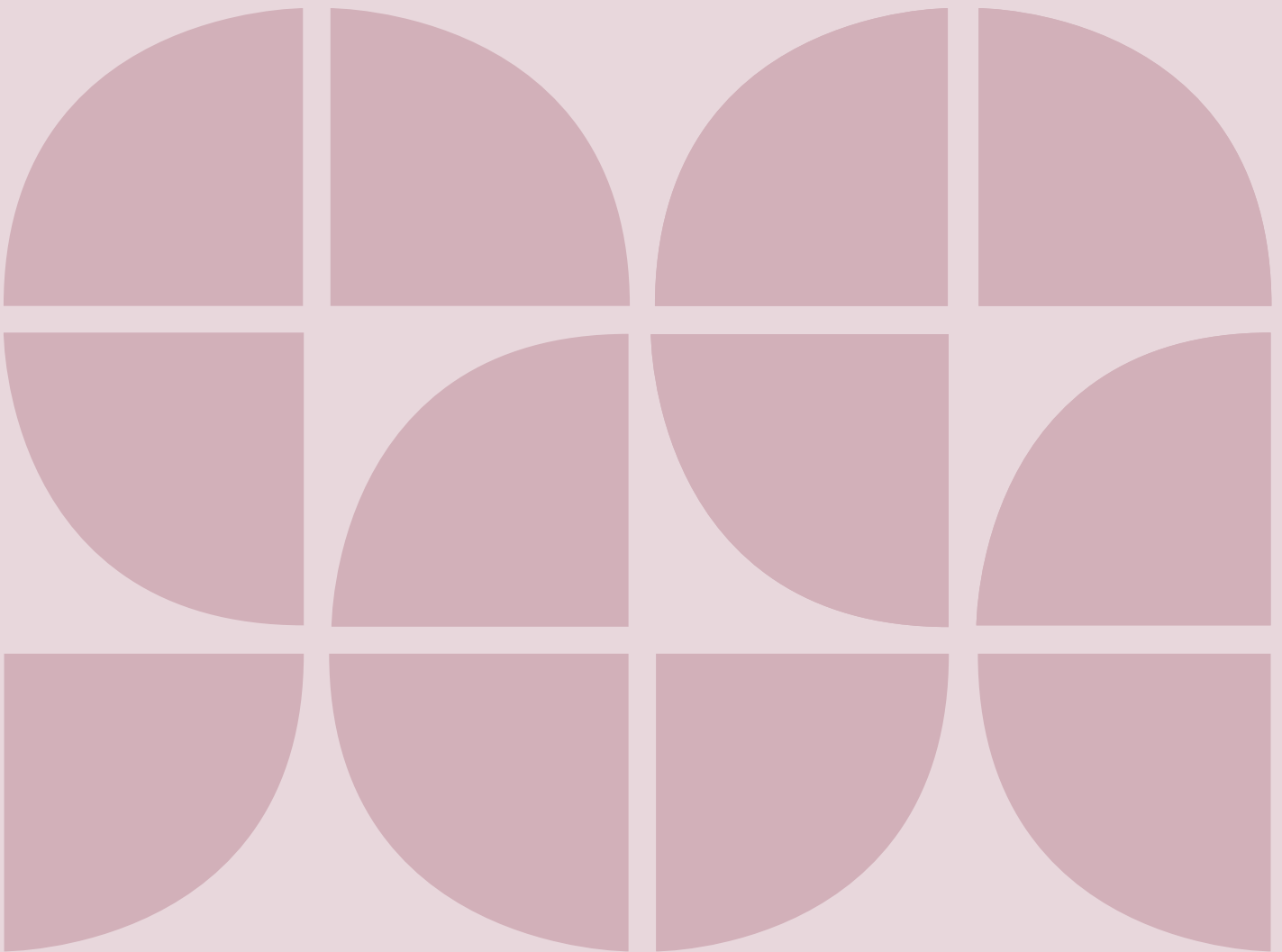
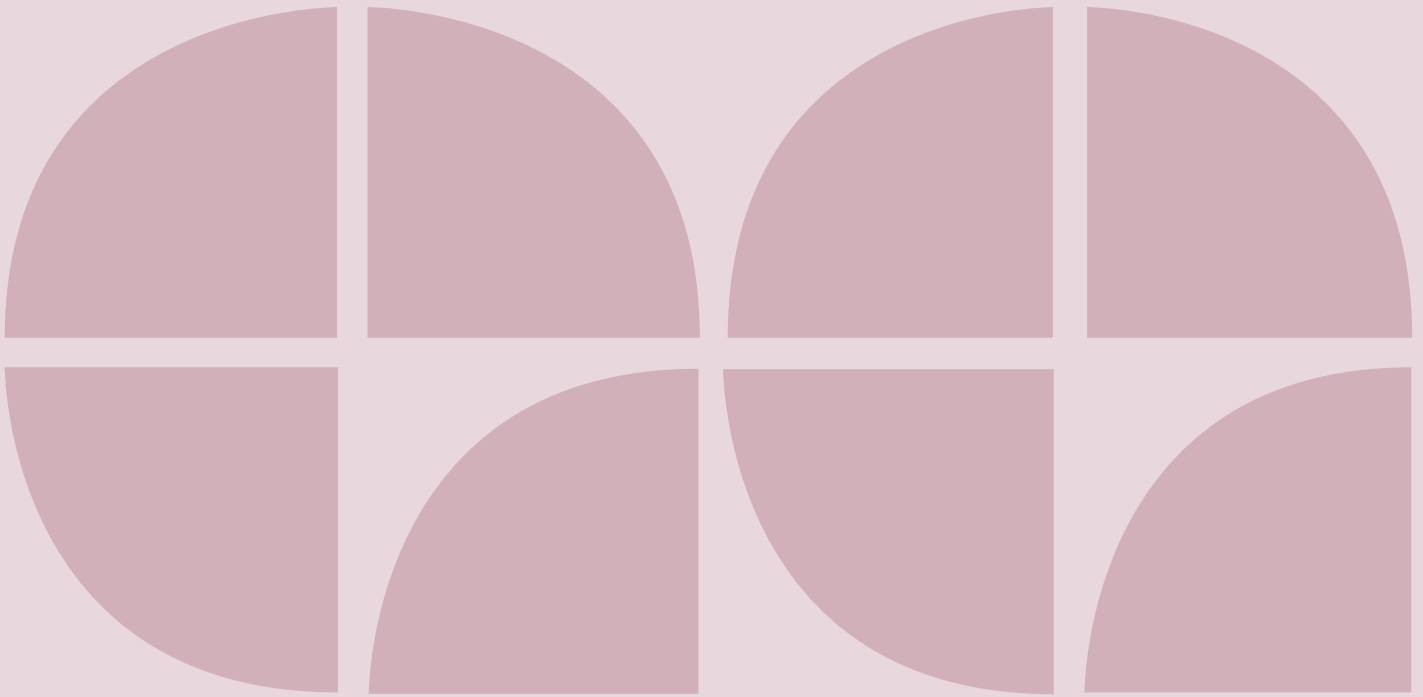




Chapter Seven

The possibilities of redemption





1. Introduction

We cannot hide from the fact that the Church herself must face the lack of faith and the corruption even within herself. In particular, we cannot forget the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people “due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.” [4]

We are continually challenged “as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit.” [5]

For too long the cry of the victims has been a cry that the Church has not been able to hear sufficiently. These are deep wounds that are difficult to heal, for which forgiveness can never be asked for enough and which constitute obstacles, sometimes imposing ones, to advancing in the direction of “journeying together.”

The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted. It is impossible to think of “a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People:” [6] together let us ask the Lord for “the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.” [7]

In spite of our infidelities, the Spirit continues to act in history and to show his lifegiving power. It is precisely in the furrows dug by the sufferings of every kind endured by the human family and by the People of God that new languages of faith and new paths are flourishing: capable not only of interpreting events from a theological point of view but also of finding in trials the reasons for refounding the path of Christian and ecclesial life.⁸⁷

Synod Preparatory Document

In this chapter, we explore the theological themes and questions which arise from listening to the experience of all those who spoke in this research. Our life together in the Catholic Church is shaped by our theology which is expressed in Catholic teaching and liturgy. This teaching evolves and develops as the Church unfolds its life and mission in the history and contexts we experience. As Catholics we believe that the Holy Spirit is active in this process, revealing how the gifts and truths of our tradition always call us forward. It is a particular responsibility of bishops to teach what the Church believes, ensuring that what we have received is passed on faithfully. Theologians also play an important role, exploring fresh questions and discovering the insights of Catholic tradition that refresh the Church's life and mission.

Alongside bishops and theologians, the Church teaches that all the baptised take part in this process. Individually and communally we have a 'sense of the faith', an instinct for what is true. In the words of Vatican Two, speaking about Catholic faith, the entire people of God 'penetrates it more deeply with right judgement and applies it more fully in daily life'.⁹⁰ This crucial aspect of Catholic teaching is now coming into fresh awareness and practical reality as we explore and take forward Pope Francis' invitation to become a Church which lives and practices synodality.

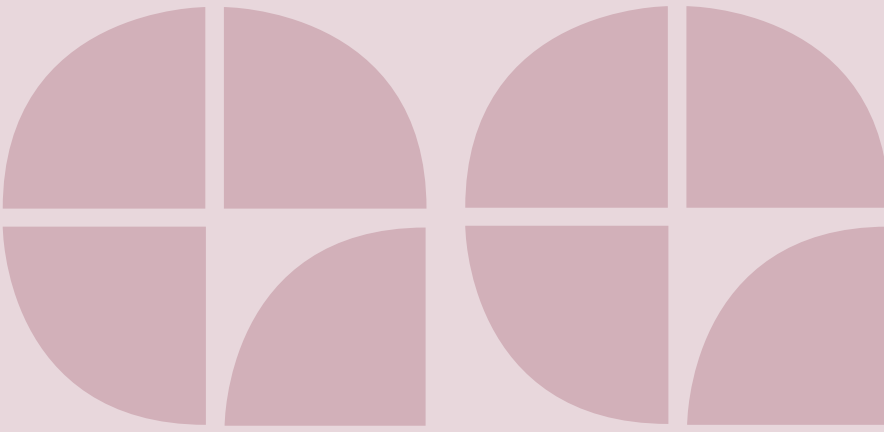
Understanding what we mean by Tradition

Tradition, according to the Fathers of the Church, is in fact just the opposite of a burden of the past. It is a vital energy, a propulsive as much as a protective force, acting within an entire community at the heart of each of the faithful.

Henri De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, p.91⁸⁸

According to a dynamic understanding of tradition, says Ratzinger: "Not everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition; in other words, not every tradition that arises in the Church is a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ. There is a distorting, as well as a legitimate, tradition... Consequently, tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically; we have Scripture as a criterion for this indispensable criticism of tradition, and tradition must therefore always be related back to it and measured by it."^[3] Pope Francis alluded to these two different ways of understanding tradition, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Tradition is a living reality and only a partial vision regards the 'deposit of faith' as something static. The word of God cannot be moth-balled like some old blanket in an attempt to keep insects at bay! No. The word of God is a dynamic and living reality that develops and grows because it is aimed at a fulfilment that none can halt".^[4]

Fr Ormond Rush, Theological Reflection at the Sixteenth General Congregation of the Synod, 16 October 2023.⁸⁹



Synodality

Synodality in the current Catholic understanding means ‘journeying together’ as a whole community of faith. It is a way in which the whole Church listens together to the Holy Spirit, ‘remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way’.⁹¹ Synodal listening involves the skill and gift of discernment, in which we learn to be attentive and open to how the Spirit guides our path. Synodality is expressed in processes and events but it is more than structures or meetings. It is ‘the particular style’ that expresses what it means to be the Church. We are ‘summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel’. So ‘synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working’.⁹²

Pope Francis asked the global Catholic Church to begin a new synodal journey when he announced that the 2023 Synod of Bishops would focus on this theme. A process of listening, learning and dialogue took place in local churches (dioceses) from 2021 onwards, gradually bringing the concerns, desires and hopes of diverse voices into a series of syntheses at local, national and continental level leading to Synodal Assemblies in Rome in 2023 and 2024. In addition to the bishops who are members of the Synod, elected by their bishops’ conferences, lay people, priests and religious are taking part.

Alongside the Pope’s invitation, in some dioceses and some entire countries, bishops have led local churches into synodal processes for their own renewal and in response to their own challenges. In England and Wales, the Archdiocese of Liverpool followed a synodal path over three years leading to a diocesan Synod Assembly in 2021 and a new diocesan pastoral plan. See Synodality - Together on the road

<https://www.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk/about/synodality>.

The Church in Ireland has begun its own process, and the Church in Germany has also been exploring a synodal path.

See Home - Irish Synodal Pathway **<https://synod.ie/>**

There are close connections between synodal processes and the themes of this research. The pain and grief caused by the abuse crisis features in most of the diocesan reports synthesising what has been expressed in local synodal listening. The passage at the beginning of this chapter taken from the initial document from the Synod Office in the Vatican confirms how the questions raised by the abuse crisis are significant in the whole Church's synodal journey. Chapter Eight includes exploration of how synodal ways of thinking and listening offer positive ways to respond to the abuse crisis and create healing and hopeful spaces.

When we reflect on how the abuse crisis happened and how it has affected victims and survivors and also the whole Church, it is important to ask:

- How can we listen to all the voices through which the Spirit works, including those on the edges of the Church or outside it, and those who have experienced the immense harm of abuse?
- How can Catholic teaching and theology help us interpret what they mean and what they ask of the Church?
- What parts of Catholic teaching and theology are implicated in the culture, habits and structures associated with the abuse crisis and our failures in response? How do they need to be questioned or re-examined?
- What is the Holy Spirit revealing to us now, as a Church, about our life and mission?

These questions prompt the theological perspectives explored in this chapter. Most of the voices that spoke to us are voices of faith. Even the survivors who had moved away from the Catholic Church because of abuse acknowledged how they were formed by Catholic faith. Their ethical clarity, honesty and generosity were striking. Many of the active Church members, lay and ordained, spoke with a profound *'sense of the faith'*, evident in a deep instinct of care and concern for what the Church is and what it could and should be like, a gift of lifetimes of faithful belonging and mission. All these voices invite discernment of how the Spirit nudges and calls us to greater truth and fidelity.

Untying the knots in how we receive and live Catholic teaching

One of the images we have used in theological reflection in this research is the idea of untying knots that have in some way tightened aspects of our theology and teaching in unhelpful or unhealthy ways. These knots then influence the culture and practices of Catholic life and become very difficult to unpick.

In the previous chapter, we explored some of the cultural and systemic themes that emerged in our research indicating areas where our common life is unhealthy or dysfunctional because it fails to reflect our theological vision. It is often difficult to disentangle culture and theology or teaching, partly because Catholic teaching is extensive and contains many varied voices and expressions, and also because much of its content needs interpretation in diverse local contexts and experience. The process by



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which formal teaching comes to influence and in turn be influenced by local Catholic life is gradual and often messy and mysterious. But it is not impossible to shape and re-shape how people think and change the habits and practices by which we live. Neither is it inherently difficult to listen to and learn from the instincts and insights of different groups within the Church. Synodal processes are helping us to learn how to do this in a way that is deeply attentive to where the Spirit might be leading us.

It is clear from this research that some ideas and practices found in the cultural habits and structures of Catholic life reflect partial or distorted understandings of aspects of Catholic teaching. The child abuse crisis is asking us to recognise and examine these in the light of faith and prayerful listening to the Spirit and to see how we can grow into a re-balanced and more faithful understanding. It also brings fresh perspectives into view that can enrich Catholic teaching as it continues to unfold. This process is already happening in initiatives and theological work elsewhere but is less evident or visible here in England and Wales.

This is essentially a constructive and reparative process of learning and transformation. The child abuse crisis in the Church has wounded us deeply, harming the victims and survivors most of all. But as we have already noted, there are resources in Catholic teaching and tradition which will help us learn and change and act differently. These resources offer hope for whatever healing is possible if they are presented in a framework of humility and openness to the truth. This is not just about the best possible safeguarding policies and practices, nor even about generous redress and compassionate accompaniment of survivors. It is about our deeper beliefs about what it means to be the pilgrim people of God and how we live and express these beliefs in the practices, culture and structures of our common life. To follow this path, we must recognise the full depth of institutional failures and find the right ways to repair these.

A theological framework: a redemptive journey

In the light of this research, we suggest that the task now for all of us in the Church, both members and office-holders, is to seek the possibilities of redemption in relation to the experience of the child abuse crisis. We have to imagine and create the actions and pathways which might open us further to redemptive grace. Redemption in ordinary understanding involves making good something or someone that has failed or become involved in harm or other wrongdoing. In Christian faith, we see Christ as the redeemer of humanity; in the Gloria in celebrations of the Eucharist, we say 'you take away the sins of the world'. Christ is the one who brings newness of life and the promise of salvation.

We understand the Church as a community of those who believe and trust in the redemption Christ brings. Redemption confronts sinfulness and opens up possibilities of hope leading to fulfilment of our true vocation and transcendent destiny. Redemption, although already achieved in Christ, is a continuing process in our lives of faith as we seek to live with our recognition that we always stumble and fail and need to repair and make good what has been lost or damaged or bound so tightly that it has harmed. When we do what is needed to restore what is right and just in our relationships and our common life, we take part in the process and gift of redemption.



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In the context of the abuse crisis, redemptive paths are those which restore what has been taken away from victims and survivors and which recognise with honesty and humility how, as a Church, we have failed and how we need to change. Most importantly, they are pathways of action, not just words, of signs given and commitments made and followed though.

The redemptive journey to which the abuse crisis calls the entire Catholic community needs a further theological perspective. The Church in its visible and institutional forms is called to live within and serve the purpose of God for all humanity and all creation, the purpose we call the economy of salvation. What matters most of all is our created common dignity and our transcendent destiny. We are called equally and communally to share in the divine life. This is of eternal significance; the particular form that institutional structures, ministries and offices take is not, as history testifies. Rather, they have emerged and can change in their expression as part of our search for what best enables our pilgrim journey in the Spirit towards the fulfilment that is only found in God.

This theological ground matters for the themes and questions explored in this chapter. When we see the Church in the larger framework of God's purposes and call, we can live more easily with its institutional failure and sinfulness. When we recognise our utter shared dependence on God and the radical equality of God's call to each person and to all of us as a body, we discover resources that critique clericalism, whether found in the habits and attitudes of priests, bishops or other members of the baptised. When we discuss the reasons for building a strong and practical culture of support and accountability for all who lead in the Church, we can base this on knowing that we are called toward salvation as a people, as a body of interdependent parts, owing to each other a duty of care and support but also challenge and truthfulness.

The most recent report on safeguarding policy commissioned by the Bishops' Conference, the Elliott Report, works from the same theological ground.⁹³ It begins with a strong affirmation of the theological foundations of the Church's safeguarding commitments and work, presenting this as a vocation. Based on the infinite dignity of each human person as created and loved by God, this vocation is 'intrinsic to our baptism'; 'we are the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:27); if one member suffers, we all suffer'.⁹⁴ So we are all called to solidarity with anyone who suffers from any kind of abuse. It is an act of solidarity to listen, as to the voices heard in this report, and to engage in the necessary work of reflection on cultural habits and practices that impede the renewal for which the report asks. It is an act of trust in the leading of the Spirit to engage in the theological work needed to identify precisely how our understanding needs to be renewed.

The discussions in this chapter are not 'finished' theology. They are pointers to work that needs to be done by theologians. They offer resources for reflection, discernment and prayer for all those charged with the ministry of teaching or leading in the Church. They sketch outlines of a theology that emerges from lived experience, from narratives and from the pain, courage, heart-searching and honesty of those who spoke to us.



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2. Survivors as witnesses and the sinfulness of the Church

The testimony of survivors is compelling. Although as noted earlier each voice and each story is unique, the experience of listening with deep attention to what they have experienced and how they reflect on that experience revealed some significant themes.

Survivors' testimonies often express a desire for the truth of their experience to be recognised and acknowledged. Many ask a crucial question: do you believe me? It is a question freighted with moral urgency, both for the survivor and for the office-holder or listener involved. For the survivor, it is not just about whether the experience they describe actually happened. It is also about their dignity and moral personhood. It often reflects their hope that the Church, embodied in an office-holder or listener, will recognise that although the primary responsibility lies with the abuser, the institution is also implicated. When a victim or survivor's disclosure has also been mishandled, the moral balance shifts further. They ask: 'Why has his institution, which stands for what is good and preaches a Gospel of love, failed to care for me?' Implicit in their desire for truth is a question for the Church: can we recognise our own failure, our sinfulness?

First, their testimony compels us to recognise that the Church has been and still is a place in which abuse happens and in which institutional response has repeatedly failed and still fails, to the extent that many survivors have experienced that response as further or secondary abuse. This report has described the impact of that abuse and explored some of the cultural habits and ideas implicated in how abuse happens and how mishandling deepens the harm done. These narratives point to an uncomfortable perception: that there is institutional or structural sinfulness in the Church.

This can be difficult for many Catholics to acknowledge. We are taught that the Church is holy and spotless, an idea that seems to exclude sinfulness. We venerate the Church as both mother and teacher. It is painful and perplexing to work out how to reconcile these instincts with the reality of institutional failure as well as the failure of individuals who have perpetrated abuse.

Catholic teaching holds strongly that sin is first of all personal; but because we are social beings living in relationship, it is also social. Individual sin affects other people, as we see only too clearly in abuse and mishandling. Pope John Paul II spoke about how social sin develops not only in the acts of individuals but also in the failure of those who are in a position to 'avoid, eliminate or at least limit social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference', an understanding which reflects closely the idea of unethical passivity explored in the previous chapter.⁹⁵ Catholic teaching also recognises that the wrong acts or omissions of individuals create structures which then deepen and extend the impact of sinfulness. A structure may be a visible organisational reality such as a parish or a diocesan organisation, but it may also be a practice or a widely

established cultural habit such as defending the Church against criticism or assuming all the power in a parish belongs to the priest.

This understanding of sinful structures developed within Catholic social teaching where it has normally been used to examine economic systems and structures; but the principle also applies in areas of institutional failure in the Church. Pope John Paul II acknowledged this when speaking about ecumenism. The painful divisions among Christians have happened not only because of personal sins, he explained, but also because within the Church there are ‘the sinful structures themselves which have contributed and can still contribute to division and to the reinforcing of division’.⁹⁶ If there can be sinful structures within the Church which have led to enduring divisions among Christians, there are surely sinful structures which have failed to recognise and respond adequately to the impact of abuse and the search for justice of many survivors.

The Church is both holy and sinful

We understand the Church as both a human community, a pilgrim people, and as the body of Christ, the place in which we encounter Christ most intimately and we are drawn into his saving work. We believe that the Church is called to be a sign to the world, a sacrament of God’s grace and a visible expression of the Gospel. Yet Catholic teaching is clear that the Church is ‘at once holy and always in need of purification’, and so ‘follows constantly the path of penance and renewal’.⁹⁷ It also asserts that ‘All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners’.⁹⁸ As Francis Sullivan notes, if the Church is always in need of reform, its leaders ‘are fallible in every decision they make except when they solemnly define a doctrine of faith or morals’.⁹⁹ The Church in its institutional form and in its leadership would not need to be purified and penitent if it was not in some real sense sinful.

So we should take seriously what the abuse crisis reveals about institutional sinfulness in the Church and consider the implications. Sullivan continues ‘As a people on pilgrimage, while it has a divine guarantee of arriving at the Kingdom of God at the end of its journey, it inevitably takes many a wrong path along its way. And yet, as God’s people, it has a holiness given to it by the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit, which it cannot lose.’¹⁰⁰ We need to adjust the way we think and speak about the holiness of the Church; it is both holy and sinful and these are interwoven in many aspects of our life. When we recognise this, we know even more surely our need of grace to help us resist and overcome sinfulness.¹⁰¹

In this perspective, we can reflect on how the Church as an institution has handled the response to abuse. Has the way in which we understand the holiness of the Church impeded our willingness to see and admit institutional or systemic failure? We do confess our sinfulness in every Eucharist, but we tend to assume that this is about our individual and personal failures. We do not have a practice of pondering and recognising communal or institutional failures. Recalling the discussion in Chapter Six about bystanders and unethical passivity, do we need to learn a greater sense of communal conscience and responsibility? How and when might we learn to recognise the subtle yet powerful



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complicities and fears which have impeded recognition of abuse and of how we have failed as a Church?

It is difficult to speak of or recognise the sinfulness of the Church. It is much easier to speak of sinful individuals. It is also complex. Structures in the Church may be implicated in blindness and other forms of failure that have deepened the impact of abuse, but that is not all that happens through those structures. People act in them from good intentions and sometimes collude unwittingly or unwillingly with what may be harmful. Sinfulness, goodness and the openness to grace are often intertwined. But unless we recognise that structures can fail and can influence or allow wrong actions, we will fail to see all the dimensions of the repentance and conversion to which we are called by the voices and experience of survivors.

Holiness includes failure

There is another perspective on the holiness of the Church which emerged from some voices in this research. They spoke of struggling with ideas of holiness as perfection and of the Church as a perfect society. They saw saints portrayed as perfect in their holiness, an idea which separated them from our flawed humanity. As discussed in Chapter Six, priests were also assumed to be holy in the same way, changed by ordination. They explained how these ideas lost the sense of the humanity of saints and of priests, and indeed of the Church. Several voices spoke of the need to explore instead how holiness is a path of living with and accepting failures and weakness and of knowing our need of God's grace and forgiveness. We are dependent on, and need constantly to turn towards, the grace found in the sacramental life of the Church. Saints are models of this struggle more than they are models of pristine perfection, some felt. So too the holiness of the Church need not be the perfection of never failing or admitting its own sinfulness, but rather the acceptance of our continual need for grace and mercy on our pilgrim path. This is part of what it means for the Church itself to be a sacrament.

This is the framework in which it makes sense when a bishop asks for forgiveness from victims or survivors, an act that reaches beyond apology to a deeper sense of communal failure and sorrow. It is also the framework in which as a sacramental community we can lament our communal failure as well as pray for healing and growth. The annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors is an important step forward, but there may be more work to be done to express in sacramental terms our acceptance of communal failure and to recognise the possibilities of grace-filled change.

Survivors and moral leadership

There is a real moral leadership in the testimony of survivors. Pope Francis writes often about the need to listen to those who find themselves on what he terms 'existential peripheries', places where people are wounded, where there is pain and injustice. The Pope


proposes that 'they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made'.¹⁰² There are aspects of how we live and work as a Church that the testimony of survivors enables us to see. Their desire to expose the truth of their experience is one aspect of their moral claim, but so too is their need for some kind of restoration, often expressed in terms of justice. They are asking the Church to be fully what we are called to be by the Gospel; a community which defends and upholds anyone who is suffering and which shows what true justice means. Survivors are frequently also deeply motivated by the desire to prevent further abuse, to ensure that Catholic institutions change so that what has happened to them does not happen to any other children or young people. Sometimes their moral leadership reflects more of the Gospel than office-holders in the Church have shown in response to disclosures of abuse.

The teaching structure of the Catholic Church means that we assume that moral leadership is the task of the bishops because they are charged with this responsibility. It is intrinsic to their ministry. Yet we know from the abuse crisis that sometimes bishops fail as moral leaders either in how they mishandle allegations or respond inadequately to victims and survivors or in other areas such as inappropriate relationships or even abuse. We can see too the moral claims of survivors as teaching us something we need to know about becoming a church of truthfulness, humility and justice. In a pilgrim church on a journey of penance and renewal, we need to listen to moral insight that comes from such sources. We need to adjust our sense of who teaches, not to exclude or diminish the teaching office of bishops but to bring further resources of truth into view. As Pope Francis so often stresses, all have something to learn, and the dynamics of who is in the centre and who is on the peripheries change when we are open to the moral intuitions and experience of survivors.



3. Being able to be humbled: recognising we are a vulnerable Church

When we listen to the testimony of survivors of abuse and acknowledge the sinfulness of what has happened, it is humbling. As researchers, we have experienced being humbled by the courage and moral and theological insight of many survivors and of others in the Church who have been affected. Some of those in leadership positions – priests and bishops – spoke to us of how they too had been humbled, by listening to survivors or by the compassionate response of parish communities to a case in their midst. It has also been humbling for the Church as a public institution to find itself investigated and criticised by a statutory Inquiry, the IICSA process.


Being humbled can be seen as part of the journey of conversion of hearts for which Pope Francis asks and part of the penitential pathway discussed above. When we are humbled, we are realising that we are not as good or holy as we thought we were. We are also recognising that qualities we see in others disclose gifts of grace and love. Being humbled is probably good for us even if it disturbs our confidence or our consciences.



So too the holiness of the Church need not be the perfection of never failing or admitting its own sinfulness, but rather the acceptance of our continual need for grace and mercy on our pilgrim path.



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If so many groups within the Church are vulnerable, we are a vulnerable Church, a Church that is already wounded and able to receive fresh wounds each time there is another case of abuse or mishandling revealed, or a report published which confronts us again with our failings and yet again humbles us.



When we accept being humbled, we are accepting our own vulnerability. The capacity for and acceptance of vulnerability emerged as an important theme in this research. Vulnerability usually describes a condition in which we can be harmed or wounded. It is crucial to distinguish between vulnerability which is accepted and lived in a positive way, and vulnerability which is imposed. Imposed vulnerability is sometimes defined as precarity, being subject to forces which bear down on you and which you cannot escape or change. Any form of abuse exploits and enforces vulnerability in damaging and wrong ways.

Vulnerability is found in many of the groups of voices that speak in this research. In the early chapters, we described the vulnerability of children and the vulnerability of victims when they begin to disclose abuse. We also recognised the vulnerability of those in ordained ministries, particularly of innocent priests who fear the impact of an allegation, and of bishops who must balance multiple responsibilities to all those impacted by abuse, and to those who have committed abuse. Parish communities are also vulnerable, able to be hurt when a case of abuse or its mishandling touches their life, or when they are unsure about what to believe or what they know or not told all the available information. There was a vulnerability in everyone who spoke to us, created in some way, or deepened, by their experience in relation to abuse.

If so many groups within the Church are vulnerable, we are a vulnerable Church, a Church that is already wounded and able to receive fresh wounds each time there is another case of abuse or mishandling revealed, or a report published which confronts us again with our failings and yet again humbles us.

It is not easy to see ourselves as vulnerable. In developing safeguarding culture we have become familiar with the concept of vulnerable adults, people whose age or capacities mean they need extra protection, and recognise too the vulnerability of children and young people. Those kinds of vulnerability require our full commitment to their safety and well-being, as does the vulnerability still carried by survivors of abuse. But we need not see only these groups as vulnerable. The vulnerability we all share when we face the knowledge of abuse and mishandling is also real. The philosopher Judith Butler explains vulnerability as part of our human nature as social beings. We are vulnerable to each other, she argues, because we are already bound together: 'This is what it means to be the self I am, receptive to you in ways that I cannot fully predict or control.'¹⁰³

The abuse crisis invites us to reflect more deeply on vulnerability, for ourselves and for the Church as a whole. It is not a weakness or a liability but a strength, even if it is sometimes painful to live. Pope Francis, meditating on the parable of the Good Samaritan, writes about the choices we face when we are confronted by those who lie before us wounded in some way. Do we choose to make ourselves vulnerable to the claim of the wounded person, or to be 'indifferent bystanders'?¹⁰⁴ He suggests that the question Jesus asks is not so much 'to decide who is close enough to be our neighbour, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all'. For Francis, the parable 'shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others'.¹⁰⁵

There is a deeper theological theme here about God. We are made vulnerable in our humanity and that humanity is made in God's image. God chose to be vulnerable in his Son, Jesus. The image of the new-born Christ child is one of immense vulnerability, and the passion and death of Christ reveal his vulnerability. We are more familiar with the idea of God as 'almighty' and it can seem scandalous to speak of the vulnerability of God. Yet it may be an insight we need, prompted by what we learn from searching reflection on the abuse crisis. Vulnerability images the divine. We need not fear it; we can live it gracefully.

Vulnerability is important in relation to the abuse crisis in other ways. In earlier chapters, the research has described the importance of listening well to survivors. To really listen, we have to be vulnerable, as individuals, as office-holders and as a Church. In listening, we open ourselves to the pain of others and may hope to carry a little of its weight, even when it wounds us to do so. Listening is a witness we can offer in response to the witness of those from whom abuse or mishandling has taken something. Just as importantly, it is a witness in which it matters to be open about how we are affected, to let our vulnerability be seen, either in words or, as appropriate, in actions that express this sense. Being willing to be vulnerable and accepting our vulnerability communicates an offer of solidarity to those who have been unwillingly and harmfully made vulnerable. It could be described as a redemptive pathway for the community of faith and its office-holders.

4. Untying the knot of clericalism

Clericalism is one of the most complex knots that we need to disentangle and loosen. As described in Chapter Six, it is both a collection of cultural habits and a set of theological choices or interpretations. It is pervasive yet avoidable. It can be colluded with but also resisted. It is often largely unconscious or unnoticed. It involves all of us, the baptised and the ordained. It is deeply implicated in how abuse and mishandling have happened, and how the whole community has been wounded by its multiple impacts.

Clericalism takes different forms in each cultural context. Whilst this research relates only and specifically to the Catholic community in England and Wales, our communities and the priests who serve us are increasingly drawn from many other cultures and ethnicities. Cultures are always somewhat fluid and the cultures of our Catholic life in England and Wales are no exception. Cultures of priestly life are varied and will evolve as well. Sometimes those coming from other cultures may bring strong habits of clericalism or expectations of priests that become further entangled with existing practices and attitudes. Clericalism is not a single reality or experience.

Theological unpicking of clericalism is important. Unless we have some sense of what needs to be re-examined or re-balanced in our teaching and theology, we will lack the resources to guide cultural change. The child



although it is now over 60 years since the Second Vatican Council began, we have still not managed to become a Church in which the full dignity of all the baptised is expressed in genuine sharing of responsibility and in relationships of equality and collaboration between priests and people.



abuse crisis is not the only reason for unpicking clericalism, but it is one important motivation. Clericalism impedes us being a community which is not only safe but also as fully faithful as we can be to the Church's own teaching.

Several strands emerge from the research data that illuminate the theological task here.

The first is not new or original but it is still disturbing. It is the sense that although it is now over 60 years since the Second Vatican Council began, we have still not managed to become a Church in which the full dignity of all the baptised is expressed in genuine sharing of responsibility and in relationships of equality and collaboration between priests and people. This is not the case everywhere; some parishes and some priests and pastoral teams have experienced such relationships working well. But it is still the case in far too many parishes that decision-making is barely shared, effective consultation is rare and relationships between priests and people are characterised by undue deference, passivity and submission. If the Council's teaching on the co-responsibility of the baptised is not reflected in our habits and cultures and structures, then the role and power of the priest becomes disproportionate. When that happens, everyone is less safe, including priests, because the cultural habits of passivity and silence described in Chapter Three are allowed to grow. We are then less faithful, less able to flourish as fully as God intends.

This is not about a gap in Catholic teaching or theology. Catholic teaching in this area is very clear, expressed with the highest level of authority by Vatican II and then re-affirmed and expanded in Pope John Paul II's Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* in 1988.¹⁰⁶ Even today, Pope Francis has added his teaching voice. Speaking about the baptised, he says, 'room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making'.¹⁰⁷ So why do we struggle to develop practices and cultures which make this happen in practice?

Part of the answer may lie in how effectively this teaching is communicated and what kind of adult formation happens in a parish. But part of it probably lies in another strand of the knot which has also been discussed in Chapter Six, the way in which priests are seen and sometimes behave and are treated at parish level. There are structures and practices which communicate power and priestly ownership rather than collaboration and shared responsibility. The most significant example of this is what happens when a new priest or priests come to a parish. It is rare to find any example of a process that recognises that the life and activity of a parish is owned and built by all its members as well as being served and led by priests. There is commonly no process of handover or induction that models a theology of shared responsibility. The power of the priest seems absolute. Another example is the absence of shared decision-making structures. Even where structures such as parish pastoral councils exist, they are, in terms of canon law, merely consultative and they exist or are disbanded, used or ignored, as the priest wishes.¹⁰⁸

Other strands need to be disentangled here. One strand is how canon law defines the powers and responsibilities of a priest in a parish. Such definition is necessary, but it should not be the primary principle

determining the style and culture of the priest's pastoral role in a parish. The teaching documents on priesthood do provide ample scaffolding for the role of the priest as 'governing' the parish but they also use many other images which are more reflective of the Gospel: the priest should shepherd the faithful, gather together God's family, take care of the faithful, lead their communities.¹⁰⁹ These texts describe a much more personal and relational form of priestly ministry, helping the community find its purpose and mission.

Recovering the priestliness of the baptised and adjusting how we view the ordained

Another strand is an element of the teaching of Vatican II that is almost always underplayed. The Council recovered and taught the principle that the whole baptised community is priestly. There are two forms of priesthood in the Church, the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood. In a crucial text from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, they are described as 'interrelated', or in a different translation, 'ordered one to another'.¹¹⁰

In other words, they need each other for the Church to be fully ministerial. The body of Christ is constituted by both forms of priesthood. Although the priestly ministry is to act 'in the person of Christ', the priest is still part of the body and his task is to enable the priesthood of the whole body to be living and active. When a priest is ordained, the recent version of the prayer of ordination begins:

***Draw near, Lord, holy Father,
almighty and eternal God,
author of human dignity and bestower of all graces,
through whom all things progress,
through whom everything is made firm,
who, by the power of the Holy Spirit,
in order to form a priestly people,
establish among them ministers of Christ your Son in various orders.***¹¹¹

The task of the priest is to *form a priestly people*, not to hold all priesthood to himself. Priesthood is, as Pope John Paul II said, 'fundamentally relational'.¹¹²

Part of the difficulty may also arise from how the figure of the priest is seen in relation to Christ. Some of those who spoke to this research spoke about the priest as an 'icon of Christ', an expression that contributed towards an over-elevated idea of priesthood that risked diminishing priests' humanity. The teaching documents about priesthood speak at length about the priest's relationship with Christ, presenting priests as those 'called to prolong the presence of Christ, the One High Priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care'.¹¹³ Priests are to be a sacramental representation of Christ and a sign of grace in the Church.¹¹⁴ In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), we read:

In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the



The teaching of Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist.

Para. 10, *translation on Vatican website.*

Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts in persona Christi Capitis.¹¹⁵

The risk here is that when the priest's relationship with Christ is stressed in this way, it seems to omit the relationship of all the baptised to Christ. All the baptised are also called to be the presence of Christ in the world, to make Christ visible. This is expressed in words attributed to St Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

If we talk about priests and priesthood in ways that too closely conflate the priest and Christ, the vocation of all the baptised is diminished rather than enabled. The priestly people also image Christ, and indeed are ontologically conformed to Christ, as Pope John Paul II taught:

The new priestly people which is the Church not only has its authentic image in Christ but also receives from him a real ontological share in his one eternal priesthood, to which she must conform every aspect of her life.¹¹⁶

There is restorative potential in re-balancing how we commonly talk about priesthood, priests and the priestly people. It is worth recalling how one priest who spoke to us described his role. He saw himself as

the person who can talk about what we all need to be doing, and he needs to express it in his own life, and the fact that that's his full time job, is there as a reminder to people that, in what they are doing, in their full time jobs, is as sacred as what he is doing.

Priests who see themselves as part of the body, on the same level, can grieve with people when abuse happens and can imagine what is needed by way of communication and support. Priests who see their task as calling forth and celebrating the priestliness within the baptised people will enable their voices to be heard. If priests seem to hold onto priesthood for themselves alone, how will the priestly people discover its priestliness?

There are practical ways in which we can begin to change our culture and relationships. For example:

- In how we speak about priesthood, in preaching, teaching and formation, we should take care wherever possible to speak about it in relationship to the whole body of Christ. We have many ways of speaking which separate the priest from the rest of the body. We speak of priests 'celebrating the sacraments'; but we could take care to say that priests preside in the community's celebration.
- If we speak of priests as holy or sacred, we should also always speak of the baptised that way, as otherwise it seems that holiness or sacredness seem to belong only to priests. As Pope John Paul reminded us: 'Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful.'¹¹⁷



**From Pope John Paul II's
Post-Synodal Exhortation,
Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992)**

The ministry of the priest is entirely on behalf of the Church; it aims at promoting the exercise of the common priesthood of the entire people of God.

Finally, because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire People of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church's mission.

Paras 16, 17

- We should try to avoid speaking about a priest as owning a parish, because the parish belongs to the whole community; the priest belongs to the parish rather than the parish to the priest. When there is a liturgical installation of a new parish priest, texts should reflect the theological and pastoral meaning of their role.

These are small habits, but they shape and could re-shape our thinking and culture.

Hierarchy, power and servanthood


One further strand also emerged. In Chapter Three, we reported the voices of a number of women who talked about clericalism and what they felt needed to change. Several spoke about the need to reconsider how we understand hierarchy. It is usually understood as 'power over', a sense that perhaps reflects a juridical view, because in canon law, bishops do have immense power. But here too, the texts of Catholic teaching frequently stress ministry as service. The assumption that hierarchical office means power over people seems to prevail over the idea of service and creates a culture which does not help us all to flourish.

In Chapter Six, we briefly quoted from an article written by James Keenan, a moral theologian, in which he makes a critical analysis of what he terms the culture of 'hierarchicalism', which he defines as 'the exclusive power culture of the episcopacy'.¹¹⁸ He identifies this in how bishops are selected and in the lack of any real accountability for their actions. He argues that this leads to impunity, no consequences when they act wrongly. As noted in Chapter Six, Keenan recognises that this is now changing because of the abuse crisis, citing Pope Francis' document *Vos estis lux mundi* in particular, but he argues that the culture of hierarchicalism needs to be addressed.¹¹⁹ He suggests that we can only dismantle clericalism if we also recognise and reform the attitudes and practices that express hierarchicalism. The remedy he proposes is a recovery of 'servant leadership' and an ethic or spirituality of vulnerability, made visible in practices such as listening and encounter with those who are hurting or angry and other ways that bishops might visibly be present to people as servants.


It is important to recognise how this is already visible. Many bishops already use the language of service when they speak about their ministry. But the right language is not enough. Another moral theologian, Enda McDonough, comments:

The persistent danger is that the rhetoric of service will replace the harsh reality of serving. It is still very difficult for lay people to recognise in the privileges and practices of priests, bishops and pope their proclaimed status as servants.¹²⁰

Yet there are roles and tasks a bishop must perform as they are charged with governance and leadership. How can a bishop exercise faithfully the responsibilities of governance yet also symbolise and enact servanthood in an authentic way? How can we learn, as the community of the baptised, to invite and welcome this? Can we set aside expectations that the bishop will always have the answers, will always take the central place and be seated at the top table? It is striking how Pope Francis has chosen



this crisis reveals a praxis of episcopal leadership that has not met the hopes and needs of many who spoke to us.



throughout his ministry to model service and leave aside privilege, in his decisions about where to live and in many smaller habits and gestures. Some of our own bishops indicate the desire for servanthood when they speak about their need to learn and their willingness to admit mistakes.¹²¹ But these are only beginnings; a stronger narrative and practice is still needed.

Whilst Keenan was writing from a different context, the Catholic Church in the USA, and our context and experience of episcopal ministry is different, some parts of his analysis resonate with questions raised in this research. To understand why mishandling has happened and why many survivors have experienced fresh abuse in how office-holders in the Church have handled their cases, we have to think about what we need from bishops and what impedes this from happening. As we discovered throughout this research, this crisis reveals a praxis of episcopal leadership that has not met the hopes and needs of many who spoke to us. That praxis is formed by Catholic theology and teaching.

Another theologian, Massimo Faggioli, has written about what he terms ‘episcopalism’, an unbalanced theological understanding of the role and structure of the episcopacy.¹²² He suggests that Vatican II sought to respond to the incomplete ecclesiology of Vatican I by balancing the doctrine of papal infallibility with a strong doctrine of episcopacy giving pre-eminence to collegiality at the universal level. Faggioli argues that this led to a more centralized church in which the place of religious orders and their prophetic mission was side-lined and the bishops’ relationships with priests and laypeople were unbalanced.¹²³ Whilst the notion of collegiality between bishops was a step forward, he explains, this was not extended to collegiality with priests or with the wider community of faith. In the decades after Vatican II, structures in which the baptised had some autonomy, such as lay associations, diminished, and there was a ‘parishization’ of Church life, ‘at the expense not only of religious orders but also of other forms and spaces of Christian life’.¹²⁴ Finally he connects all this to the child abuse crisis, arguing it is a crisis ‘not just of the episcopate, but also of the theology of the episcopate’.¹²⁵ Faggioli’s reading of this area of doctrinal development resonates with themes in this research; the passivity of laypeople may reflect the absence of other spaces in the life of the Church where the baptised have some autonomy and agency.

Some of those who spoke in our research had close knowledge of how the Bishops’ Conference worked and had experienced aspects of its culture. They expressed concerns about a culture that gave priority to finding consensus and remaining united, a habit which worked against individual bishops being able to take more radical initiatives when their discernment in relation to local and pastoral needs indicate that these are needed. This is perplexing ground. From one viewpoint, when individual bishops do speak and act with courage, vulnerability and transparency in relation to abuse, this is immensely valued. It helps and heals survivors and affected parishes and communities. But we also see in the wider Church that some individual bishops have spoken and acted in ways which seem damaging, in intemperate opposition to the Pope, for example. There is a role here for synodal processes, for a discernment about what the Gospel asks of us. Breaking of consensus or radical

leadership must be born from listening to the Spirit in the light of both scripture and the community's insights. It must always be transparently motivated by the Gospel; and it must also be attentive to those on the peripheries.

These perspectives do not set out to criticise individual bishops or to reject the role and ministry of bishops, individually and collectively. Rather they are questions about what a bishop is asked to be and to do, how bishops work together and what kind of leadership we need. They suggest a need to discern together how to change the unhealthy habits of deference and autocracy who do not serve us well. The child abuse crisis has already compelled change in aspects of canon law relating to bishops. It has shown us that leadership can fail, and that Vatican II's teaching that the Church is always in need of purification and renewal is reflected all too often in our actual life. The crisis may also point to ways in which our understanding of episcopal ministry may need to be re-balanced. Chapter Three described the complexity of their role, holding multiple sometimes conflicting responsibilities. Cardinal Walter Kaspar proposes a kind of untying of knots here, a process which he terms 'unbundling':

In the course of church history, the fatal development has taken place that a charism, the charism of leadership, has drawn and absorbed all other charisms. Thus, a bishop today claims to be a teacher and shepherd, to exercise an apostolic and a prophetic ministry... The same applies to the pastor. The ideal here was for a long time that of an all-round man who does everything, liturgy and administration, building planning and individual pastoral care, teaching and club manager. Unbundling would be urgently needed here, not only because of the workload and the lack of priests, but also because the ministers have to be reminded not to extinguish the Spirit (1 Thess 5: 19) and to let all charisms have their say.¹²⁶

It would be a sign of commitment to conversion if there was a way that voices from the body of the baptised could reflect together with bishops on their role and ministry, particularly in light of the issues raised by the abuse crisis, and imagine the changes that are possible.



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5. Accountability as redemptive

In Chapter Six we explored another aspect of the institutional life of the Church which is deeply implicated in the abuse crisis, the lack of accountability structures for priests and also for bishops, and the broader surrounding culture of relationships in which the habits and dispositions which support accountability mostly do not happen. We saw how this absence weakens priests and bishops themselves and also the communities they serve. We pointed to the importance of seeing support and accountability as closely connected and discussed the work that is being done in documents such as *Caring Safely for Others* and by individual priests and bishops to change expectations and set standards. We identified two forms of accountability in need of effective practical expression; accountability upwards for priests, an equivalent to line management, and accountability to the communities that priests serve.

Here we reflect on accountability in a theological perspective. This chapter has already discussed themes which shed light on accountability.

- The absence of accountability practices is an institutional gap, an area of organisational failure or even sinfulness.
- When we can and do hold each other to account, it is a practical expression of what it means to be a pilgrim church, always in need of renewal.
- It is also a counterpoint to the unhealthy habits of clericalism. Richard Gaillardetz points out that a distinctive priestly identity is not problematic in itself, but can become so when combined with systems that lack accountability.¹²⁷
- When accountability is accepted and expressed in practical ways, office-holders accept a kind of vulnerability; but if accountability is freely chosen and skilfully prepared, it is a vulnerability which deepens ministry and spirituality.
- It has the potential to help build mature relationships of equality and respect between the baptised and those in ordained ministry.

In wider society, accountability is an ethical principle applied in many areas of public life. It is one of the seven standards set out by Lord Nolan in 1995 to operate as a code of conduct for politicians, civil servants and those who work in the criminal justice system as well as those in health and social care services. Accountability means taking responsibility for actions, decisions and policies and being open to scrutiny. It may of course lead to criticism and liabilities. Crucially, accountability cannot exist unless there are practices that enable it to happen.

Accountability is particularly important for those who hold power or have governance responsibilities in an institution, including in the Church. Some accountability practices already happen in Catholic institutions because they are required by charity law or other statutes. Financial accountability is practised and accounts are audited externally,

for example. It is a sign of significant progress that the new Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency is already engaged in independent audits of diocesan safeguarding practices and the agency's first such report is available on its website to anyone who wishes to see it.

In the Church, as we have seen from this research, some office-holders – bishops especially – recognise various ways that they are accountable but they also admit that in practice the structures which express and enable it do not exist. This is not so much a knot that needs to be untangled but rather some strands that need to be tied together or connected in a generative and practical way. The need for such structures, as well as the habits and culture that sustains them, and the openness of office-holders to try them out, need to be tied into a theological framework and a practical outflow.

A theology of accountability

The overarching theological framework in which to place accountability begins in the ultimate horizon of the economy of salvation. We are all accountable for what God has given us, individually and communally as the body of humanity living throughout time. We are inter-dependent, in need of each other's love and support if we are to live the life that God intends for us all. We cannot flourish or find fulfilment alone. Whilst our primary accountability is always to the creator who made us and always draws us towards divine life, we are also accountable to each other, in need of challenge and correction as well as love and forgiveness. Within this economy, the Church's task is to make visible the call to salvation, to be a sign and sacrament of all that is given and offered. So the Church should make visible in its own life what accountability means, in all its dimensions, as part of its mission.

Accountability in the Church should not therefore be seen or practised simply as a political or management exercise. It has a theological purpose which needs to be articulated and understood and then expressed in practical terms.

This work has already started. *Caring Safely for Others*, the Code of Conduct for clergy quoted earlier, is unequivocal about the importance of accountability for those in ordained ministry and locates this theologically in the centre of what it means to be ordained:

In the same way, clergy must be prepared to be held accountable for their conduct and aspire to observe the highest standards of behaviour in the exercise of their ministry.

The reason for this aspiration is that the standards for the exercise of the ordained ministry are derived from the divine law of love,¹²⁸ from the mandate for ministry received from Christ at ordination,¹²⁹ and from a vocation which places “a special obligation to seek holiness”¹³⁰ on those who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders to live in a way which is conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ.¹³¹

This text is telling us that accountability is intrinsic to the priestly vocation and particularly to the priest's growth in holiness. It is an important affirmation of the intimate connection between the principle



When accountability is offered and visibly enacted, it gives away some of the power held by office-holders.





Archbishop Charles Scicluna speaks of accountability as redemptive, an idea worthy of profound reflection.



of accountability and the theological structure of ordained ministry which opens up questions about new pastoral structures and practices. How are the ordained to know whether they are reaching 'the highest standards' if there is no practice of listening to how people experience your ministry? How are they to discover the dimensions of holiness that practices of accountability might bring as their gift? Such processes should of course be careful and constructive; this is not about listening to every complaint but about recognising that we cannot grow in ministry (or in any other significant sphere) without the help of those with whom we share a common life.

This leads to a further perspective that emerges from this research. Archbishop Charles Scicluna speaks of accountability as redemptive, an idea worthy of profound reflection.¹³² This suggests that making accountability real and practical is a way in which we turn away from paths that do not reflect the Gospel, and turn towards the paths of grace, truth and justice. The second *Letter to the Corinthians* (4:1) offers an idea which resonates with this: 'Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.' The ministries and responsibilities to which people are called in the Church are ways in which we receive divine mercy. Accountability is, in theological perspective, an invitation to recognise the specific ways in which we receive that mercy. It plays a part in the search for holiness and for wholeness. It enables us to see our own failures and even sinfulness more clearly. It allows for grace to be given as well as wounds recognised.

This is powerful in relation to how we respond to the abuse crisis. When accountability is offered and visibly enacted, it gives away some of the power held by office-holders. It restores some of the power which should rightly be held by other parts of the baptised body. Most of all, it responds to the experience of victims that something has been wrongfully and harmfully taken from them. Acts and practices of accountability cannot give back exactly what was taken away but they are signs of a commitment to learn and to change. They have the potential to become elements of a mutual and reciprocal process of healing. They are acts of relational justice. They reflect ideas deep within Catholic sacramental practice of reconciliation; ideas such as contrition, penance and restitution.

Other theological perspectives extend a distinctive understanding of accountability in the light of Christian faith and Catholic teaching. Accountability in the Church also recognises our mutual dependence on each as members of one body. The description of what it means to be part of a body in *1 Corinthians* 12: 24-26 is very clear:

God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

Holding each other to account is for the purpose of enabling all the parts of the body to function with 'equal concern for each other'. The *Letter to the Corinthians* is clear: no part of the body can say to any other part that I do not need you.

This scriptural principle is reflected in the teaching of Vatican II already cited about how the two forms of priesthood in the Church are inter-related. In a very real sense, each form of priesthood enables the other. Ordained priesthood without the relationship of priests to the community of the baptised makes no sense, and the priestly people needs the visible and sacramental ministry of the ordained in order to realise their own nature. In other words, we can see accountability in the Church as part of what we owe to each other because of the bonds between us.

A further perspective from Scripture that underpins accountability is the idea of stewardship. The parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew (24:14-30) challenges us all. We are all accountable for the gifts entrusted to us by the Spirit, called to be 'good stewards of God's varied grace'. (1 Peter 4:10). Offices, tasks, ministries and relationships are among those gifts. We have to use them for the flourishing of others.¹³³ In Chapter Three, we quoted *Supporting Ministry*, the report on appraisal for clergy, which drew on this principle in defining accountability:

a priests' or deacon's duty to be responsible to God and others for using his gifts and talents in his ministry, office and other tasks entrusted to him.¹³⁴

Supporting Ministry speaks of accountability both to bishops and to 'others', which includes 'giving explanations to those for whom his ministry and/or office make him responsible'. What it lacks, however, is a sense that accountability must be a dialogue. It is not a one-way process, either in secular life or in the body of believers.

A further point must be added. Even when the Church has grown into a stronger practice of accountability within its own life, it is still also required to be accountable in a public and legal way. The IICSA process was in this sense an exercise in public accountability, based on a legal paradigm. Even though it was uncomfortable and chastening for the Church as an institution and had its own weaknesses and difficulties as a process, it has been valuable as a source of learning and possibly redemptive insights. It revealed the experiences of victims and survivors in a public forum; and investigated institutional failures in the Church. In the Truth Project, it listened to victims and survivors at length. Daniel Philpot has written about truth and reconciliation processes in post-conflict societies and argues that 'the importance of learning the truth about past injustices is the most widely agreed-upon principle among the nation-states who have faced their past'.¹³⁵

Philpot's observation points to a crucial element in processes of accountability. They are concerned with listening and facing up to uncomfortable truths. Sometimes this needs a particular and exceptional public form and expression when the situation is one of grievous harm and failure. In relation to the abuse crisis, this prompts a question: why has there not been any forum within the Catholic community in England and Wales in which victims and survivors could tell their stories and have their truth recognised? There have been many apologies and statements; and many private meetings in which victims and survivors have been invited to speak. But there has been no visible space which is both public and pastoral and which signifies to the Catholic community and wider society that victims and survivors can speak and the Church will listen.

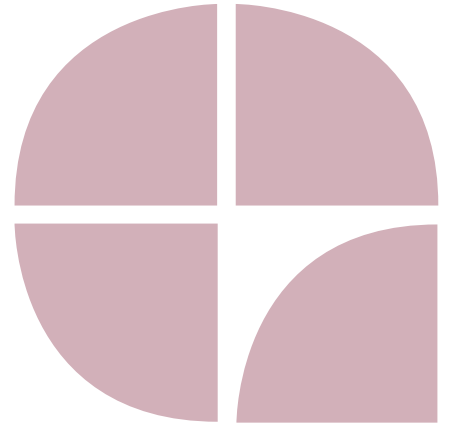


why has there not been any forum within the Catholic community in England and Wales in which victims and survivors could tell their stories and have their truth recognised?



Accountability understood within the theological framework of the Church as the body of Christ and a pilgrim people may resemble and learn from broader secular ideas but it has a different meaning, depth and potential. Theologians are now exploring how accountability is implied by synodality, which we are discovering as ‘the particular style’ which expresses what it means to be the Church.¹³⁶ If we are better at practising accountability, if we can build a culture of structures and habits that express it, we will be a healthier and more faithful body. We will be better able to prevent the failures and harm of abuse and of mishandling. But we also still have specific work to do to recognise and listen to the harm already done.

6. Conclusion



This chapter has explored some of the redemptive pathways that we can take as a whole Catholic community in response to the abuse crisis. In each area, we have sought to uncover how the resources of Catholic teaching and tradition can help us learn from the abuse crisis and understand better what is asked of us. We have also recognised how some presentations of Catholic teaching become unbalanced and lead to habits of thinking and gaps in our practices that impede the full flourishing of the whole body of Christ.

There are some systemic habits here that cannot be changed at the level of our local church, although we can practice accountability upwards by asking office-holders to feed them back to relevant institutions, and in some cases, press for particular change.¹³⁷ We cannot, for example, alter the habitual way that papal teaching documents have talked about the sacredness of the priesthood in ways that seem to diminish or obscure the priestliness of the whole body of the baptised. Nor can we revise the role and responsibilities of a bishop as outlined in teaching and canon law, although we can ask questions and reflect on how culture and practices can evolve and experiment with new structures and processes.

There is much more that we can change that does not require new canon law or teaching. But the change cannot be compelled or practised just as a box to tick. Pope Francis' insight that what is needed is a process of conversion of hearts is crucial. Conversion is more than change. In theological terms, it is a process of recognising what is wrong or missing, of turning away from what is leading in the wrong direction and moving towards a deeper acceptance of the Gospel. Picking up themes from this chapter, conversion of hearts needs deep listening, an acceptance of vulnerability and an awareness that we need to challenge each other truthfully and compassionately in order that we can all grow. Although conversion may be a personal journey, it is also communal and needs theological nourishing. It is a process of attraction as much as one of stripping and repentance.

At the beginning of Chapter Six, we quoted several research participants who saw this experience of the abuse crisis and our collective response as pointing to how the Holy Spirit was awakening the Church and calling us into new paths. We also spoke at the end of that chapter about this material as prompting discernment as well as theological exploration. The theological exploration in this chapter arises from how we believe the Spirit speaks through the voices heard in this research; it is theology from the ground upwards, engaging with aspects of the theology we experience as coming down from the Pope and the bishops. Both are needed as we seek the possibilities of redemption.