar to a limited, controlled truth-telling exercise, with victim-survivors only revealing that which they

[38] Tippett, "An Invitation to Brave Space."

are comfortable revealing. There are obviously risks around vulnerability for the victim-survivor in both of these scenarios. In the first scenario, victim-survivors enter into conversation with a group of people who, though not perpetrators of sexual violence themselves, have been influenced by social structures and likely participate in harmful constructs without explicit awareness. In the second scenario, victim-survivors place themselves in an even more uncomfortable position – having civil (and hopefully constructive) dialogue with those who have caused great harm. Despite the past deeds of the perpetrators, victim-survivors must respect the dignity of all persons in the room, understanding that all persons are sinners but also have inherent dignity. There are also risks for the perpetrator in the second scenario, including making personal shortcomings and wrongdoing publicly known and the associated potential ostracization.

Brave thus speaks of both parties. This process is not easy and is not an expectation of victim-survivors. It also comes much further along in any pastoral process; brave space encounters such as these exist on a long-range timeline and should happen years after such a project begins. There is incredible trust that is assumed, both on the part of victim-survivors and on the part of perpetrators, trust that takes years to build.

Moving even further, parishes can be spaces wherein more than one-off conversations in brave spaces happen but where ongoing work towards restorative justice occurs. This could be accomplished by hosting regular restorative justice circles, run by trained circle leaders who can help to set ground rules, ensure the circle functions smoothly, and can step in if absolutely necessary. A circle process is ongoing, meeting for many weeks until injustices

are fully addressed, and participants find a way forward.[39] These restorative justice circles would not be focused on a particular victim-survivor and a particular perpetrator but would rather look towards creating communities that recognize the harms done by sinful structures that encourage sexual violence and would then work to dismantle such structures.

A very particular form of restorative justice is an option in situations of sexual violence, that of "vicarious restorative justice."[40] This process is best explained through an example, mostly in the words of an unnamed perpetrator:

> He meets with survivors as a kind of "stand-in" perpetrator for survivors who cannot, for various reasons, meet with the actual perpetrators in their own cases. He listens to them describe their experience as victims, and they listen as he takes responsibility for what he did to his victim.
>
> "That would be to say, 'I took your body for my pleasure and my needs,'" he says, choosing his words carefully and deliberately. "I knew you couldn't stop me from doing it. I knew that you were hurt, but I got up and left you there, having been violated by me, because of my selfishness and my belief that what you had was mine for the taking."
>
> Then, he acknowledges the damage he did. "You may have had depression, you may have–" he begins, before catching himself and switching to the first person. "*I* may have caused you anxiety and a lifetime of difficulty having relationships."
>
> And lastly, he offers an apology.
>
> "It's not your fault," he says, "and it's not something that was anything other than my boorishness, my belief that I could have whatever I wanted. And I'm very sorry that you were hurt."[41]

A perpetrator enters such a space with extensive preparation and a deep desire to grow, to change his behavior, and to make amends, even if those amends are made with a stand-in.

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[39] For more information, see Lynette Parker, "Restorative Justice: Circles," *Centre for Justice and Reconciliation*, last modified 2021, accessed April 26, 2021, http://restorativejustice.org/restorative-justice/about-restorative-justice/tutorial-intro-to-restorative-justice/lesson-3-programs/circles/.
[40] Tovia Smith, "Growing Efforts Are Looking At How — Or If — #MeToo Offenders Can Be Reformed," *NPR*, last modified October 10, 2019, accessed December 15, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2019/10/10/766834753/growing-efforts-are-looking-at-how-or-if-metoo-offenders-can-be-reformed.
[41] Ibid.

He has to admit everything he did and take full responsibility for his actions before entering into the process. Stand-in victim-survivors report that the process deeply affects them as well. Even though it is not the person who harmed them who is apologizing, it is still moving. Victim-survivor Alissa Ackerman explains, "it was just this moment of being heard, by someone who'd caused sexual harm. It is a weight that you no longer have to carry."[42] This is the ultimate goal – healing on the part of victim-survivors, reform of perpetrators, and a visible path towards changing actions long-term.

In a parish, there are a couple ways in which to assist with vicarious restorative justice – with the victim-survivors of the parish volunteering to participate as stand-ins for other victim-survivors who are not able to face their perpetrators or, in an exercise of courage and bravery, perpetrators who are part of the parish community meeting with stand-in victim-survivors. Though not explicitly religious in nature, such a project aligns with the desire to work towards just peace outlined in chapter two and for parishes to constantly strive to envision and embody the coming reign of God.

These spaces of careful truth-telling act as bridges between the first and second goals of reconciliation in the context of sexual violence, as they create space for truth to come to the surface, raising the problem of sexual violence in the collective consciousness of the parish. They allow space for victim-survivors to process their pain and establish right relationship but also allow glimpses of nascent cultural change at the community level. Some of the later approaches in this section appear so counter-cultural that they may seem unachievable. Yet a community that goes through the entire process slowly and deliberately

[42] Ibid.

will find such radical action doable and, in the process, will serve as a beacon of light and hope for those who work towards dismantling sinful structures that promote sexual violence.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, all of these concrete pastoral solutions are mere starting points. A prayerful retreat, for example, might bring new and different fruits, like involvement in activism in the secular community as a way to visibly show Catholic support for victim-survivors. Growth will happen both through the community and through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Lederach writes, "it is not possible to cognitively plan and control […] healing,"[43] we must accept the unpredictable role of serendipity and lean into the grace of the Holy Spirit.

These spaces and changes within a community will likely also allow other women who have experienced sexual violence to be able to name it as such. As discussed in chapter one, many victim-survivors write off their own experiences as simply a bad night or a misunderstanding. As such, a community might be in multiple spaces outlined above simultaneously. A first group of victim-survivors may be going on pilgrimage and sharing their stories with the parish while another group, whose attention was caught by the sharing of stories publicly, might slowly enter into spaces of lament and retreat. In other words, a parish cannot complete a step in this process and then be done forever. Instead, it is a constant process of lamenting, healing, educating, and reforming, all while keeping the good of the victim-survivor as the central focus. And the above is not a precise guide, it is dependent on choices made by a community that best fit its particular context – of who the most appropriate pastoral minister is in a given setting, of how to integrate the sharing of women's voices from the pulpit, of what risks can be taken and when said risks can be taken.

[43] Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 160.

Sacramental Solutions

Moving on from general pastoral care considerations, we will now broach pastoral implications associated with the sacramental life of the Catholic Church. The sacraments are an integral part of the lived reality of the Catholic Church, but they are currently insufficient for victim-survivors of sexual violence, either because they fall short of that which they could potentially be or because they cause discrete harm to victim-survivors. This section does not seek to create a comprehensive revisioning of sacramental theology but rather aims to point out particular deficiencies and offer alternatives and ways forwards that center the victim-survivor. As such, I will here discuss two sacraments – anointing of the sick and reconciliation – and how they can be of greater service to victim-survivors.

Inherent in this section is ambiguity. Theologian Susan Ross explains that any feminist sacramental theology must create space for ambiguity. She writes, "a tolerance and appreciation for ambiguity reflects the experiences of women who are themselves engaged in sacramental ministry or who find themselves in a tradition that has both nurtured and alienated them. They do not choose to reject the tradition entirely, yet they search for a more adequate way to express their own sense of sacramentality."[44] It must be noted that this is not indecision, as there is desire to engage with and in the sacraments. Rather, this ambiguity is an acknowledgment of the both-and nature of the sacraments in many situations; they are both places of grace and encounter with the Divine and spaces wherein women are marginalized and subject to male power.

In the context of this thesis, starting with this notion of ambiguity underlines that I do not fully reject the sacraments in this analysis but rather approach them as imperfect, flawed

[44] Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 57.

by the very human institution that is the Catholic Church. The sacraments are by no means irredeemable and there is much good to be found within them. However, we still must take a critical stance and acknowledge the deficiencies present in order to help the sacraments grow towards their fullest potential, open to the richness and complexity of human life.

Anointing of the Sick

The anointing of the sick has already developed in recent years, now available to all who are gravely ill rather than framed as last rites. However, it is not widely known that the sacrament is available to those experiencing grave mental health issues,[45] nor is it explicitly recommended in situations of trauma. By making this sacrament available to victim-survivors (and announcing said availability), the Church would not only recognize deep physical and emotional pain but also underline that God and God's people are intimately present and supportive throughout the darkness.

This shift would involve modifying the definition of the sacrament somewhat. As it stands, Canon Law dictates, "The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age."[46] The key terms here are "begins" and "be in danger." "Be in danger" could be interpreted in a strictly physical sense, i.e., be on a health trajectory that could conceivably lead to death. This fits the language of "grave illness" used other sections of the canons on anointing of the sick. In terms of mental illness, however, the distinction is not as clear-cut.

[45] I do not want to suggest that all victim-survivors of sexual violence automatically deal with mental health issues as a result. However, RAINN says that approximately seventy percent of those who experience rape or sexual assault experience moderate to severe mental distress (see "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN.").

[46] *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition.* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999), 1004 §1.

Must an individual wait until they are suicidal to request anointing? Does experiencing severe depression or suicidal ideation suffice? What about the journey of healing from trauma, where one's life is no longer in danger but the journey ahead will still be long and difficult?

"Begins" is also a term rife with ambiguity. In writing of her journey with cancer, activist Mary Ann Wasil describes receiving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick on her first day of chemotherapy, with her children present. She writes, "Sharing this sacrament with my children in this way, on this holy day, in this holy place, was exactly how I wanted to enter my new world of cancer and chemotherapy."[47] Her experience loosely fits the canonical definition of when an ailing person can be anointed, as she is technically beginning a journey that will both cause and treat severe health issues. Yet some priests would say she could have been anointed earlier (as discovery of cancer marks the beginning of illness) and others could argue she was not in danger as she began chemotherapy, since it is an effective treatment and she was thus never in mortal danger.

These ambiguities are written into the canons so that the best pastoral decisions can be made. Priests are given leeway to anoint even if the full necessity of the anointing is in doubt. However, this intentional ambiguity means there are not sufficient directives around the need to anoint in situations of mental health issues and emotional trauma. In addition, the average layperson is not aware that they can request anointing for these reasons. This sacrament has the potential to do great good if it is made more readily accessible to those who need it.

One potential solution is to perform communal anointing services in the same style of the second rite of reconciliation (community reconciliation services, often performed in

[47] Mary Ann Wasil, *A Diary of Healing: My Intense and Meaningful Life With Cancer* (Bloomington: Balboa Press, 2013), 25–26.

parishes during the seasons of Advent and Lent). In such an anointing service, a time of prayer would be offered, followed by individual anointing. This could fit into a retreat setting but could also be celebrated by an entire parish community on a regular basis. It could involve those dealing with various ailments, not just the aftereffects of sexual violence. It would be for parishioners themselves (in consultation with pastoral ministers, if necessary) to decide if they are in need of anointing, to examine their own experiences and discern the true severity of their afflictions. The power thus does not lie exclusively in the hands of the priest who anoints but also in the one to be anointed choosing to come forward and in the discernment process itself.

Finally, there must be a discussion of if the ordained male priest is the appropriate minister of this sacrament in all situations. Victim-survivors may not feel comfortable with physical contact from a man and said discomfort easily tips the sacrament from ambiguous to not helpful or even harmful. The goal of anointing of the sick is to draw God near and render God ever more present in the process of healing. A non-ordained woman might be a better pastoral minister for that process in certain contexts.

Sacramental Reconciliation

Sacramental reconciliation likewise offers a potential space for healing and for entering into deeper relationship with God. It could be particularly helpful for victim-survivors who carry a sense of guilt around their trauma due to the ambiguity of the situation, the presence of consent but lack of free consent, the teachings of the Catholic Church on sex, or myriad other factors. This might seem counterintuitive, as if it supports the victim-survivor's guilt. However, such guilt already exists for the victim-survivor; denying it does not remove it but can rather compound it, adding guilt for feeling guilty. Sacramental

reconciliation can offer a location of healing for some, but it is a choice and must not be forced upon any victim-survivor.

Here, a concrete example might be helpful. Keshgegian provides the example of "Rebecca," who has experienced sexual violence and who works alongside both a therapist and a minister (Lukey) as part of her healing journey. Keshgegian explains, "Initially, Lukey is hesitant to perform [a ritual of confession and reconciliation] because she does not want to suggest that Rebecca is guilty of what was done to her. Yet it becomes clear that Rebecca feels guilt and needs to experience reconciliation."[48] The question here is not if Rebecca did anything wrong – she did not – but if she felt guilt. Denying her guilt because she did not commit sin does her no pastoral good but rather denies her agency, compounding the powerlessness already encountered in sexual violence.

Keshgegian continues, explaining that the effectiveness of the rites described above "is due in no small part to the fact that Rebecca is the one who chooses them and is able to control what happens in them. The emphasis in the rites is not simply on reconciling Rebecca to God, but on restoring relationship – between Rebecca and God and others, and especially between Rebecca and herself."[49] Sacramental reconciliation is thus, at least for some victim-survivors, a pathway towards right relationship and just peace.

However, for other victim-survivors, as mentioned previously in this chapter, the role of the male celibate priest in the sacrament renders it ineffective or even harmful. Again, the focus of the sacrament must be on the needs of the victim-survivor rather than unthinking adherence to the Church's formulaic interpretation.

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[48] Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 222.
[49] Ibid., 223.

Liturgical theologian Teresa Berger gives voice to the misgivings of many women when she writes, "[She] had already made clear a while ago that she finds the all-male cast of the Reconciliation Service deeply hurtful and fatally flawed and that, Lent or not, she has no intention to subject herself to the concentrated clerical presence of this liturgy."[50] A sacrament is problematic when it causes harm to those it is supposed to help.

There are a number of ways in which this sacrament might be re-visioned for the benefit of victim-survivors. The most major change would be to allow women to be ministers of the sacrament, creating an environment where victim-survivors can speak woman-to-woman in this space of profound healing. Berger's narrator writes, "I hope God at least knows how to absolve through women."[51] In a similar vein, Bishop Vincent Malone muses,

> And in the sacrament of Reconciliation, could not a lay person be seen by the Church, after prayerful reflection, as the authorised speaker of the forgiveness that comes in reality from God alone? It is not difficult to conceive circumstances in which a female minister could more appropriately than a man be the receiver of the humble confession that opens a soul to hear the glad words of the Lord's forgiveness.[52]

This would, of course, take significant doctrinal changes on the part of the hierarchical Church. Though such changes are not impossible, they would take a long time to materialize and would face many roadblocks, if they happen at all. This is not helpful to victim-survivors in the present-day.

Less radical changes to sacramental reconciliation would also be of great service to victim-survivors. They should be given the option to not say the Act of Contrition, as it underlines that wrong was done, which is not the case for victim-survivors. Any penance

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[50] Teresa Berger, *Fragments of Real Presence: Liturgical Traditions in the Hands of Women* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 2005), 168.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Vincent Malone, in *Healing Priesthood: Women's Voices Worldwide*, ed. Angela Perkins and Verena Wright (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 122.

given should be the result of discussion between the priest and the victim-survivor, with the goal of penance as healing and growth rather than punishment for sin, especially considering victimization is not a sin.

Priests themselves also must be aware of and attentive to the fact that sin may look different for women than it does for men. In her famous essay "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," theologian Valerie Saiving explains that theology, including theology of sin, was created from a masculine viewpoint and therefore does not appropriately account for the feminine experience. In the realm of sacramental reconciliation, this means priests should not look for sins like pride but rather for "negation of the self."[53] Rubio renders Saiving's language in more modern terminology, speaking of "failure of self-care and self-realization"[54] as elements of sin that priests might overlook because they are not in line with masculine normative sins. Though priests should not look for sins to pin on victim-survivors, awareness in the confessional of the ways in which women tend to diminish their own beings allows for better care of victim-survivors.

Conclusion

Other sacraments can be examined in similar ways. For instance, how is sexual ethics taught in marriage preparation classes? And who teaches it? Does Eucharist rely on a potentially harmful notion of broken bodies? As demonstrated in this chapter, the sacraments

[53] Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960): 109.
[54] Don Clemmer, "Priests and Lay Women Work Together Every Day. The Church Is Finally Starting to Train Them Together, Too.," *America Magazine*, last modified March 18, 2021, accessed April 26, 2021, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/03/18/priest-seminaries-formation-catholic-laity-women-vatican-ii-240212.

in the Catholic Church are flawed in many ways. However, they have great potential to create both comfort and hope.

The Catholic Church has myriad resources that can be used to help victim-survivors heal, resources so numerous that many could not be addressed here. Using these pastoral and sacramental resources, the Church can create a culture of appropriately vulnerable truth-telling that aims towards protecting victim-survivors while striving towards just peace. If the goal of the Church is truly to create the reign of God on earth, supporting those harmed by sexual violence and working towards a society free of sexual violence is good and necessary work.

Conclusion

With its history of sex abuse crises, misuses of power, and involvement in sinful social structures, the Catholic Church may not be the most intuitive place to look for reform and solace in cases of sexual violence. But there is a richness in the Church's pastoral and sacramental practice that has the potential to offer consolation and healing for victim-survivors of sexual violence. There is also a richness in the Church's understanding of social sin that allows us to look at sexual violence not simply as an individual act but rather as indictive of sinful structures and cultural norms. As such, the Catholic Church can provide a supportive space for victim-survivors to re-member their trauma and work towards healing, for perpetrators to repent, and for entire communities to endeavor to change sinful structures while acknowledging their own complicity.

We must prioritize victim-survivors throughout this process, understanding that Jesus identifies with victim-survivors not simply because they have suffered but because he himself suffered in a similar way: "Stripped naked, he was subject to a violating sexual humiliation. Like many prisoners throughout history, he perhaps even suffered the piercing violence of sexual assault. But even if Jesus was not raped, his crucifixion was inherently rather than circumstantially sexually violent."[1] This "deep incarnation"[2] of Jesus is in solidarity with victim-survivors, understanding their every pain.

Combatting sexual violence is an issue of justice and is work that must be done with empathy. It is this understanding of empathy, of moving into the pain of the afflicted,

> that helps us to know, according to the Catholic tradition, […] only a God who suffers with victims can be capable of offering any kind of forgiveness, because God takes on the burden and does the work of forgiving on our behalf. In a theology that

[1] Grimes, *Christ Divided*, 216.
[2] See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 183–187.

> centers victims' experiences, forgiveness is in the hands of a God who suffers, not a responsibility resting on the shoulders of those who have been abused.[3]

This is not a defeatist attitude but rather one of hope. It provides space for victim-survivors to not be beholden to working towards forgiveness and yet provides a promise of redemption for perpetrators.

By recognizing unjust social structures and working to reform them, we look to create spaces where lasting, sustainable peace is achieved. And, ultimately, we glimpse a future where forgiveness is possible.

[3] Oakes, "On Forgiveness, Clergy Abuse, and the Need for New Understandings."

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