

**THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN,
CLERICALISM, AND THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS
IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT**
*LA PARÁBOLA DEL BUEN SAMARITANO, CLERICALISMO
Y LA CRISIS DE LOS ABUSOS SEXUALES
EN EL CONTEXTO DE AUSTRALIA*

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the ways in which the Church has responded to the clergy sexual abuse crisis in light of Pope Francis' reflections in *Fratelli tutti's* on the parable of the Good Samaritan. It draws on his critique of clericalism and the analysis of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse to argue that it is secular authorities that have taken the message of the parable more to heart than the Church itself. By its own standards, the Church has failed in its pastoral response to clergy abuse victims because the perpetrator is one of their own, sharing with them the same clerical identity.

Keywords: Clericalism, Sexual abuse, Good Samaritan, Pope Francis, Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse, Australian Church, *Fratelli tutti*.

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RESUMEN

En este artículo abordamos el modo en que la Iglesia ha dado respuesta a la crisis de los abusos sexuales perpetrados por sacerdotes, y lo hacemos a la luz de las reflexiones del papa Francisco acerca de la parábola del Buen Samaritano en su encíclica Fratelli tutti. El estudio que presentamos se basa en una crítica al clericalismo y en el análisis de la Comisión Real Australiana sobre Abuso Sexual en las instituciones, a fin de demostrar que las autoridades civiles se han tomado más en serio el mensaje de la parábola que la propia Iglesia. Esta ha fallado en su respuesta pastoral a las víctimas de abuso por parte del clero porque el victimario es uno de los suyos, con lo que la Iglesia y el abusador comparten la misma identidad clerical.

Palabras clave: Clericalismo, abuso sexual, Buen Samaritano, papa Francisco, Comisión Real Australiana sobre Abuso Sexual, Fratelli tutti.

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has been seeking to reorient the Catholic Church from being an inward-looking community to one which bravely turns its face to the world, to confront the realities there, to listen, to learn, and to bring the good news to those at the margins. In his pre-conclave speech, Cardinal Bergoglio spoke of the dangers of a Church becoming “self-referential” and “sick”. He warned of the dangers of a “theological narcissism” overtaking the Church and referred to the Gospel image of Jesus knocking on the door wanting to enter our lives. “But think of the times when Jesus knocks from within to let himself out. The self-referential Church seeks Jesus Christ within and does not let him out.”¹ This fundamental shift in orientation is reflected in his two major encyclicals, *Laudato si’* (LS) (2015) on the environmental crisis facing our planet, and in his more recent *Fratelli tutti* (FT) (2020), written in the shadow of a global pandemic that is disrupting our lives across this same planet. Both documents fall under the general umbrella of Catholic Social Teaching. However, there are differences. Much like the

¹ Cf. Jorge Mario Bergoglio, “Criticizing Theological Narcissism. Cardinal Bergoglio’s Speech to the Cardinals before the Conclave”, access on June 28th, 2021, <https://catholicismpure.wordpress.com>.

foundational document of Catholic Social Teaching, *Rerum novarum* (RN) (Leon XIII, 1891) on workers' rights, *Laudato si'* is written with a strong focus and a clear structure. Both *Rerum novarum* and *Laudato si'* injected new concerns into the Church's pastoral mission, breaking substantial new ground. *Fratelli tutti*, on the other hand, is like a number of other encyclicals on Catholic Social Teaching, a grab-bag of issues all of importance, but lacking the sharper focus of these two previously mentioned. Clearly it has a strong contextual component —one cannot read it without the Donald Trump U.S. presidency continually coming to mind—, but it lacks the tighter organization of these others.

However, there is one element in *Fratelli tutti* that really stands out, something one could easily give to anyone to read —Catholic or non-Catholic, priest or laity, believer or atheist— and be assured they would understand and appreciate its content. The beating heart of the encyclical is the second chapter, wherein Francis provides the reader with an extended (some 14 000 words) and profound commentary on the parable of the Good Samaritan (LK 10:25-37). This is the element I would like to focus on in this essay. I want to use this focus as a lens through which to analyze the Church's response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the clericalism which exacerbates it. The robbers who beat up the victim whom the Samaritan helps do not play a key role in the story, but in the case of clergy sexual abuse, the identity of the abusers is central to the problem and the Church's response to the victim is so caught up in that identity that it loses sight altogether of the victim.

I begin by highlighting relevant elements in Pope Francis' account of the parable. I note in particular his comments that draw attention to the false religiosity of those who think their religious status provides them with an excuse not to act justly. This leads into a consideration of Francis' repeated criticisms of clericalism. I then turn attention to the report of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse and its identification of clericalism as a major contextual factor to be addressed in handling the problem of abuse. I will read the parable of the Good Samaritan, as well as other parable by Jesus, as an internal critique of the Church's failure, which has been brought to light, ironically, by a secular process of a Royal Commission.

1. Pope Francis and the Parable of the Good Samaritan

The parable of the Good Samaritan would have to be one of the best known of all Jesus' parables, so much so that the notion of a "good Samaritan" has entered into our culture as a symbol of an unexpected and generous response to the suffering of a person without any relationship to the victim. In his reflections on the parable, Pope Francis reminds us that "the sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy" (FT, 65). This is surely something we have all experienced, the awkwardness, the hesitation we feel in the face of another's suffering. The sight of suffering provokes a moral question for us: "The parable eloquently presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our wounded world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan" (FT, 67). In fact, this is not our "*only* course", for often we fail to do so. However, such a failure brings with it a judgment that we must bear: "The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social, and religious project" (FT, 69). We find ourselves judged by those we include and those we exclude, and the act of exclusion calls into question our very claim to be "religious" people. Yet as Francis reminds us: "The story of the Good Samaritan is constantly being repeated" (FT, 71). We continue to find those by the wayside in the poor, the victims of violence, and notably of sexual violence, and in those marginalized through poverty, social stigma, gender, race, or creed.

I want to highlight a particular section where the Pope further brings out a critique of our religious failures to live out this parable, because it is especially poignant when we turn our attention to the sexual abuse crisis.

One detail about the passers-by does stand out: they were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a Levite. This detail should not be overlooked. It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God. [...] The guarantee of an authentic openness to God, on the other hand, is a way of practising the faith that helps open our hearts to our brothers and sisters. Saint John Chrysostom expressed this pointedly

when he challenged his Christian hearers: “Do you wish to honour the body of the Saviour? Do not despise it when it is naked. Do not honour it in church with silk vestments while outside it is naked and numb with cold”. Paradoxically, those who claim to be unbelievers can sometimes put God’s will into practice better than believers.

“Robbers” usually find secret allies in those who “pass by and look the other way” (FT, 74-75).

As Francis highlights, we should not overlook the fact that those who walked on the other side were men of religious standing, a priest and Levite in the Jewish religion. But their belief in God and their privileged role in the worship of God is no guarantee that their lives were pleasing to God, in fact quite the opposite. They have become secret allies of robbers who beat up the victim of violence.

I remember when I first read this section of the encyclical, my thoughts immediately turned to the question of clergy sexual abuse. The victims of such abuse are increasingly calling out to the Church for healing, for comfort, and justice; and in this case the perpetrator, the “robber” is none other than one who belongs to the same class as those who walk by on the other side of the road. This is where the problem of clericalism intersects with the problem of sexual abuse in the Church. Those who should be most attentive to the needs of the victim belong to the same caste as those who perpetrate the crime. They went through the same formation programs, studied the same theology, lived under the same discipline of celibacy, served on Church bodies, shared liturgical and social events together. In this lie the origins of clericalism, a sense of group bias, group identification, a bond between priests as a “brotherhood” that closes ranks whenever any one of them is threatened.²

In reflecting on the significance of the parable and the power of its message, Pope Francis pauses to comment: “I sometimes wonder why, in light of this, it took so long for the Church unequivocally to condemn slavery and various forms of violence. Today, with our developed spirituality

² For an analysis of group bias and its contribution to social decline, cf. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Crowe Frederick E. and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 247-50.

and theology, we have no excuses” (FT, 86). If the Church has no excuses in these instances, similarly it can have no excuses in the cases of clergy sexual abuse. In its failures to address victims with justice and compassion it has failed the test that Jesus himself acknowledged, “who is my neighbour?”

2. Pope Francis and Clericalism

Pope Francis has rightly identified clericalism as a cancer undermining the Church and perverting its mission to the world. He identifies the “spirit of clericalism” in the Church, that makes “clerics feel superior; clerics distance themselves from the people”. He goes on to note that “when the cleric doesn’t have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned: the evil of clericalism is a really awful thing; it is a new edition of this ancient evil”, of the *libido dominandi* that distorts human relationships and undermines social order. Ministry becomes a matter of power rather than service, status rather than pastoral care. Clericalism “gradually extinguishes the prophetic flame to which the entire Church is called to bear witness” and is “a perversion of the Church”.³

Francis makes the connection between clericalism and the obsession of clerics with sexual sins: “One dimension of clericalism is the exclusive moral fixation on the sixth commandment”.⁴ Yet this fixation is bound to a perverted misshapen understanding of sexuality. Far from locating sexual acts in a framework of human relations, it focuses on individual sexual acts, which have no inherent interpersonal context. Hence when the 1983 Code of Canon Law sought to characterise clerical sins against the sixth commandment, it spoke of them as “a violation of the commitment that the priest had made to the celibate life”.⁵ The focus here is entirely on the

³ Quotes from various talks given by Pope Francis, cf. Aleteia, access on June 28th, 2021, <https://aleteia.org>.

⁴ Quotes from various talks...

⁵ Interview with leading canon lawyer and advocate on clergy sexual abuse, Prof. Myriam Wijlens, access on April 28th, 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news>. It needs to be acknowledged that Pope Francis has made important progress in this area with recent CDF document “Vademecum: On certain points of procedure in treating cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics”, which clearly acknowledges the criminal nature of child sexual abuse and requires clerics to obey mandatory reporting of cases known to them (apart from protecting the seal of the confessional), even going beyond civil requirements to inform secular authorities of cases known to them. For an analysis see Brendan Daly, “An Analysis of the Vademecum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith”, *The Canonist* 11/2 (2020): 197-217.

priest and “his” celibacy as a private, non-relational possession, while the victim whose life has been devastated, whose dignity has been undermined, who lives with a constant sense of shame and guilt, has been erased from view.⁶

Celibacy plays a particularly important role within clerical culture, binding priests within a common bond of shared experience. Over the centuries various justifications have been provided for the practice of celibacy.⁷ These include: cultic purity which required a range of behaviors which distanced the priest from contact with “bodily fluids”: semen, menstrual blood, and so on; mystical union with God represented most clearly in the Song of Songs, or at least as it was understood by the Church Fathers, as a love song of the soul seeking union with God; celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God, a powerful symbol of self-sacrificing love, of giving oneself completely to the work of the Kingdom; a solution to inheritance problems to make it clear that ministry in the Church was not hereditary. The first two of these create a mystique of sacred power inhering in the priest, an ontological change which separates him from the ranks of ordinary believers. Sexual activity by a priest is then seen not only as a violation of cultic purity and an undermining of his quest for union with God, but an attack on the mystique of the clerical caste itself. The sad irony is that vulnerable people are attracted to this mystique seeking healing from past physical and psychological abuses, only to find themselves re-abused, this time in the “name of God”.⁸

⁶ We see this same non-relational understanding of the notion of an “ontological change” in ordination. Cf. John F. Collins and Neil Ormerod, “The Curious Case of a Priest Who Had Lost His Faculties”, *Australasian Catholic Record* 97 (2020): 206-215. The irony here is that in promoting such a non-relational notion of sexual relations it effectively mirrors the type of moral individualism that the Church so often rejects in its official pronouncements.

⁷ For differing accounts of the history and rationales see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Celibacy*, trans. C. A. L. Jarrott (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Alphonso M. Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy: Its Historical Development and Theological Foundations*, trans. Brian Ferme (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); Stefan Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church: The Beginnings of a Discipline of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West*, trans. Michael Miller (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000).

⁸ It might be worthwhile if seminary formation viewed celibacy more as a commitment to the safety of others, marking the priest as a safe person who will not abuse the trust of those who come to him, and placing celibacy into an immediately interpersonal context, rather than the non-relational view currently in place. There are also issues in relation to the psycho-sexual development of younger priests that need to be addressed but go beyond the scope of this paper.

It is easy to see how this attitude to sexual sins plays out when Church authorities are called on to handle complaints about sexual abuse. Far from entering the experience of the victim, their immediate identification is with the perpetrator. Not only do they see a brother priest with whom they share a common clerical culture, they too have had their own struggles, and possible failures, with “their” celibacy, again understood in non-relational terms. They see the remorse, the shame, and suffering of the priest whose crimes have been exposed, and to some extent see themselves in that priest. In a strange inversion of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest becomes the victim while the actual victim is identified as a “robber”. As Francis notes, the actual robber, the priest who stole the innocence of the victim, finds “secret allies in those who ‘pass by and look the other way’ ” (FT, 75).

This provides the context for the experience of so many sexual abuse survivors who find Church authorities hostile to their pleas.⁹ They are viewed as attacking the Church —actually, they are just attacking the abuser— because their accusations threaten the clerical mystique and undermine priestly authority, since they pierce through the illusion on the inherent spiritual superiority of the priestly caste. They are not seen as victims who should have a priority in the Church’s pastoral care, but as a hostile force seeking to destroy the Church. Church authorities do not build bridges to victims, they place walls between them and the victims. As a result, the most common reported experience of survivors of abuse who have reported their abuse to Church authorities is one of revictimization. Materially, if not formally, they are “excommunicated”, cut off from communication with the pastoral care of their Church. Many survivors find this experience as traumatic, or even more traumatic, than their original abuse. To be abused by a single priest can be put down to individual failure, but when the Church through its leadership cuts off the victim it can be a devastating loss.¹⁰ Again to quote Pope Francis: “The decision to include

⁹ For a solid account of the trauma experienced by sexual abuse survivors, cf. Jennifer Beste, “Envisioning a Just Response to the Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis”, *Theological Studies* 82/1 (2021): 29-54.

¹⁰ Significantly when the Church does provide limited pastoral care, it is usually through its professional Church social service office, operated by professionally qualified laity. Clerics are generally out of their depth and incapable of responding in a humane fashion beyond platitudes.

or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every religious project” (FT, 69). Over decades, if not centuries, the Church has “excluded those lying wounded” by clergy sexual abuse, fundamentally undermining its claim to carry on the mission of Jesus in the world. This is a massive moral and spiritual failure.

3. The Australian Royal Commission and Clericalism¹¹

In the Australian system of governance, a Royal Commission is a mechanism with wide ranging powers, established by the government of the day, to investigate a major issue of social concern. A Commission may run for months or years to eventually produce a lengthy report with recommendations for criminal or other legal penalties and/or multiple recommendations for government action. After some decades of half-hearted attempts by the Catholic Church in Australia to come to grips with the sexual abuse crisis, and with similar concerns being raised about other large institutions with a duty of care for children, the Australian government announced the formation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse in November 2012.¹² The Commission was initially meant to finalise its work by December 2015 but was extended for another two years. The Commission investigated both religious and secular organizations. It eventually published seventeen volumes, one of which, the 16th, was on religious institutions, published in three books, the second of which was on the Catholic Church and consisted of nine hundred pages.

The Commission staff interviewed over 6 800 survivors and conducted some 8 800 private sessions during its operation. Survivors were treated with dignity and respect, their stories listened too, and proper professional assistance was provided. “One survivor told us: ‘After 50 years I finally feel I’ve been heard. People have listened to me before, but no one has really heard me’. Many survivors reported that private sessions were a powerful

¹¹ For a fuller analysis of the Commission and its impact in Australia, cf. Neil Ormerod, “Sexual Abuse, a Royal Commission, and the Australian Church”, *Theological Studies*, no. 80 (2019): 950-966.

¹² The full report of the Commission published over seventeen volumes is available at: Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse in November Final Report [Royal Commission Report, henceforth: rcr], access on June 28th, 2021, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au>.

experience”.¹³ Commission staff were themselves exposed to vicarious trauma, hearing repeated studies of the most horrendous abuse at the hands of trusted adults, including clergy.

The statistical findings of the Commission are disturbing. Within the Catholic Church around 7% of priests had credible complaints made against them, based on a methodology mutually agreed by the Commission and the Church. This was further broken down to findings of 7.9% among diocesan clergy and 5.6% among religious orders of priest. These figures, however, differed from diocese to diocese and religious order to religious order. One rural diocese had over 15% of its priests reported, and one religious order of priest had over 21%. Figures for religious orders of brothers were also provided, often over the 10% figure, with one order, the Hospitaller Order of St John of God brothers had a staggering figure of over 40% of their members with credible accusations. This was particularly disturbing given this order works with some of the most vulnerable people in society, those with physical and mental disabilities.¹⁴

The Commission did investigate a range of religious and secular groups, but given the disparity of their institutional profiles and lack of centralized reporting processes, comparisons are difficult to make. The Catholic Church runs parishes, schools, hospital, welfare agencies, orphanages and the like. In terms of such a profile, the religious denomination that comes closest would be the Anglican Church, which, for the period of time that the Commission investigated, had a comparable percentage of the Australian population as adherents.¹⁵ It too runs parishes, schools and welfare agencies, but one a smaller scale and often with greater lay involvement. Whereas the number of survivors identified by the Commission for the Catholic Church was 2 489, for the Anglican Church it was 594, less than a quarter of the Catholic figure.¹⁶ On the other hand, secular activities such as “Sports and Recreation” (including scouting groups) which work with

¹³ RCR, vol. 1, 29.

¹⁴ Figures from RCR, vol. 16, Book 2, 80-89.

¹⁵ Anglicanism, the Australian version of the Church of England, was the dominant religion in Australia but has declined significantly and is now around 13% of the population, from a high of over 40% historically. Catholic adherents are generally stable at around 20-25%. See <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats>, access on November 13th, 2021.

¹⁶ RCR, vol. 16, Book 1, 290.

hundreds of thousands of children had 408 victims present for interview to the Commission.¹⁷ The Commission provided no comparison with abuse occurring in the family context.

For Catholics, the most difficult aspects were the public sessions in which bishop and leaders of religious congregations were subjected to scrutiny for their failures to address the problem of abuse in the Church, their open admission of these failures, and their inability to propose concrete and lasting solutions to the problems. Some bishops, including Cardinal George Pell, were subjected to particular scrutiny over their handling of very specific cases where Church authorities had acted with appalling callousness towards survivors and their families.

In its investigations the Commission identified a number of issues which assisted in both the perpetration of abuse and the appalling failures of Church authorities to respond adequately. Chief among these was the problem of clericalism, which it identified in the following terms:

We heard that clericalism is the idealisation of the Catholic priesthood and, by extension, the idealisation of the institutional Catholic Church:

- a) Belief that priests are unique and special because of the supernatural effects of ordination.
- b) Consciousness of a special bond that exists among all priests because of the sacred nature of their ordination.
- c) Authority with which all priests are invested. This authority does not have to be connected to their ecclesiastical office or position. It is the authority the priest has derived from his role as sacramental minister.
- d) The public perception of priests as men set apart, as men entitled to deference because of their “calling” and as men who are entitled to respect and credibility because of their priesthood.
- e) Life in a homosocial environment. Priests are celibate. They may interact with women, married people, and families on a daily basis but their essential living environment is all male with no truly intimate relationships permitted.

¹⁷ RCR, vol. 14, 12.

- f) Priests are part of an institutional culture that is monarchical in practice and socially stratified. The very nature of the hierarchical-monarchical structure has created a clerical aristocracy.
- g) Priests have a high degree of discretion in their behaviour and a very low degree of supervision and actual accountability.
- h) Priests' official dress sets them apart. When exercising their ministry in the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments they are the central focus [of] rituals that are generally medieval in nature.¹⁸

This comprehensive presentation echoes the concerns identified by Pope Francis, of a priesthood more concerned with status and power rather than service, with a distorted understanding of human sexuality, of feeling “special and unique” or as Pope Francis puts it: “clerics feel superior”.

Survivors of sexual abuse regularly identify the special authority of priests as a major contributor to their trauma. When abused by a priest who is designated as *alter Christus*, acting in the place of Christ, they feel as if they have been abused by God, abandoned by God, and treated as worthless by God. This adds a spiritual component to their suffering, which is further increased when they turn to the Church for succor only to be further abused by rejection, by being treated as a problem to be opposed rather than a member of the body of Christ seeking comfort. Unsurprisingly many survivors then become angry, which Church authorities then use as evidence of their ill-will towards the Church.

Turning back to our parable of the Good Samaritan, we can ask as Jesus did: who has been a neighbor to the sexual abuse survivors? Not the priest who abused them, nor the Church authorities who either walked on the other side, or worse still, kicked them as they lay prone. Rather the one who sought to bind their wounds, to salve their pain, to go the extra mile in caring for them was the secular authority of a government appointed Royal Commission (established at the time by a Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, who was a professed atheist). And just as the Jewish people looked down on the Samaritans of the day, the Church in Australia regularly complains about the rise of secularism, of the marginalization of

¹⁸ RCR, vol. 16, book 2, 615.

the Church in society, to now find itself being outdone in compassion to the victims of clergy abuse by a secular instrument of investigation.

In its final report the Commission made a number of recommendations concerning the discernment of vocations, processes of psychological screening, processes of training and ongoing monitoring of priests once in ministry. In particular it required that all persons in ministry should receive some form of regular pastoral supervision by professional trained person to ensure attention if being paid to self-care and the maintenance of proper boundaries in ministry. Many such recommendations echoed the Church's own list of "things-to-do" which were either never implemented or poorly done.¹⁹ It should be said that the Church in Australia has responded positively to many of the recommendations made by the Commission, but the integrity of its response has been muddied by concerns many bishops are adopting a compliance-based approach rather than a genuine change of heart, just hoping things can return to normal, the "way things were". This concern was voiced by Francis Sullivan, a layman who was the public face of the Church during the Commission, heading the "Truth, Just and Healing Council" established by the Church to mediate the demands of the Commission to various Church bodies.²⁰ After the work of the Commission was finished and the Church was deliberating as to its response, he commented publicly: "Since the commission handed down its report the church leadership has appeared to retreat into its shell. [...] Where lay Catholics seek to take responsibility and proffer a reform agenda they are too quickly dismissed or treated as dissidents. This arrogance must be purged otherwise the decay and disillusionment will continue to fester"²¹ The problem of clericalism remains deeply entrenched.

¹⁹ Some of the key suggestions made by the Commission were present in previous Church policy statements, particularly the requirement for pastoral supervision of ministers, but were never implemented by the Church. See Neil Ormerod, "Clergy Sexual Abuse: Did Vatican II Make a Difference", in *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, ed. by Neil Ormerod et al. (Melbourne: Garrett Publishing, 2012), 218-219.

²⁰ Though now terminated, the work of the Council is still available: cf. Truth, Justice and Healing Council, access on June 28th, 2021, <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au>. The Council had eleven board members, only two of whom were clerics (bishops in this case). Sullivan was the CEO, not formally a member of the governing board, carried out the work of the Council. His high profile attracted much criticism from conservatives in the Church, so construed him as supplanting the authority of the bishops to speak on behalf of the Church.

²¹ See his opinion piece: cf. "Pell conviction blows apart the bishops' mantra", access on June 28th, 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/national>.

4. Reframing Jesus' Parables

Some years ago, my wife and I wrote a book on the problem of clergy sexual abuse, drawing on our own experiences and those of a group of survivors we had befriended. Our concern was not just with child abuse, but with the all-too-common issue of sexual boundary violations that occur in pastoral situations where clergy exploit women (and men as well) for their own sexual gratification.²² There are strong parallels between childhood abuse and the impact on survivors of such adult abuse, much common ground in its emotional and spiritual damage, and in the ways Church authorities respond.²³ In the epilogue to that work we provided a reframing of the Good Samaritan parable to reflect some of our own experiences:

The parable of the good feminist counsellor

There was a Church lawyer who, to disconcert Jesus, asked: "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied: "What does the Law say?" The lawyer said: "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself". "Well done", said Jesus, "do this and you will live". But the Church lawyer was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus: "But who is my neighbour?" And Jesus told the following story:

"There was a woman, who had been sexually abused by her minister, and she sat in the Church, her heart bleeding with betrayal, her body aching with shame, her soul tormented by feelings of guilt. And along came a senior Church official who thought to himself: 'I must protect the Church from scandal; I must protect the reputation of the minister; she might want compensation'. So he walked by without saying anything. Then along came a group of ministers and they thought to themselves: 'I have a liturgy conference to attend', 'This is not a social

²² Neil Ormerod and Thea Ormerod, *When Ministers Sin: Sexual Abuse in the Churches* (Sydney/Eugene OR: Millennium Books/Wipf & Stock, 1995/2017). What few statistics that are available would suggest that the numbers here are much larger than cases of child abuse.

²³ Usually, Church authorities are even less sympathetic because the victims are adult and are told they were complicit. There is a complete lack of understanding of the power differential that occurs in the pastoral relationship.

justice issue' and 'I have to go and give a retreat', so they walked by without saying anything. Then a group of her fellow parishioners came by, and they thought to themselves: 'She really threw herself at him; she was an adult after all; the poor man was feeling lonely', and they walked by without saying anything. In despair the woman left the Church and phoned a sexual assault service and was answered by a feminist counsellor. And the feminist heard the pain in her voice and listened to her story of betrayal. She spoke to her soothing words which alleviated her shame and feelings of guilt. She booked her into a mutual support group for survivors of sexual abuse and she was so moved by the woman's plight that she gave the woman her home phone number: 'If ever you need help, just give me a call'.

"Now which of these do you think acted as a neighbour to the woman?" "The one who helped her", answered the Church lawyer. And Jesus replied: "Go and do the same".²⁴

Now some twenty-five years later and faced with the continued obstinacy of the Church in effectively responding to the cries of the abused in her own midst I have turned to another, perhaps more challenging, parable to reframe to reflect my ongoing experiences of failures in the Church leadership. Now I turn to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus at his gate (LK 16:19-31). Think of the rich man as the bishop who has stored up his position and authority; while Lazarus is the sexual abuse survivor at his gate begging for justice that never arrives. The reader knows how the story unfolds. So, the bishop calls out to Abraham to send Lazarus to his brother bishops to warn them. And Abraham will say: "They have the Gospels, what more do they need?" Can the bishop then plead: "But if someone rose from the dead they would believe?" How then would Abraham respond?

If we want to know how to respond to the sexual abuse crisis, we need look no further than these parables of Jesus, and by them the Church shall be judged. Whether it be the parable of the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and the Rich Man, or the One Lost Sheep, we need look no further to know the depths of our failures as a Church to respond as Jesus wanted the Church

²⁴ Ormerod and Ormerod, *When Ministers Sin*, 176.

to respond. The shame of the Catholic Church in Australia is that it needed a secular authority to force it to act accordingly.

5. Conclusion

In the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* Pope Francis asks us to see everyone as “brothers (and sisters) all”. He asks that we respond like the Samaritan in Jesus’ parable to the victim by the wayside, to open our hearts to recognize the one who is suffering as our brother and sister. In the context of sexual abuse, the outsiders who have responded with compassion have been secular authorities, professional counselors, mutual support networks, and the media. This is the flip side of Francis’ call to open the doors of the Church to the world, that we can expect the world to respond honestly to what they see happening in the Church. What does the Samaritan say to the priest and Levite who walk on the other side? Is the Samaritan impressed with their failure to respond to their own brother or sister? A Church seeking honest dialogue and interaction with the world will quickly find itself judged by its failure to practice what it preaches.

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