

Exploring a Theology of Safeguarding Children

**A compendium of views
written on behalf of the National Board**



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND



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Introduction

The experience of child safeguarding in the Catholic Church over the past thirty years has identified the absence of a well-developed theology of childhood and of a theology of (child) safeguarding. For instance, the McLellan Commission Report to the Catholic Bishops in Scotland stated that ‘... the Church should set out a clear and simple theology of safeguarding, which emphasises that the protection of the weak is not merely a Christian duty, but a divine privilege’.¹

In 2021 the National Board began an initiative to create a focus within the Catholic Church in Ireland on the consideration of, reflection on and development of theology in relation to the safeguarding of children and other vulnerable persons.

If St Anselm’s simple definition of theology as ‘faith seeking understanding’ is used, then what the National Board sought to do was to explore how the beliefs of members of the Christian Churches – about the dignity of the individual, the sacredness of all life, the imperative to express Christ’s compassion to abused people, the meaning and outcome of the suffering of Jesus, the forgiveness of God, and the mission of the Church – can be understood and applied in how we undertake safeguarding, in all of its aspects.

The National Board therefore invited nine experts (theologians, scripture scholars and others) to prepare and present a short video addressing topics related to a theology of safeguarding. These videos are available to view at <https://safeguarding.ie/national-conference-2022>.

This booklet provides the transcripts of the nine videos presented in order of delivery: Fr Hans Zollner, Sr Nuala Kenny MD, Dr Sr Ethna Regan, Fr Paddy Boyle, Una Allen, Dr Jessie Rogers, Fr Jim Corkery, Dr Marcia J. Bunge and Justin Humphreys.

The National Board would like to thank each presenter for their time and for sharing their views and wisdom with us. We commend them and their insights.

The hope of the National Board is that by making the video transcripts available, they will continue to guide us all in realising that safeguarding is at the core of the ministry of the Church.

¹ The McLellan Commission Report, *A review of the current safeguarding policies, procedures and practice within the Catholic Church in Scotland*, 2015.

Theology in the Face of the Sexual Abuse Crisis

Fr Hans Zollner

Hello from the Centre for Child Protection at the Gregorian University in Rome.

I'm grateful for the invitation to talk to you and to talk about something that you have dared to take on, that is, theology in the face of the sexual abuse crisis, or the double crisis as it is called, the crisis of the abuse itself and the crisis of leadership in regard to these issues.

From my point of view, I have seen over the years that in theology, especially in systematic theology, in dogmatic and in fundamental theology over the last thirty-five years, there has been little reflection and little output in terms of the publication of articles and books on the impact of the abuse crisis on theological reflection and teaching, and this is very unfortunate. I believe that theology plays a vital part in dealing with sexual abuse as such, as well as with its prevention.

So, what I would suggest is that we consider sexual abuse – and other forms of abuse of minors, abuse of adult people, abuse of vulnerable people – as one part of theological reflection; as a starting point for thinking about our faith. This is called, in the tradition of the Church, considering a certain topic, a certain area, a *locus theologicus*, something from which our reflection in theology starts and emerges, and then comes also to conclusions. Considering the abuse crisis as a *locus theologicus* means first and foremost thinking about the voice of victims, the presence of victims, the reality of people who have been harmed so grievously by the hands of clergy and other church personnel over the last decades – maybe we should more appropriately say centuries. What do these facts mean to us?

What do we need to do to understand how this could have happened; how these horrendous crimes could have taken place; how they were covered up? What are theological underpinnings of not dealing with abuse, denying it, being neglectful about the presence of survivors among us, and of not being



able to really take on the challenge of changing our understanding of the Church, changing our understanding of priesthood, of clergy, of episcopacy, of church structure as such, of the sacramental institution that we call the Church? How could we be neglectful about all this in the face of all the suffering that was created over the last years?

Some of the topics I would say should be a priority in our reflection are:

- how do we think about redemption?
- what does it mean to people who have been wounded that we talk about Jesus Christ as their saviour?

Now these questions are not new. What is new, and should be new from my perspective, is that we listen to survivors, and we listen to secondary survivors – their families, their friends, their partners, the families in which they grew up, and the families in which they live; the schools where abuse has taken place, the boarding schools, the social activities, the pastoral ministry, youth ministry and so forth – wherever abuse took place. And what does it mean to us that we say Jesus Christ has saved us from sin, from suffering, and ultimately from death? This certainly also includes the death of the soul that many survivors of abuse refer to when they realise that the part of themselves that was relating to God, that was believing in Jesus Christ, that was trusting the Church, has been destroyed.

Another big area of reflection certainly should be ecclesiology. What does it mean that we call the Church one and holy and apostolic? Holy in what sense, if we consider the sins and crimes committed by church representatives and within the realm and reality of the Church?

What does it mean that we administer the sacrament of reconciliation to individuals? But also, what does it mean and say about our reflection? What can and should the Church do in terms of repentance, in terms of public confession, in terms of not only amendment but also reparation for victims and secondary victims and for the whole community of the Church, whether it be a local diocese, a religious congregation, or a religious institution?

As such, moral questions come into play so does the whole discussion about what mercy means to perpetrators in the face of their crimes. To what extent can we be merciful, keeping in mind Jesus who, yes, on the one hand wants to forgive, to bring the message of forgiveness to the whole world, but who also uses very strong words – maybe the strongest words we have from

him – when he tells us that we should throw those who have harmed the little ones into the sea with a millstone around their neck? How can we balance justice and mercy? How can we avoid talking about mercy in a cheap way; refrain from forgetting that the mercy we have received as sinners is the mercy that was very costly to the Lord? It cost him his life, and he suffered all the torture and the entire Passion, up to being nailed to the cross for our sake. This is not something we should take lightly.

Another area of concern in theology is the understanding of priesthood. We all know that this crisis has changed our understanding of the sacrament of order and of the relationship between the laity and the clergy. Lay people are outraged – and I would say justly so – that our ordained leaders were so neglectful and pushed aside not only victims but the whole discussion about this. Not only was justice not done, victims were not even heard. In light of this, what is priesthood, what is episcopacy all about? What would a new understanding of the sacrament of order and a new understanding of ecclesiology be? How are the different roles and sacramental order related to the whole people of God?

I would also say that this includes the whole question of how we theologically talk about accountability and responsibility. The word ‘accountability’ doesn’t exist in the languages derived from Latin; it is in German and it is in English, but you don’t have the equivalent of that in any of the Romance languages. If we lack a word in those languages to express what is meant by accountability, not only on a juridical or canonical level but also on a moral and theological level, what does this mean?

This also includes the question about how we can celebrate liturgy, in terms of bringing the words of survivors into our official prayer. And by ‘our’ I mean both communal prayer and individual prayer. Why are there so few liturgies of penance? Why are there not more liturgies of reconciliation? And why are there very few instances in which we put into words prayers for those who have been harmed – in the prayer of the faithful in normal liturgies?

Finally, I would say that the theological questions need to go deeper, to the roots of our understanding of who we are as human beings and who we should be as Christians baptised in the name of the Triune God who calls us to follow his path – the path that Jesus walked. Jesus has shown us that the Father wants to be a father for all and that he wants to protect all human persons, not only Christians. How do we reach out to others? How do we work with others? How do we understand our collaboration in the area of safeguarding, not only in practical terms, but also reflecting on the good that is done outside the

Church? And how can we learn from others? So, it is a call to more humility, to greater realism, and to more thoroughness, also in the area of theological reflection.

I'm really happy that you are endeavouring to embark on work in this new field. Unfortunately, we have to call it a new field, though it has gained some traction in recent years; but there's so much more to reflect on and to discuss, and also to express in a way that the Church – which means not only clergy but the whole people of God – really learns how to deal with this issue with courage, within the Church and outside the Church, in a better way, in a more consistent way, so that we can become a safer Church and a safer world.

Thank you.

Fr Hans Zollner SJ is the director of the Institute of Anthropology. Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC), previously the Centre for Child Protection (CCP), and professor at the Institute of Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He is a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and consultant to the Congregation for Clergy. He is honorary professor at Durham University, UK. Lectures and conferences have taken him to many countries on six continents.

Healing in a Wounded Church

Sr Nuala P. Kenny MD, FRCPC

Greetings.

I'm honoured to participate in this important initiative on safeguarding for the Irish Church and happy to contribute my experience as a religious sister, a paediatrician and a medical ethicist.

The title I've been given is 'Healing in a Wounded Church'.

Here Pope Francis made his important observation – 'you have to heal his wounds; then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds; heal the wounds'.



If we look at wounds of the Church and of our world as we entered the Covid era, we are dramatically reminded of the profound harms of the clergy abuse crisis, where in fact Jesus' love and care for children was contradicted totally by behaviours of those who were entrusted by God with their care. The wounds from the clergy abuse crisis, from its public revelations in the 70s and 80s, to the period of pandemic in 2020, revealed very important lessons about wounding and harms. There were lessons about the abuse of power, trust and sacred office in harm to the vulnerable young; secrecy, silence and denial to avoid scandal – understood as reputational. Laws, bureaucratic responses of canons, policies and protocols necessary for protection, but not sufficient for long-term prevention, failure to address underlying systemic and cultural factors, and very slow learning by the Church from science.

Former Pope Benedict in his March 2010 letter to you, the faithful in Ireland, made this observation: 'Only by examining the many elements that gave rise to the present crisis can a clear-sighted diagnosis of its causes be undertaken, and effective remedies be found.'

Pope Francis reiterated and emphasised this in his October 2018 Letter to the People of God:

It is essential that we acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics and

all those entrusted with ... caring for the most vulnerable. Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others ... acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds ... be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion.

This is about atonement – and atonement requires much. First apology and repentance, which itself demands conversion of minds and hearts; care for victims – and not just retributive justice in a legal system but restorative justice for their healing. It requires policies and protocols to develop safeguarding environments, and education of clergy and lay as to the magnitude of the harms of sexual abuse to children and youth; but it also requires that we address underlying issues that are both theological, practical and organisational in the Church.

So, as we ended 2019 and entered 2020, vulnerability became a new experience for all; the vulnerability of the coronavirus globally not only compounded the wounds of abuse, but revealed a whole other set of wounds in the pandemic Church. It then raised the notion of vulnerability and wounding to a new level. Vulnerability is understood as inevitable, not optional, in our being, embodied in flesh and bone, and embedded in families and communities. Vulnerability is a condition of the moral life, trusting in others and learning that relations of dependence are open to loss and even abuse. Jesus became vulnerable for us.

So, the Church entered the pandemic of 2020, not from a position of strength and health, but from a position of weakness and wounding from the clergy abuse crisis, and the deep revelations of theological and organisational issues therein.

But as we then look at the wounds that became more evident in 2020 in the chaos and confusion of Covid, we see unprecedented losses in the ageing Church of the global North – the West – losses of both priests and people. We see a shift from the euro-centric Church to a global reality. We see the profound loss of religious experience and affiliation for the young. We have witnessed a new understanding of our complicity in colonialism, racism and white privilege in the Church, and we have experienced loss of political prestige and power.

In this time, for the Church to be a healer, she must recognise she is a wounded one; and this calls for us to return to the prophetic tradition. The prophets taught us in their long journey of faith that lamentation – weeping for our sins and our losses – is crucial, and that we must weep and mourn together.

They also taught us that prophetic criticism demands not future-telling, but asking us to look at who it is God called us to be and who we have become – and repent. But it also calls us to prophetic imagination; imagine who and what and how we could become, if we returned to being the people God has called us to be.

At the same time as this call to prophetic is crucial to healing wounds, Pope Francis reminds us of the obstacles to the prophetic. Narcissism makes you look at yourself constantly in the mirror; discouragement leads to complaining, and pessimism to thinking everything is dark and bleak. These three things close the door to the Holy Spirit.

So, as a doctor, thinking of the deep wounds of the Church before we entered Covid, now magnified and complicated by Covid – as a doctor, you would ask what’s my prognosis for healing? Can we heal the wounds?

I would list here serious issues – tragedy, fatigue and burnout from all in the Church, all in society. Ongoing silence, and denial of the pain and the suffering, especially by clerics and many in the Church. Polarising divisions about the Church of the poor – or the Church of the rich, exemplified most egregiously and tragically in the country of my birth, the United States, where the Church has been complicit in privilege.

The challenge to re-found our understanding of the Church from an organisation to a community of missionary disciples of Christ, and to rekindle hope in the resurrection and belief in the Holy Spirit – this is in a time of apparent desolation and loss, and wounding beyond comprehension – a Calvary moment:

You have been taught that when we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised into his death. In other words, when we were baptised we went with him into the tomb and joined him in death; so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life, if in union with Christ we imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection. We must believe by his wounds we have been healed. (St Paul’s Letter to the Romans)

Our challenge is to be a resurrection people.

Nuala Patricia Kenny is a Sister of Charity of Halifax. In 1989–90 she was the pediatrician member of the St John's, Newfoundland Archdiocesan Committee on Child Sexual Abuse that produced a 'landmark report' in 1992. This committee identified both individual and systemic/cultural factors at work in the crisis. In 1990–92, she was appointed to the Canadian Conference of Bishops Ad Hoc Committee on Clergy Sexual Abuse. This committee produced *From Pain to Hope*, the first set of national guidelines on this topic. Following this involvement, she returned to her academic and clinical career as paediatrician and medical ethicist.

In late 2009, she returned to ministry in this area and presented to the 2010 Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' Plenary Meeting on 'unfinished business' in dealing with the abuse crisis with particular attention to the need for accurate diagnosis of its causes and identification of personal and systemic risk factors for recurrence. In October 2011 she co-chaired the McGill Centre for Research in Religion Conference 'From Trauma to Transformation' on clergy sexual abuse.

In September 2012 at the European Society of Catholic Theology *Redeeming Power* Launch Conference at St Mary's University College, Twickenham, UK, she was chosen to respond to the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith's Monsignor Charles Scicluna's keynote on institutional response to abuse, and presented 'Diagnosing the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis: Lessons From the Canadian Experience'.

In May 2014 she was appointed a consultant to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for the Protection of Minors to revise *From Pain to Hope*. It produced *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation* (CCCB Publications, 2018). The CCCB principles of responsibility, accountability and transparency were used in organising the 2019 Summit in Rome.

She has travelled extensively, giving reflections to clergy and laity from her books *Healing the Church: Diagnosing and Treating the Clergy Abuse Crisis* (Novalis, 2012) and *Still Unhealed: Challenges for Conversion and Reform from the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis* (Novalis and Twenty-Third Publications, 2019) on the spiritual and ecclesial challenges emerging from this crisis and its management. Her newest book, *Prophetic Possibilities for the Post Pandemic Church* (Novalis, 2021), focuses on pathology needing personal and ecclesial conversion in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Why a Specific Focus on the Rights of the Child?

Dr Ethna Regan

How can a theology of safeguarding encompass human rights, including children's rights?

I want to begin by asking what is our operative understanding of safeguarding?

Felicity Fletcher-Campbell explains that there are two aspects to the term 'safeguarding'; the first is a more minimal position, focusing on legal responsibilities, and is relatively well defined.

The second however is looser; more about a moral responsibility to remove barriers to children's well-being and flourishing. She argues that both approaches are necessary, and neither is sufficient on its own.

Thus, safeguarding runs a continuum from a minimal interpretation of safeguarding as protection from abuse and danger to a more expansive understanding as removing barriers to the flourishing of children and young people.

The crisis in the Catholic Church resulting from the crimes of child abuse and the scandal of the cover-up by Church leaders has meant that the focus has been on the crucial minimal interpretation of safeguarding as protection from abuse and danger. It is imperative that such protection is embedded in all our policies and practices; but it is also important I think, that we develop a more expansive theology of safeguarding.

This is the publication from the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church held in Rome in February 2019. I read the powerful heart-breaking testimonies of victims of sexual abuse, and the excellent, sometimes hard-hitting, papers by cardinals and lay experts.

The victims' testimonies refer to lives destroyed; to total loss of innocence; the abuse of human dignity; and life-long trauma, including the awful wound of self-blame for the abuse.



Cardinal Reinhard Marx described the abuse of power in the Church in which the rights of victims were, he said, ‘effectively trampled under-foot, and left to the whims of individuals’.

This publication from the Rome meeting also includes twenty-one points for reflection on the protection of minors; but what is missing from these points is any reference whatsoever to human rights.

What is the relationship between human rights and theology, and how do they engage with each other?

Human rights is one way of articulating the inherent dignity of the human person.

Human rights focus on what we need to be protected from, provided with, and participate in, in order to flourish as human beings.

Human rights emphasise equality, that is the truth that every human being is a locus of human flourishing which is to be considered with favour in him or her as much as in anybody else.

Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of Catholic teaching. At the heart of the development of this teaching is the attempt to understand the concrete implications of human dignity in interpersonal social, structural and international terms.

Of course, the ultimate theological justification for engagement with human rights is the doctrine of *Imago Dei* – ‘so God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them’ (Gn 1:27).

While the concept of human rights is not explicitly present in the Bible, Genesis points theology towards the concept of inalienable human dignity, based on this astonishing assertion – as one person said – that God created human beings in God’s image.

The history of theological anthropology – that is the part of theology where we seek to understand human existence from a faith perspective – is an attempt to come to terms with the meaning of this assertion about the human person. The doctrine of *Imago Dei* acts as both indicative and imperative, indicating what we are as human beings; who we are and the ethical demands of that identity.

An appeal to human rights is now a core dimension of Catholic advocacy for human dignity across the world; although the acceptance of the notion of human rights by the Church and the incorporation of rights into its social teaching was a slow and complicated process.

Since the Second Vatican Council, human rights has emerged as a major theme in the social documents of the Church worldwide. At Vatican II, however, no one would have envisaged the revelations of crimes and scandals that have scarred the reputation of the Catholic Church.

These and other failures test the credibility of the Church's promotion of human rights externally.

Despite these failures, the contemporary challenges of social, global and ecological justice make the Church's continued promotion of human rights an urgent imperative. However, the credibility of the Church externally will be judged by our capacity to respect and implement human rights *internally* – not only, but most especially, in how we respond to the victims of abuse, and how we deal with the causes of the crisis.

Why a specific focus on the rights of the child? The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights instrument in the history of international law.

Why is such a convention necessary? Children are entitled to benefit from the universal standards of human rights; but the particular vulnerability of children means that they require special care and assistance – which does not take from their status as human beings with the same rights as adults.

The convention promotes the rights of the child, generally outlined in terms of three distinct categories:

- **Protection** from abuse neglect and exploitation
- **Provision** of services to promote their survival and development – indeed their flourishing
- **Participation** in decisions about matters that affect them and society, with due weight given to their age and maturity

The convention presents the welfare of children as a matter of justice rather than charity; and the rights of children thus evoke responsible obligations in governments, organisations and individuals. The four core principles of the convention are:

1. non-discrimination;
2. devotion to the best interests of the child – and the phrase 'the best interest of the child' is used six times in the convention;
3. the right to life survival and development; and
4. respect for the views of the child.

These are the core principles that would help the Church embed the rights of the child into a broad safeguarding framework; and also direct the kind of theological reflection on childhood that should be part of that.

Few theologians, however, have reflected on children as part of theological anthropology, one exception being the German theologian, Karl Rahner. In his beautiful essay, 'Ideas for a Theology of Childhood', Rahner asks fundamental questions about the meaning of childhood in the Christian scriptures and tradition.

His primary argument is that the child *is* the man, *is* the woman; that children have full value and dignity in their own rights; that childhood is *not* a stage on the way to full personhood in adulthood. Children are subjects and they do have rights.

Further, Rahner argues that the child is the man/the woman who is, right from the first, the partner of God. The rights of the child point not just to the vulnerability of children, but also to their potentiality as individuals and as members of our communities. Abuse, neglect, and indeed poverty, deny children their rights, but also deny the human community the gifts of those who never reached their potential.

So, an emphasis on the rights of the child is not simply about the individual autonomy of children, but about their relational autonomy in families and communities, about their flourishing and the flourishing of Church and society.

Children's rights have not had adequate, explicit attention in Catholic social teaching, despite the fact that the Holy See was one of the first states to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in April 1990. On that occasion, Archbishop Martino – then the permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations – said:

One must always keep in mind that the rights of the child are not a concession granted by governments or by the adult members of the human family, they are inherent in the child's nature; and the purpose of legislation is to recognise and uphold them to the fullest.

I cannot help but think how different the subsequent decades might have been if the Catholic Church had implemented the convention that it signed and ratified in 1990.

To conclude: it is clear that many different aspects of theology need to be interrogated in light of the abuse crisis and mono-causal explanations and one-dimensional responses will not suffice.

It is also clear that an understanding of human rights and the rights of the child must be a key dimension in a theology of safeguarding, for it reminds us of the inherent dignity of the human person. As *Imago Dei*, it emphasises equality. Hierarchy does not trump our fundamental human and Christian equality. It upholds the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly that focus on the best interests of the child.

It can help us develop the implications of the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, and the practical demands of this doctrine for Church structures and practices; and it contributes to an expansive vision of safeguarding, beginning with protection from abuse, through a rights-based approach to victims, and challenging the barriers to the well-being and flourishing of children in the Church and in the world.

Thank you for listening.

Dr Ethna Regan CHF is associate professor in theology and ethics at Dublin City University. A Holy Faith Sister, she taught for over a decade at the University of the West Indies and worked with Credo Foundation for Justice in Port of Spain with socially displaced children and in the campaign for the abolition of the death penalty in the Caribbean. She also worked for five years in Samoa. Her PhD from the University of Cambridge was on theology and human rights, and she has also published in the areas of Catholic social thought, theological anthropology and ecclesial responses to child abuse.

How to Put a Theology of Safeguarding into Practice

Fr Paddy Boyle

In 2013, at World Youth Day in Brazil, when Pope Francis arrived in Rio De Janeiro, he made a speech, a short speech, in which he said:

Listen! Young people are the window through which the future enters the world.

They are the window, and so they present us with great challenges. Our generation must show that it can rise to the promise found in each young person when we know how to give them space.

This means that we have to create the material and spiritual conditions for their full development, to give them a solid basis on which to build their lives; to guarantee their safety and their education to be everything they can be; to pass on to them lasting values that make life worth living; to give them a transcendent horizon for their thirst for authentic happiness and their creativity for the good; to give them the legacy of a world worthy of human life; and to awaken in them their greatest potential as builders of their own destiny, sharing responsibility for the future of everyone. If we can do all this today, we anticipate the future that enters the world through the window of the young.

(Pope Francis, Rio de Janeiro, Monday, 22 July 2013).



The Pope's speech is both inspirational and aspirational at all kinds of levels. It is the context, and it configures the environment in which, and from which, we repeatedly state we want our children and our young people to experience the world, the church and themselves as they journey through life.

Pope Francis is, of course, coming from a faith-based understanding and perception of the world, of life and of every human being who has and who ever shall live. Faith implies a human response, but the act of faith presupposes that God is already drawing that person to himself. After the profession of faith during the baptism ceremony we proclaim, 'this is the faith of the Church, we are proud to profess it.'

Faith, the faith of the church, is, of course, informed and nourished by the scriptures and by theology and theology is, as St Anselm would have it, 'Faith seeking understanding'.

Faith, according to St Anselm, is not replaced by understanding or reason but rather complimented and nourished by it. It is a volitional state: it is love of God and a drive to act as God wishes (cf. Thomas Williams, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2000).

Other definitions of theology include:

- Theology is: 'the study of the nature of God and religious belief'.
- St Aquinas: 'Theology is taught by God, teaches God, and leads to God.'

These are just some of the definitions of what theology is and what it does. It enhances our faith; it should deepen our faith. It should always lead to God. Theology is simply the attempt to understand God.

On that point, Pope Francis has some interesting insight concerning children:

God has no difficulty in being understood by children, and children have no trouble in understanding God. It is not by chance that in the Gospels Jesus speaks beautiful and strong words about the 'little ones'. This term indicates all persons who depend on the help of others, particularly children. Children, therefore, are a treasure for humanity and for the Church – because they remind us of the necessary conditions for entering into the kingdom of God – that we must not consider ourselves self-sufficient, but in need of help, of love, and of forgiveness.

(Pope Francis, general audience, 18 March 2015)

If we were to choose a text on which we might reflect on all the above, it might well be Genesis 1:26: 'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness".'

This is without doubt an incredibly exalted understanding and indeed vision of the human being, of the human person. These seminal creation texts which we find in Genesis go on to describe an idyllic relationship between God and his creation, a relationship based on love, pure love, effective love. God does; God is a moral God who is, who acts, who does. In the creation narrative God shows himself to be the provider, the protector of the human being.

The environment into which he places the human being, the garden of Eden, is, as Pope Francis would say, a place worthy of human life, where

everything is provided to enable the human person to grow, to develop and to reach his/her greatest potential.

And today, God's mission, the mission of the Church, as it has always been, as shown to us by Jesus Christ, is one of love and service.

Even after 2,000 years of Christianity, it is still and will always be the imperative – incumbent on each generation and central to our faith – to act, in the image and likeness of God, following the example of his Son, Christ Jesus, and to provide, to protect, to pass on lasting values, love, truth, justice, peace, to create and preserve an environment worthy of the beauty and dignity of the child and that imperative is as urgent now as ever it was.

Jesus, before he ascended to his Father, gathers the eleven Apostles and he tells them to go, to baptise, to teach everything – 'everything I have commanded you' (Mt 28:16-20).

Everything that Jesus commanded us to do can be summed up in the two great commandments:

- Love God and love your neighbour as yourself;
- As long as you did this to one of these little ones you did it to me. (Mt 25:40)

This has always been at the core of the mission of the Church, to love God and love your neighbour – to provide, to protect, to teach, to pass on, to safeguard, to nourish, to enhance what is passed on. At the end of the profession of the faith during the baptism ceremony, the priest sums up what has been said by saying, 'this is our faith, the faith of the Church, we are proud to profess it.'

The scriptures are used copiously through the baptism ceremony and, as well as that, our understanding of baptism, its action and the beneficial consequences, for the child, its family and the faith community, is to be found in the teachings of St Paul, the teaching of the Church and in sacramental theology – all of which imply a clear and direct responsibility for the family, the church, the local faith community – to safeguard and nourish this child, and every child, this nascent faith, this child of God, this brother/sister of Jesus Christ – this heir to the kingdom of heaven. That is the church's life-long project.

While the universal and local churches continue to develop and promote informed and effective policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults – ensuring that places of worship and all church activities are safe – it is also engaged in an ongoing process of articulating the theological and faith-based foundations of safeguarding principles.

In formulating a theology of safeguarding, the Church continues to learn from the behavioural sciences, for example, the various departments of psychology.

It also has a rich trove of resources in the various branches of theology – dogmatic theology, moral theology, biblical theology, pastoral theology, sacramental and liturgical theology. Pope Francis is a leading voice in the world of ecology, the safeguarding and preservation of the planet and of all who share its gifts. We can also delve deeply into the social teachings of the Church.

All these rich resources speak of the nature of God and God’s relationship with the human person – with the child – and of how we should, in our day-to-day dealings with one another, live out those values of love, of truth, of justice, of peace, values that make life worth living – all of it is good news.

This leads us back to the one basic premise – every child is a treasure and faith is a gift and, as Jesus emphasises again and again throughout the gospels, a child-like vulnerability, a child-like trust, is of the essence of the kingdom.

Every child has the right to live their life, their childhood, free from abuse and exploitation. Safeguarding is of the very nature of the church – Mother Church – the Church is a mother in her roles of nourishing and protecting the believer, particularly the little ones, her children and the vulnerable.

Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary. (Benedict XVI)

Let us pray that the brightness of God’s love may enfold all children. Let us ask God to help us do our part so that the dignity of children may be respected.

(Cf. Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Saint Peter’s Basilica, Sunday, 24 December 2006, et alia.)

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How Can (an Understanding of) Pastoral Theology Inform Action to Heal the Spiritual Damage Caused by Clerical Child Sexual Abuse?

Una Allen

‘Soul murder’ is a term which is often used to describe the effects of sexual abuse, especially when the perpetrator is associated with the Church, because in this context, the abuse of power, particularly against the vulnerable, strikes at the very heart of our belief and connection to a loving God. The term is even more meaningful when used to capture the spiritual disease suffered by the child victim and the adult survivor of clergy sexual violation.



Whether experienced in childhood or as an adult, this type of abuse by Church personnel – real spiritual damage – traumatises not only individuals, but whole communities. The impact emanates out from victims and survivors providing a shock wave to families and friends, all levels of community, and ultimately to society as a whole. We now know that the spiritual injury associated with religious sexual abuse has the capacity to destroy faith in religious institutions and erode belief in God or any higher power, shatter spirituality and the spirit within, leading to loss of purpose in life. The trauma of betrayal experienced throughout Irish society and indeed throughout the world in the last number of years as a result of clerical and institutional abuse is proof, if such were needed, that the subsequent consequences from the outrage of abuse has had repercussions for entire generations, especially our faith communities.

The question naturally arises then: ‘Can the soul recover?’ The answer is: we don’t know. Only the survivor can answer that. But what we do know, because we have heard it from survivors themselves, is that many have expressed a desire to reconnect to the God from whom they felt they were so cruelly severed or never had the chance to know. Arising from this, it is my belief that a real understanding of pastoral theology can be one of the building blocks which not

only can, but *must* inform action if we are to join the dots and, in so doing, begin to heal the wounds caused by clerical child sexual abuse.

Thomas Merton taught that no matter what anyone has done to us in the past, or is doing to us now, or might do to us in the future, there is within every one of us, at our innermost core, a hidden centre of ourselves that remains invincibly established in God as a mysterious presence, as a life that is at once God's and our own. It is in being awakened to this innermost centre of ourselves with God that we find the courage to continue on in the challenging process of healing, grounded in a peace that is not dependent on the outcome of our efforts, because it is the peace of God, which depends on nothing, and on which everything depends. In coming to explore and understand the true role of pastoral theology, I believe we have the ability to inform action to deal with the spiritual damage inflicted by clerical child sexual abuse, and in doing so unearth that hidden presence within ourselves from whence we can begin to heal because, as Richard Rohr says, 'if we do not transform our pain, we will almost inevitably transmit it'.

Theology is often defined as faith seeking understanding in the context of human experience. At its best, theology means figuring out how to bring faith and life together: people reflect on their lives from the perspective of faith and on faith from the perspective of their lives; quite simply bringing life to faith and faith to life.

Pastoral theology, coming from the notion of care and concern, lies within the broad spectrum of theology and cannot be neglected because of its fundamental importance and relevance to both Church and society. In more recent decades pastoral theology has become increasingly recognised as an integral part of theological study and education. Not too long ago, it was considered a matter of instructing those in preparation for ordained ministry in the administration of the sacraments. But since Vatican II and especially in recent times, we have witnessed a more fluid dynamic and deeper understanding of pastoral theology with an accompanying pastoral task of responding to particular human, individual and communal needs and circumstances.

Pastoral theology bridges the relationship between Church and society. It traditionally encompasses those dimensions of Christian life that are to do with care, particularly the care of the Christian community through ministry. It has its foundation in the role of Jesus Christ as shepherd and, arising from people's experience of life and of faith, seeks to reflect on and serve that faith commitment. Theologically fundamental to pastoral care is the belief that God

is the prism upon which and through which all other assumptions and practices of religiously based pastoral care are shaped. Ultimately it is about growth. Through pastoral care, a person may be assisted to grow personally, relationally and spiritually.

Pastoral theology has at its core the desire to journey with our fellow travellers in the human desire for God. It raises the theological issues of meaning and truth in relation to living out of the life of faith. It brings together theory and practice. It relates to pastoral skills and ministry training, but it is also concerned for every aspect of social policy and cultural experience of the individual. Pastoral theology is not static. It evolves with each context and continually tries to read the signs of the times. The specific task of the true practitioner of pastoral theology is mediating or making real the presence of God in the concrete everyday experience. Pastoral theology in the person of the one who is ministering seeks to guide and help people to find solutions to various problems and life's questions, healing and aiding them to find wellness and reconciling people to restore relationships. As I say, it is a practical theology that grounds ministry. In helping us take a deeper look at our inherited religious traditions and our own lived experience, we can hopefully, in humility, reinterpret those traditions in a manner that assists healing, corrects distortions and expands our vision.

Research tells us that the spiritual wound associated with abuse can be unbearably painful. People who have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of clerics, who consciously or unconsciously are experienced as 'God representatives', begin to question the nature of God. As I alluded to earlier, many have spoken about their struggle with their faith, and the sense of rejection by a Church who betrayed them, their feelings of loss, and darkness, of deep mistrust and suspicion of that Church, but most of all a sense of abandonment by God. *Where was God when I was being abused as a small child? Why did this abuse happen to me? Does God care about me? Did God ever care about me? Is there a loving God?* These theological questions and many others inevitably arise in the aftermath of abuse in a spiritual context – God questions which cannot always be explored in the context of counselling, but may be begun to be understood in the realm of true pastoral care.

With an understanding of the essence of pastoral theology as building a bridge between Church and society, we can build on our knowledge that clerical child sexual abuse has wounded the entire Church and that now the entire Church is called to put right what has happened. The entire Church is

called to put itself right in its relations with the kingdom and with Jesus Christ. As Archbishop Diarmuid Martin says: ‘Healing is not just a question for the counsellors; it is a theological and ecclesiological necessity.’

In all aspects of pastoral theology the notion of theological reflection is prime. In prayer and reflection we are enabled to look at our past in a positive way, to discover seeds of growth and peace where we once only found grounds for fear. In that story from the Gospel of Luke that unfolds on the road to Emmaus, the two disciples first share with an unknown stranger (who is in fact Jesus) the sadness, the utter loss and the devastation that weighs upon them, and then he helps them to reframe their past in a new light. Jesus does not force them to ignore their wounds, but listens patiently to them, hears their hurt, their anger, their struggles to understand; he stays with them. This story of the disciples on the road demonstrates that the Emmaus story is not about the magic of instant transformation. We all must go through a healing process; together we must first face, listen, share and process the wounds of the past before we can endeavour to recognise anew the indwelling Spirit – the God within – of whom Merton speaks.

Our Church must be transformed into a place where children are safe, but it must also be transformed into an honoured and privileged place of healing for survivors. It must be transformed into a place where survivors, with all their reticence, their wariness, and with all their anger and resentment towards the Church, can genuinely come to feel that the Church is a place where they will encounter healing. In conjunction with this, pastoral theology teaches that our response to help heal the spiritual damage caused by clerical sexual abuse must also be one which attempts to bring healing to a wounded, many would say fearful Church also in need of understanding and healing. Our way forward must be robustly responding to all those who have been wounded by abuse. Pastoral theology teaches us to be able to suffer with those who are hurting and to companion those who seek hope in a loving God. The healing of the Church comes through how the Church works to heal survivors.

There is no doubt that each person’s spiritual journey is highly individual, but the role of pastoral theology in seeking to heal the spiritual damage caused by clerical child sexual abuse is to give us the tools which enable us to witness that unique journey with God and to provide support and encouragement towards each individual’s own experience of freedom, flourishing and spiritual peace. As well as opening up ways of communicating with God, however we perceive God to be, through our understanding of

pastoral theology, emphasis is always placed on the lived and concrete experience of the person, and Christianity teaches that each of us meets God in that unique personal experience.

Una Allen is the current coordinator of Towards Peace, the spiritual support service set up by the Irish Church in 2014 in response to a request from survivors of abuse by Church personnel.

She has an interdisciplinary background, including social science, spiritual direction and a Master's in Pastoral Theology. She worked for thirty years with the Probation Service in both Dublin and Galway. While her work brought her into contact with those who perpetrated sexual abuse, her experiences also taught her about the physical, psychological and social consequences of abuse – for abuse survivors, their families, and their communities. She continued her involvement in this area with Athru, a multidisciplinary agency attached to Health Service Executive, working with young people who exhibit sexually inappropriate behaviour.

A spiritual companion and retreat giver with a number of years' experience, Una has taught on the Diploma in Spiritual Direction course at the Jesuit Centre of Spirituality and Culture in Galway and in Manresa Spirituality Centre in Dublin. She is a qualified supervisor for spiritual directors.

Una is married with four children.

Jesus Puts a Child in Their Midst and Tells the Disciples to Welcome Children as a Way of Welcoming Jesus. How Can the Church Take That Seriously Today?

Dr Jessie Rogers

I

An unintended consequence of taking seriously the safeguarding of children in the Church has been to further marginalise them within the life of the people of God. It can seem easier to just exclude children from a space or an activity than to put in place all that safeguarding protocols require. This moves the Church in the opposite direction from the journey that Jesus in the gospels requires us to take. A good theology of safeguarding must enter into deep conversation with a theology of childhood and also, I will argue, a robust theology of power.



The stories of Jesus and the children in the gospels present a beautiful image of openness and inclusion. But they also point to something very fundamental about what it means to be a community in whom the risen Christ dwells. I will look briefly at three episodes in Mark's gospel – which have parallels also in Matthew and Luke – to begin to form an answer to the question: How can the Church take seriously Jesus' action of putting a child in their midst and telling the disciples to welcome children as a way of welcoming Jesus?

II

All three of these teachings of Jesus occur within the same context. In Mark 8–10, Jesus and his followers are on the way to Jerusalem and Jesus is preparing them for what lies ahead. Peter has spoken for the others in declaring that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One sent by God that the people of

God have been waiting for (Mk 8:29). They know who Jesus is, they think, and yet they are still not able to really see what that means.

Jesus has warned them to be on their guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod (Mk 8:15). That powerful little phrase alerts them to the dangers of power and status games and of an approach to religious practice that leads to self-righteousness and exclusion. And yet, as Jesus prepares them for his own suffering and rejection, they choose to dwell on a different understanding of what the coming of the kingdom might mean. The yeast that Jesus has warned them against is already at work in their midst.

III

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' (Mk 9:33-7)

What is the antidote for this concern for power and status, this endless tendency to imagine the kingdom of God in the same way that the kingdoms of the world operate? It is to put a little child in the centre. The welcome or otherwise given to children is the welcome or otherwise given to Jesus Christ and to the Father. We are open to Christ in our midst to the extent that we are open to receiving and welcoming children.

IV

A few verses later, after Jesus challenges the disciples' sharp insider versus outsider thinking (see Mark 9:33-7), he warns them:

'If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.' (Mk 9:42)

[Some manuscripts have ‘believe in me’ others just have ‘little ones who believe’. So this might be referring to the little ones within the community, or it may be a recognition of the spirituality that is the birthright of every child.]

This is a huge responsibility. Revelations of abuse have made it shockingly clear how ‘welcome’ of children can become something much more sinister. And other speakers in this series have spoken of the devastating effects that can have on the spiritual lives of children into adulthood. Perhaps this is why a concern for safeguarding can actually lead to further marginalisation of children. It seems less complicated that way. It is almost as if children become a danger in our midst. But that marginalisation is itself abuse. And the effect of that marginalisation on the Christian community is profound, in that we are excluding Christ. A community that closes its heart against children is closing its heart against Christ. Children in our midst are not the danger. They are a litmus test for the quality of our communities. If they are not safe, our communities are diseased and no one is safe within them. When children are safe, our communities are healthy. A community with children safely at the centre is a community that does not engage in power play or status games. It is one that reflects the fruit of the Spirit.

V

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mk 10:13-16)

The yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod is at work in the disciples when they are concerned that Jesus not be distracted from the ‘important’ task of ministering to adults. Jesus’ response is indignation. Their priorities are upside down. His command is clear – put nothing in the way of children coming to him. In fact, if we want to enter the kingdom – if we want to live out the reality into which God invites us, we need to learn from children. Scholars like to discuss what it means to receive the kingdom like a little child – what attributes do we need? In fact, the best way to cultivate those characteristics is to be in

the presence of children and let their way of being rub off on us. Being with children reminds us how to be childlike. In welcoming children, we welcome the childlikeness within us that is open to entering the kingdom.

A few concluding thoughts:

1. If something is safe for the most vulnerable, it is safe for everyone.
2. The decision, followed by whatever action is required, to put the child in the centre and not at the margins is a significant step in a process of conversion to a kingdom-of-God-compatible way of exercising power in the Church.
3. Bringing children and other vulnerable people to the centre is not so much a burden and extra work as it is an invitation and an opportunity to become communities that are more intentionally focused on Christ.
4. Our treatment of children is a true reflection of how we treat Christ.
5. A theology of safeguarding would find thoughtful and provocative dialogue partners in the theology of childhood and in a genuinely Christian theology of power.

Dr Jessie Rogers lectures in sacred scripture and is dean of theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. She specialises in Old Testament Wisdom Literature. Originally from South Africa where she taught at a number of institutions, including Cornerstone Christian College and the University of Stellenbosch, Jessie came to Ireland in 2007. She was a member of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, before coming to the Pontifical University in 2014. Jessie is a member of Godly Play International's College of Trainers and founding member of Godly Play Ireland. Her most recent publication is an article on Rahner and the theology of childhood in the *Irish Theological Quarterly*.

Does There Now Need to be a Re-examination of the Theology of Salvation?

Fr Jim Corkery

Does there now need to be a re-examination of the theology of salvation, in the light of the experience of survivors of abuse who did not sin, but were sinned against?



In this question, the most important words are: ‘who did not sin but were sinned against’. Why? Because often, when there is talk about ‘salvation’, the idea that is present is: salvation *from sin*. But survivors of sexual abuse have not sinned; they have been *sinned against*. And so, emphasising that the heart of salvation is Jesus dying *for our sins* is not particularly helpful for them because in the entire traumatic experience of their sexual abuse, they are not sinners at all. Jesus is not saving them from sin; he is saving them from the terrible sins of other people. In all of this, they do not contrast with Jesus, as sinners do; rather they share his experience, as he shares theirs. For survivors of abuse, the Jesus who saves is in *solidarity* with them; *like* them, *beside* them; because just as they, who are entirely innocent, have suffered abuse, so has he. He knows their pain.

When human sin is at the forefront of the picture in talk about ‘salvation’, the focus is on ‘salvation *from*’. But there is another side to salvation: salvation *for*. The very word itself, ‘salvation’, is related to ‘health’, ‘wholeness’, ‘fullness’. When, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus says: ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’ (Jn 10:10), we catch a glimpse of the *positive* side of salvation: it is well-being, freedom, renewed life, happiness, re-found joy, and finally peace. It makes much more sense to think of the salvation brought by Jesus as offering these positive gifts to people, especially those who have lost them through abuse and violence. The cross of Jesus is a protest against such violence – by him, who knew it too. And it is a promise of new life, not just in some unimaginable future, but *now*, as every tear will be wiped away, already in this life. Salvation is *now!*

Is salvation really *now*? Well, think of all the people who encountered Jesus in the gospels; they were not made to wait. He answered them there and then – healing, embracing, showing compassion, loving. He stood beside them in their pain and restored them to love and freedom and new life at the heart of the community. And his saving touch was always more than a *fixing* touch; it was a compassionate, tender, understanding, ‘entering in’ ... to all of the difficulties of people, bringing light where darkness had reigned. God becoming human has its *deepest* meaning just here: he becomes like us so that we can become like him; a victim himself so that we can be victims no more.

People who have been sexually abused by priests and religious have experienced, inside the Church, the very opposite of what they are meant to experience. The Church, the ‘community of salvation’, is the usual place where believers can hope *together* in the God of grace and salvation. In the Church, people are enabled, somehow, to touch ‘salvation’ through the scriptures, the sacraments, and the kindness and love of fellow believers. That is how it should be in the Church – so that God’s salvation can become tangible, at least in a fragmentary way. But what of those who have been abused within the Church – and by figures who are meant to be its most trustworthy representatives? For them, the Church ceases to be a place where salvation is easily experienced and it becomes, instead, a place of the opposite: of darkness, evil, of what might even be called ‘un-salvation’. I am not saying that those abused within the Church lose their ‘anchor’ in the salvation and love that comes from God in Christ. No! But I am saying that this ‘anchor’ becomes, because of their experience, difficult to hold onto *within* the Church. Their experience pushes them to the edge of the life of the Church; it sometimes even pushes them outside of what was once, for them, the ‘community of salvation’.

Jesus, in the salvation that he brings, wants with particular intensity to reach with his healing love and tender heart those who have been abused and violated. He wants this because he is aware that survivors have been doubly ‘robbed’: robbed of all that was taken from them through the abuse itself and robbed also of being ‘anchored’ and feeling safe in the community of believers, the community of salvation, because in this community, the Church, ‘salvation’ has *not* been their experience. So he wants them to feel safe once more, loved, healed, welcomed and understood, cherished and protected. All these positive characteristics of salvation confer life. They make women and men whole again.

They save people *for* a better life, a life of love with God and others. When the Italian poet, Dante, spoke of his beloved, Beatrice, as his salvation, he knew

he had found in her what would make him truly *live*. Salvation is fullness of *life*. And for survivors, this has to include life also at the heart of the Church, the community of salvation; they have been hurt but must not be hurt again.

Thus the Church and theology must indeed learn to speak of ‘salvation’ in the light of survivors’ experience, emphasising the positive riches that salvation bestows. Central to the theological understanding of salvation is what is called *divinisation*. This means receiving a share in the very life of God, something that Christians are already given in baptism. ‘Divinisation’ is an unusual word, but it teems with dignity, with the sense that human beings, touched by salvation from God in their present life, become a new creation, become whole, become healed and enlivened. All this belongs to the ‘*being*’ dimension of salvation: one comes to *be* something new: a sharer in God’s own life. For survivors of abuse there is a special tenderness to this because in what they have gone through they share the experience of being *similar* to Jesus, who has been subjected to abuse also. So they can say tenderly to him, ‘we know what it’s like’, and they can hear tenderly from him: ‘I too know what it’s like’. There is a particular closeness here, a truly being *like* him, a sharing in his life in a heartfelt and tangible way.

There is a ‘*doing*’ dimension to the gift of divinisation also. If survivors share especially in who Jesus, a victim like them, *is*, they share also in what he *does* as he brings salvation to people now. This is because, although he alone saves, he does not save alone. He involves those he loves and saves in his own work of saving – here, of saving and re-including those pushed by clerical sexual abuse to the edges of the Church. Survivors, divinised and sharing in Jesus’ own life, are invited in their dignity to *act* with him too in the saving and re-including of other abused persons, whose pain they surely know best. This is a genuine mission of saving that can place survivors at the heart of the Church’s life again, saving with him whose cross repudiates the violence of abuse and whose love ‘enlists’ their help in his work – because only they know what it is really like to be robbed of the sense of salvation through abuse. Every person in the Church, bishops and religious superiors of abusers especially, is asked to be involved, today, in this salvific work of Jesus Christ. But no one is more effective in it than those who themselves have been abused because, like Jesus, they know the pain involved. Thus, their receiving salvation can involve them in bringing salvation to others like themselves – because they do this with Jesus, who alone saves, but who never saves alone.

Fr Jim Corkery is an Irish Jesuit who taught systematic theology at the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy in Dublin for more than twenty years. In the autumn of 2014, he moved to the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where he is a professor in the Departments of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology and was also, until 2020, active in the St Peter Favre Centre for Formators to the Priesthood and Religious Life.

Among his current areas of research/writing are the following: contemporary approaches to the resurrection; the theologies of Joseph Ratzinger, Karl Rahner, Avery Dulles and Elizabeth Johnson; the social and cultural dimensions of grace; the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council; and the attempt to re-think the theology of salvation in the light of the clerical sexual abuse crisis. He is also interested in Jesuit spirituality and history and is one of the associate editors of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (2017). Other writings of his include *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions and Legitimate Hopes* (2009) and, in 2010, a co-edited collection of essays with US Jesuit Thomas Worcester, entitled *The Papacy Since 1500: From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor*.

In Rome, he has worked with the Centre for Child Protection (CCP), teaching for its Diploma in the Safeguarding of Minors and guiding two doctoral students attempting to combine theology and safeguarding in their dissertations. Arising from his activity with the Centre, he has published two articles: 'Jesus and Children, Images of a Loving God' and 'Toward an Understanding of Salvation that Could be "Salvific" for Survivors of Sexual Abuse in the Church: An Exploration of the Notion of Representation in Joseph Ratzinger's Soteriology' in Karlijn Demasure, Katharina A. Fuchs and Hans Zollner (eds), *Safeguarding: Reflecting on Child Abuse, Theology and Care* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018, pp. 5–15 and 17–35, respectively).

While he teaches at the Gregorian University he lives at the Collegio Internazionale del Gesù, a community that is home to more than fifty Jesuit theology students from all over the world.

Robust Theologies of Childhood: Their Role in Safeguarding Children, Strengthening Theology and Empowering Action

Marcia J. Bunge PhD

What is the significance of a robust and biblically based theology of childhood for safeguarding children and strengthening Christian theology and the church's work in the world?



Hello! I am Marcia Bunge and I am here to speak about ‘Robust Theologies of Childhood: Their Role in Safeguarding Children, Strengthening Theology and Empowering Action.’

I am a theologian who did my graduate work at the University of Chicago and in Tübingen, Germany. Throughout graduate school, I did not study or write about children, and none of my professors did. Then and often today, the subject of children is considered marginal in theology: a subject perhaps for religious educators but ‘beneath’ serious theologians!

However, once I had children and started teaching, I began wondering why theologians pay so little attention to children. After all, children make up almost one-third of the human population. Like adults, they have ideas and are active in the world. Like adults, they suffer and are victims of violence. So this is when my theology shifted and became less ‘adult-centered’ and more ‘child-attentive,’ and I quickly discovered, as my publications show, that childhood is not a marginal but rather a central topic in the Bible, the Church and world religions!

One key take-away from my research is that robust theologies are foundational – key – to helping children thrive! Strong commitments to children and strong theologies go hand in hand!

So the three-fold aim of my remarks is: to provide one example of a robust theology of childhood; show some ways theologies of childhood can empower the church to safeguard children and help them thrive; and emphasise the need

to strengthen attention to children across theology – across all doctrines and practices. As I share my ideas, I invite you to reflect on: How might a strong theology of childhood empower you and your church to help children thrive?

Part One

Robust, biblically based theology of childhood

Let's look, first, at a robust, biblically based theology of childhood.

Theologies of childhood raise two important questions: (1) What are our *conceptions of children* – our views and assumptions? (2) What are our *commitments to them* – our obligations and responsibilities? Our conceptions of and commitments to children are highly interrelated and vary over time and across cultures, and since our conceptions of children affect our treatment of them, we all need to reflect seriously on both questions.

Through my work,² I have found that although Christians in the past and today have often viewed children in narrow and even destructive ways, the Bible expresses six insightful and central perspectives on children and our obligations to them. By holding these six perspectives in tension (rather than in isolation), we can broaden our conception of children and strengthen our commitments to them in families and all areas of the church.

First, the Bible depicts children as gifts of God and sources of joy who ultimately come from God and belong to God. Thus, adults are to delight in and be grateful for children. Many passages in the Bible speak of children as signs of God's blessing who bring us 'joy and gladness' (Lk 1:14, Jn 16:21).

Second, the Bible affirms that children are whole and complete human beings who are made in the image of God. Thus, adults are to treat children with dignity and respect. The basis of this claim is Genesis 1:27, which states that God made humankind, male and female, in God's image. Thus, children, like adults, are fully human. As the ancient theologian Cyprian said, all people, even infants, are 'alike and equal' and share a 'divine and spiritual equality'.³

Third, the Bible emphasises that children are also orphans, neighbours and strangers; they are among the most voiceless and vulnerable people on the planet, and they are often victims of injustice. Thus, we are commanded to provide for, protect, and seek justice not just for our children but for all children.

Fourth, the Bible views children as developing beings who need instruction and guidance; and adults are to bring up children in the faith, helping them to love God and their neighbours as themselves. Several biblical texts address these responsibilities, such as the famous lines in Deuteronomy: You shall talk

about God's commands with your children 'when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise' (Deut 6:7).

Fifth, the Bible conveys children are more than learners; they are also active and imaginative social agents with growing moral capacities and responsibilities who, like adults, sometimes miss the mark (or sin against themselves or others). Adults are to model for children compassion and accountability and cultivate with them practices of mutual confession, forgiveness and renewal. Children are sinned against by peers, parents, and other individuals as well as unjust social systems. As they grow and develop, children also begin bearing some degree of responsibility for their own actions. So it is important to talk openly with children about loving relationships, wrongdoing and injustices.

Sixth, the Bible also claims that children are often models of faith for adults, spirit-filled and endowed with unique strengths, gifts and talents to contribute to the common good now and in the future. Thus, we are to listen to and learn from them; to honour their current relationship with God, contributions, and vocations; and to provide all children with an excellent education. In the gospels, Jesus lifts up children as paradigms of receiving God's reign (Mk 10:13-16), and the book of Acts declares that God's Spirit is poured out 'upon all flesh', including sons and daughters (Acts 2:17; cf. Jl 2:28-32). As Catholic theologian Karl Rahner claimed, children are a 'sacred trust,' and God's expansive grace touches every aspect of the universe and their lives.⁴

Holding all six perspectives in tension

A strong, biblically based theology of childhood holds all six perspectives in tension rather than isolation and provides a rich view of children and adult-child relationships.

However, if we neglect any of the six biblical themes and focus on one or two alone, then our conceptions of children become narrow and distorted, and we risk treating children in inadequate and harmful ways. We can give many examples of such dangers in the Church today and in the past.

For example:

- If we view children as primarily gifts of God and models of faith, then we might delight in them but neglect teaching and guiding them.
- Or if we view children as primarily sinful and in need of instruction, then we might teach them lessons but neglect learning from children and delighting in them. We might even physically punish, harm, and abuse them.

- Or if we view children primarily as victims, then we might neglect hearing their own voices and recognising their own strengths and agency.

In any context (whether churches, schools, or sports facilities): If we neglect to view children as fully human, or if our vision is ‘adult-centered’, then we might emphasise the needs and reputations of adults and our institutions, and as we see in history and our own backyards worldwide, we might even abuse, starve, or kill children; or bury them in unmarked or mass graves.

We can all think of many other examples of such dangers and forms of suffering and abuse in my context, yours, and every part of the world!

We can help avoid these and other dangers and help children thrive by developing robust theologies of childhood that hold together these six and other biblical perspectives ... by cultivating theologies that hold onto biblical paradoxes and seeing children as:

- Fully human and made in the image of God yet also still developing and in need of instruction and guidance;
- Gifts of God and sources of joy yet also social agents capable of selfish actions;
- Vulnerable and in need of protection yet also strong, insightful, and models of faith and endowed with gifts to serve others.

With robust theologies of childhood, we switch from mono-focal and adult-centered to multi-focal, child-inclusive lenses! And we strengthen our commitments to and relationships with children.

Part Two

Implications of robust theologies of childhood

Now lets think about some Implications of robust theologies of childhood.

What happens if we see children from this multi-dimensional biblical perspective? If we embrace robust theologies of childhood that honour children’s full humanity?

Theologies of childhood: expand our view of and commitments to children; remind us that protecting children requires honouring their full humanity and more proactively helping them thrive; and call and empower us to do so in many ways! Here are just a few examples:

- First, a theology of childhood compels us to prevent and respond to child abuse both at church and in the home by having in place clear, substantive policies and practices in the church and by more proactively preventing child abuse and neglect in the home (where it mainly occurs). We can do so by supporting families in our midst; addressing their basic needs; and teaching and preaching about respect for children, the realities of abuse and neglect in the home and the dangers of corporal punishment.
- Second, if we honour children, we will help them thrive by strengthening spiritual formation (at church and at home). We nurture faith and cultivate resilience by more intentionally honoring children’s ideas, questions and relation to God and building meaningful intergenerational relations. We do so through a variety of practices, such as caring conversations, stories, service projects and carrying out spiritual practices at home and at church.
- Third, we also help children thrive and cultivate resilience by honouring children’s agency, wisdom and contributions, such as by more intentionally offering children and young people leadership opportunities, listening to their ideas and being inspired by them.
- Fourth, if we embrace a theology of childhood, we will attend more carefully to children’s unique vulnerabilities and intersectional forms of suffering. We will, for example, understand the more harmful effects on children (vs. adults) of risks, such as air and water pollution; malnutrition; exploitation related to aspects of their identity, such as gender, race, nationality; and harsh conditions in refugee camps or factories.
- Fifth, if we embrace a robust theology of childhood, then we will address these and other forms of suffering by strengthening the Church’s public advocacy for all children, particularly by enlarging our vision beyond children’s immediate needs or the unborn and more intentionally:
 - Addressing poverty and systemic injustices in education, health care;
 - Ensuring ‘pro-life’ efforts are ‘pro-child’ and ‘pro-life’ across life-span.

We can do so by advancing child advocacy efforts (through secular, faith-based, and joint initiatives) and by supporting faith-based organisations that work with children at risk.

Part Three

The need to strengthen Christian theology to be child-attentive across doctrines and practices

I want to share a new idea for some of you: the need to strengthen Christian theology to be child-attentive across doctrines and practices.

Robust theologies of childhood call us to expand our vision and to rethink not only our views of children but also many central doctrines and practices in the light of attention to children and childhood and to develop what some of theologians are calling child-attentive theologies.

Like feminist, black, or other liberating theologies, ‘child-attentive theologies’ (or what some call ‘child theologies’) build on traditional and diverse sources of theology (such as the Bible, the tradition, insights from other disciplines), and they re-think and re-examine a range of central doctrines and practices with attention to the experience of the marginalised or exploited – in this case children. And in this way, they enrich theology as a whole and for the whole church!

For example, if we honoured the full humanity of children, then we would need to rethink and revise our understandings of:

- The priesthood and ordained ministry (examining their roles, authority, celibacy);
- The nature of the Church (recognising children are part of the body of Christ);
- The Holy Spirit (recognising children are also spirit-filled); or
- Discipline (emphasising it is not the same as the corporal punishment of children).⁵

By re-examining these and other doctrine and practices we would enrich theology as a whole and empower the Church’s work in the world! Twelve theologians from six continents offer more examples in my new book, *Child Theology: Diverse Approaches and Global Perspectives* (Orbis Books).

Furthermore, if we honoured children’s full humanity, then theological education would include attention to children across the curriculum: not just in courses on religious education but also the Bible, Church, history, pastoral care and systematics.

Conclusion

In these ways and more, robust theologies of childhood empower the Church to safeguard children and help them thrive! Where children thrive, the Church and communities thrive!

Robust theologies remind us that children are central – not marginal – to all aspects of Christian faith and life in the Church worldwide and in all areas of theology.

I invite you to keep exploring more implications of theologies of childhood for helping children, the Church and communities in your context to thrive!

Thanks for joining me, and I will leave you with three questions for reflection:

1. What biblical or theological conceptions of and commitments to children would you add to the list of six?
2. How might robust theologies of childhood that honour the full humanity of children empower you to safeguard children and help them thrive?
3. Are child-attentive theologies important? What doctrines or practices might need rethinking in the light of attention to children?

I invite you to write down one take-away!

Notes

¹ See Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *Child Theology: Diverse Perspectives and Global Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021); Marcia J. Bunge, Reidar Aasgaard, and Merethe Roos, eds., *Nordic Childhoods 1750–1960: From Folk Beliefs to Pippi Longstocking* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018); *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Don Browning and Marcia J. Bunge, eds., *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 2009); Marcia J. Bunge, Terence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

² I have written extensively about these six central perspectives in several articles about robust theologies of childhood, and you can learn more there. See, for example, Marcia J. Bunge, 'The Dignity and Complexity of Children: Constructing Christian Theologies of Childhood,' in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, 43–68 (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Marcia J. Bunge, 'A More Vibrant Theology of Children,' *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* (Summer, 2003): 11–19; Marcia J. Bunge, 'Retrieving a Biblically Informed View of Children: Implications for Religious Education, a Theology of Childhood, and Social Justice,' *Lutheran Education* 139, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 72–87; Marcia J. Bunge, 'The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood,' *Journal of Religion* 86.4 (October, 2006):

549–578; and Marcia J. Bunge, ‘Conceptions of and Commitments to Children: Biblical Wisdom for Families, Congregations, and the Worldwide Church,’ in *Faith Forward (Volume Three): Launching a Revolution through Ministry with Children, Youth, and Families*, edited by David M. Csinos (Wood Lake, 2018), 94–112.

³ Cyprian, ‘To Fidus: On the Baptism of Infants,’ in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., revised by A. Cleveland Coxe (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 5:353–354.

⁴ Karl Rahner, ‘Gedanken zu einer Theologie der Kindheit,’ in *Schriften zur Theologie* 8 (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1966), 313–29; trans. David Bourke as ‘Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,’ in *Theological Investigations* 8 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 33–50.

⁵ For more on the dangers of the corporal punishment of children and rethinking Christian understandings of discipline, see *Decolonizing Discipline: Children, Corporal Punishment, Christian Theologies, and Reconciliation*, Valerie Michaelson and Joan E. Durrant, eds., (University of Manitoba Press, 2020), including my two chapters: Marcia J. Bunge, ‘The Significance of Robust Theologies of Childhood for Honouring Children’s Full Humanity and Rejecting Corporal Punishment,’ 108–122; and ‘Rethinking Christian Theologies of Discipline and Discipleship,’ 152–160.

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Her current area of research is perspectives on children and childhood in world religions, and she has published six volumes on the subject including *The Child in Christian Thought* (Eerdmans, 2001) and *The Child in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2008). Her most recent book, *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (Orbis Books, 2021), brings together Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox theologians from around the world who re-examine central Christian doctrines and practices with attention to children.

As a theologian, scholar and child advocate, Dr Bunge is engaged in several ecumenical and inter-religious academic projects and advocacy efforts devoted to children and child well-being. She regularly speaks about her work in the United States and abroad, and has participated in child-focused conferences and consultations on six continents.

A Theology of Safeguarding

Justin Humphreys

As a Christian safeguarding organisation, thirtyone:eight has worked with an underpinning theology of safeguarding for many years. In 2020, following our rebrand and renaming to thirtyone:eight, we commissioned respected author and theologian Dr Krish Kandiah to work with us to develop a revised theology of safeguarding that succinctly articulated our reason for being and inspired the way in which we work. The following is the result of that work.



Part 1 – Theological Background

Safeguarding must never become synonymous with an obligatory bureaucratic tick-box exercise. Theology must never be perceived as a dusty, irrelevant pastime. If these unhelpful stereotypes are accepted, then a theology of safeguarding risks becoming detached from reality and irrelevant to our day-to-day lives.

Theology is as vital to the Church as a compass is to sailors in a storm. Safeguarding is the true north of all the helpful service the Church has to offer. Together they must set the direction of all Christian ministry: grounding it with a mandate, a motivation and a mission.

Scripture tells us that in order to stay true to its divinely directed course, the Church needs the word-based ministry of apostles, teachers, pastors, prophets and evangelists (Eph 4:9-15). Amidst the storms of distraction and winds of unhelpful trends and fads, the Church charts its way forward first and foremost by holding on the word of God, rightly understood and properly applied through vitally relevant theological reflection, discernment and insight.

Woven throughout scripture, the Holy Trinity commends to God's people a trinity of God's special concern: widows, orphans and strangers. There are more direct and indirect references to helping these vulnerable groups than there are to tithing, communion and baptism. In fact, there are over two thousand references to matters of justice and injustice in the Bible; of which the

principles of safeguarding are included. Care for those in distress is included in the Mosaic law in the Old Testament (Ex 22:21-22), and in the New Testament becomes the definition of authentic religion (Jas 1:27). Genuine fasting involves sharing food with the hungry and acceptable worship has to include providing shelter for the wanderer (Is 58). Even more starkly, in Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats, hospitality towards the vulnerable is the signifier of being saved (Mt 25:31-46). Even this very brief theological survey shows safeguarding to be at the very heart of scripture.

Since caring for vulnerable people is at the heart of our scriptures, it is a disgrace that not only has the Church often failed to adequately care but has also allowed abuse and neglect to take place on our watch. Jesus himself gave the sternest of warnings to those who fail to care for those who are vulnerable. It would be better for us to have a large millstone hung around our necks and to be drowned in the depths of the sea than to cause those little ones Jesus cares for to stumble (Mt 18:6). The Church has to do everything it can to heed this warning and to remove stumbling blocks for children and other vulnerable people experiencing Christian compassion. It must engage purposefully and wholeheartedly with theology and safeguarding, ensuring they underpin all our ministry to all people and the creation of the safer places that they expect and deserve.

A robust theology of safeguarding is a gift to the Church. Like an unbreakable compass in a storm, it keeps us travelling safely in the right direction without deviation or distraction.

Part 2 – Our Mandate, Motivation and Mission

Thirtyone:eight as an organisation has tied itself to the biblical command of Proverbs 31:8 to advocate and care for those who are or may be vulnerable. The mandate, the motivation and the mission of the organisation is clearly founded therefore, on the Christian faith and on scripture.

The book of Proverbs has been designed to offer pithy aphorisms and memorable phrases to help transfer God-inspired wisdom to the reader. However, there is merit in checking that this verse reflects the wider frame of chapter, book and the grand narrative of the Bible in terms of its foundation as a theology of safeguarding.

Proverbs 31:8 forms part of the advice given by a mother to her royal son at the end of the book of Proverbs. There is symmetry here, as the book of Proverbs begins with advice from a royal father to his son. This beautiful

bookending depicts both the family and the workplace as the classroom for the passing on of wisdom, shows that both men and women are to take the lead, and identifies wisdom's mandate, motivation and mission relating to safeguarding and the creation of safer places.

Let's look at these three elements of Mandate, Motivation and Mission.

1. The Mandate: Every Generation must play its part in caring for vulnerable people

We believe that there is a clear biblical mandate offered to us in the book of Proverbs. It ends as it began with wisdom being passed on from one generation to the next. This model is preserved in scripture to authorise us to teach wisdom afresh for every generation. There are three important considerations for a theology of safeguarding based on this intergenerational mandate. Let's look at these in turn.

a) Spiritual and familial connections

King Lemuel's mother addresses her son as the fruit of her womb, but also as the answer to her prayers. He is referred to as 'my son', but his name 'Lemuel' means 'belonging to God'. This double parallelism is instructive. Children are both a gift of nature and of divine providence. We have both a human and a divine origin story. All human beings have important familial connections and spiritual connections.

Too often familial connections are undervalued. For example, it is not unusual for well-meaning Christians to support the unnecessary institutionalisation of children in orphanages or children's villages severing their links with birth families. Sometimes youth and children's ministry pay scant attention to the priority of responsibility given to parents in the formation and well-being of their children. The spiritual connections can be under-valued too. Ministry to vulnerable people can often focus exclusively on practical help: providing food for the hungry, or social support for the lonely, for example, rather than adopting a holistic approach which includes spiritual well-being and protection from harm. Well-being and safety are therefore essential ingredients within our ministry to all people.

b) Victim/survivor and voice considerations

The mother in the Proverbs story encourages her son to listen. Elsewhere in the book, children are exhorted to resist folly and pursue wisdom for themselves. Children are entrusted with a role to play in discerning and

pursuing wisdom and justice for themselves. It is to be understood that children are not just passive receivers of education and information but active participants in transformation. Children have agency. Children's views are to be heard and respected just as much as adults.

This is an important consideration for a theology of safeguarding. Those who are vulnerable are not to be seen just as victims (or even survivors) but as those with a voice that deserves to be heard. Victims and survivors have their own decision-making opportunities and indeed with their unique and personal experience can be effective advocates for others and pursuers of justice in their own right if empowered to do so. Safeguarding with this intergenerational understanding from Proverbs is a partnership: not something done to the vulnerable, or about them, but with them and for them. Speaking up for them and alongside them is therefore a deeply biblical principle.

c) Prohibitive and positive concerns

King Lemuel's mother takes responsibility for instilling a concern for those who are vulnerable, oppressed and poor into her child's conscience and imagination. She offers a critique of negative behaviours but also offers positive pursuits to aspire to as a solution-focused approach to their needs.

Safeguarding policies and procedures can often be seen as negative documents listing all the things that should and shouldn't be done and seeking to minimise risk. This is important, but can be one of the reasons that safeguarding has negative associations in many people's minds. Proverbs, by balancing out the prohibitive and the aspirational, offers a helpful model for framing safeguarding conversations.

Safeguarding is not just about ensuring people are not mistreated, but should inspire the Church to engage in constructive action on their behalf to reduce vulnerability and any risks to them. We need protective factors against harm and against the negative treatment of all people, but we also need positive factors that seek to find ways to pursue justice and well-being for all concerned. Both aspects can have a formative influence and should be key factors in intergenerational ministry. In this we see both the need for preventative and responsive efforts towards creating safer places for all.

2. The Motivation: Every leader must pursue God's purpose and priorities for vulnerable people

The wisdom given in Proverbs to a king challenges all leaders. The Bible's unequivocal articulation of God's concern for vulnerable people should

motivate Christians to take safeguarding responsibilities very seriously, especially those who are in positions of power, influence and responsibility. There are three important implications for leadership that comes from this theology of safeguarding.

a) The nature of leadership

King Lemuel is reminded by his mother that leadership brings with it the temptation to forget or take advantage of the vulnerable. Instead, he is to use that position of power to speak up and act on behalf of those who are vulnerable. This is a common theme in the Bible's teaching on leadership: it is often explained in terms of servanthood. For example, Jesus, after criticising the way that many leaders use their power for self-aggrandisement, argues that, for his followers, leadership is about serving others, even to the point of laying down their lives for the sake of those they care for (Mk 10:45).

The expression of authenticity in leadership also requires that leaders have a desire to search for and achieve a deep understanding of themselves; their personal faults and challenges as well as their skills, gifts and motivations (Ps 139:23-4). Any areas of one's character that may become negative or harmful towards others must be dealt with such that their interactions with others encourage selflessness and human flourishing for all.

b) The priority of leadership

King Lemuel, like the other kings of the Old Testament, was supposed to represent and emulate God. In Psalm 68, God is described in terms of his power and majesty, but this description doesn't stop there. It goes on to include his concern for the safety and well-being of vulnerable people: he is a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, and he sets the lonely in families (Ps 68:4-6). This is the model for all in positions of power: nobody is too important to care for the vulnerable.

Godly, authentic and just leadership will follow God's priorities and demonstrate a commitment to pursue a duty of care for the lonely, destitute and vulnerable. Because biblical leadership calls for power to be used on behalf of those most in need, safeguarding and justice more broadly, must be fundamental motivational factors for all Christian leaders, reflected in the way they use their time, develop their policies, treat those around them and build their churches, organisations, businesses or communities.

c) The focus of leadership

King Lemuel's mother makes some stringent demands on her son. He cannot live like others around him. The temptations for a powerful man in a patriarchal society, here indulging in women and alcohol, are not appropriate for his kingly station. They would be distractions from his primary focus and calling to care for those who are vulnerable. Lemuel's mother calls him to demonstrate a shift in leadership style and focus that breaks from the norm and creates a new way.

While safeguarding is often seen as merely a necessary administrative function, Proverbs 31:8 challenges leaders to give greater significance to its role in their lives and ministries. Placing the needs and interests of vulnerable people at the heart of our ministry and mission ensures that safeguarding becomes an integral and essential element of our wider activities rather than an add-on that can be met with a wide variation in commitment.

Keeping the focus on good safeguarding practice in ministry can enable leaders to withstand temptation, pursue God's priorities and get stuck into the business of caring for all people, especially those who are vulnerable.

3. The Mission: Every means must be employed to keep vulnerable people safe, heard and noticed

The wisdom given throughout Proverbs is very practical and has universal application. When instructing Christians how to put faith into practice, the Bible reiterates these practical steps of caring for vulnerable people and those in distress. There are three important functional aspects of the outworking of the theology of safeguarding.

a) Advocacy for vulnerable people

King Lemuel is commanded to speak up for the voiceless. This theme of advocacy for the vulnerable is repeated throughout the book of Proverbs (Prov 29:7; 22:22-3; 21:13). The destitute, vulnerable and oppressed must not be forgotten or ignored. Their cause is our cause.

Throughout the Bible, God is attentive to the cries of the poor. He heard the blood of Abel that cried out from the earth, and the cries of his people when they were in captivity or exile. God commands that his people are similarly attentive to the cries of the poor. But this must lead to action. Advocacy is about giving voice to others and their concerns. One way we do this is by making good use of our opportunities and using our own voice to speak up on behalf of others. Another way is to give a platform to others, enabling and empowering their voice to be heard.

b) Defending the rights of vulnerable people

King Lemuel is instructed to make sure due legal processes are applied to the marginalised, oppressed and vulnerable. His position as king at the time meant he was uniquely placed to expedite this, but engagement with judicial and legal processes is available to all in a democratic society. Proverbs, like the rest of the Bible, refuses to allow for a sacred-secular divide between a leader's responsibility before God to care for the needy and to engage in civic legal processes. Therefore, engagement with legal or political processes is no less spiritual or important than other ministries. Indeed, it is imperative they go hand in hand. Where there are safeguarding policies in place in a nation there is good reason to engage with them and where these systems are not adequately protecting vulnerable people we must seek to reform them through active and purposeful engagement with policy-makers.

c) Dignify the destitute

King Lemuel is to speak up for and defend 'all' who are vulnerable. The goal must surely be that all in our communities receive fair treatment and protection. We cannot pick and choose between people or groups of people based on our own preferences or prejudices. The Bible teaches we are to treat all with equal dignity: old and young, male and female, black and white, family and enemy. We are not to distinguish between the so-called deserving and undeserving. All children, all widows, all homeless people, all those in poverty, all those without status in our country, all those with disabilities, all those victim to systemic and societal discrimination, all those who cannot feed or speak for themselves – whatever the reasons and situations for their vulnerabilities – must be safeguarded and the basis for their vulnerability understood and, where necessary, actively challenged.

Conclusion

The Bible gives us a clear mandate, motivation and mission to ensure that those who are or may be vulnerable are heard, defended and treated appropriately, effectively, fairly and compassionately. In our ministries, education, leadership, families and communities and in the attitudes and actions that underpin our systems and structures, we must speak up for them. Our theology must be worked out in best safeguarding practice for all – and in a way that models a justice-driven heart and the very nature of God as a just God.

With special thanks to Dr Krish Kandiah.

Justin is married with three adult children and lives in southwest England. He is chief executive (safeguarding) at thirtyone:eight, the leading independent Christian safeguarding charity in the UK. With a background in social work and church leadership, he has spent the past twenty-five years working in a variety of contexts and settings with vulnerable groups. He is a passionate advocate for justice and has dedicated his working life to the pursuit of protecting vulnerable people. He is a 'learning leader' committed to exploring and practising authentic and just leadership. Justin is also honorary lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of Chester, the current chair of the Christian Forum for Safeguarding (a national body of leading safeguarding professionals from across the Christian denominations in the UK), and founder/initiator of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Safeguarding in Faith Communities. He holds an MSc in Child Protection and Strategic Management and a BSc (Hons) in Social Work Studies.

Epilogue

John B. Morgan

Father Zollner, our first contributor, sets out the parameters we need to address in any theological reflection concerning the impact of clerical sexual abuse that has so damaged the credibility of our Institutional Church. These are very wide, taking account of something new – fully listening to those abused, their families and those in close contact within environments wherever abuse has been encountered. The whole area of our understanding of Church, its structures and liturgies, of priesthood, of salvation, need re-examination, going deeper still to consider who we are as humans and who we should be as Christians.



Within the constraints of a small number of short essays, it will be appreciated that much, of necessity, will be left as yet unwritten. We thank the generosity of all our contributors for sharing their time and expertise in pointing out some sure paths we must travel, theologically, to the goal of becoming, in human terms, both a more safe Church and one where the healing of the wounds of the abused can be more effectively administered.

Words on healing, on the inherent dignity of those violated with no regard to human rights, on some key considerations which lead to a true theology of the child and childhood, all feature. You will have found important expressions, perhaps new to you, on crucial aspects of holistically caring for each other in an extended form and deeper understanding of pastoral theology, on the centrality of divinisation in understanding salvation and on a scripture-based theology of safeguarding.

Our first contributor also posed two topics that should be a priority – how do we think about redemption and what does it mean to those wounded that we talk of Jesus Christ as their saviour? From the vantage point I have had for over twenty years, I will seek, in this short theological reflection, to point towards an answer.

Redemption and salvation – a flawed paradigm

Using them as interchangeable terms, understanding of redemption or salvation has been dominated, in Western theology over the last millennium,

by an understanding that the death of Jesus on the cross is necessary for human salvation, to such an extent that if Jesus had not died humanity would still be estranged from God. This theory comes from a thesis of St Anselm, presented in 1098. It is grounded in the thinking of the feudal world of Anselm's time. Civil society was then broadly structured in such way that good order relied on respect for one's feudal overlord shown by obedience to his word. Disobedience or other forms of disrespect for the feudal lord's wishes required some form of satisfaction or punishment due. When humans do not render to God his due, they sin. As sin offends God, whose dignity is infinite, a commensurate infinite level of satisfaction is required. None but God can make an infinite level of satisfaction. This explains, for Anselm, why Christ as fully human and fully divine, becomes man. As Christ is sinless, he did not deserve to die but chose to deliver himself up to death 'for God's honour' and, in so doing, gave to his Father what he did not owe. The satisfaction he paid was infinite, greater than all debt owed by humanity for its sins.

The theory led to deep personal devotion to the crucified Jesus. It was later woven into teaching of the Council of Trent (on the Mass and ordained priesthood). Popular preaching presented that the cross was necessary to such degree that it eclipsed and ignored the astounding mercy of God. Such developments became widespread and influential in devotional contexts and distorted Anselm's original intent by painting a false picture of God as demanding sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own son, as the price to be paid for human sinfulness.

If, as often appears the case, the starting point for understanding the nature of God is that promoted by the flawed theology attributable to Anselm in the minds of those wounded by clerical abuse, it cannot be allowed continue.

Redemption and salvation – as a theology of accompaniment

A theology of accompaniment draws from a range of biblical sources to renew the biblical sense of the core Christian belief in redemption and salvation. It starts with the biblical idea that the living God, who has created the world, is also the redeemer and saviour of the world, merciful to all.

It is a theology that concentrates, with the conviction of faith, on the saving presence of the gracious and merciful God, freely and faithfully given, come what may, to all his people who call on him. It is understanding redemption and salvation as the living God, accompanying humanity in all its sinfulness, its universal suffering and death, with overflowing and immeasurable mercy – the God Jesus called 'Abba' and whose coming reign he preached. It is the same God that Mary, in the first verse of her 'Magnificat' called God 'my Saviour', and that Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, exclaims in the first verse of his

'Benedictus' prayer 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, he has visited his people and redeemed them'. It was not a new concept of God that Jesus brought but, through his life, death and resurrection, a new setting for God's redemptive will for the world.

The theology of accompaniment I outline has been heavily influenced by the writing of the American theologian Elizabeth Johnson, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.¹ As this theology is substantially contained in the theology of Second Isaiah (Is 40–55), a short note on this work is appropriate.

Second Isaiah (Is 40–55)

More than five hundred years before Jesus' death on the cross, Second Isaiah proclaimed that God was redeeming and saving Israel and forgiving their sins out of the infinite depths of divine compassion, a God forever faithful who does not need anyone to die to be merciful. A prayerful reading of Second Isaiah reveals an emphasis on God, as redeemer, forgiving sin, freeing captives, conveying justice and bringing salvation to the world. The early disciples drew extensively on this theology to understand Jesus' mission and death, particularly on Second Isaiah's four 'servant songs'. They saw the connection between Jesus and 'the servant' of the songs, just as they did with the paschal lamb.

Isaiah 40 opens with the beautiful motif – 'Comfort, comfort my people says your God' (Is 40:1).

Throughout, God repeatedly expresses himself as our redeemer, for example, 'now thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'. (Is 43:1). A multitude of similar assertions is repeated. The response called for is trust, as God will overcome every obstacle to restore his people to their life in God's covenanted family. As the exile of the chosen people was interpreted as a punishment, the redemption also entails the forgiveness of sin for the individual and the whole community. For example, 'I am the one who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins' (Is 43:25).

The language of redeeming, as well as becoming associated with the act of saving, carried through to a wider meaning of a distinct sense of healing from sickness and restoration of health. In Hebrew the act of redeeming is motivated by divine mercy and compassion. So, we grow into the understanding of redemption and salvation as the active presence of God, in every moment, accompanying us in our concrete daily experience of life. 'I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands' (Is 49:16).

Conclusion: with some thought on a theology of the cross

Discarding Anselm's theory for a different understanding of divine mercy, underpinned by a theology of accompaniment, as sketched out, is what is appropriate for our times. It befits the wounded Church we journey with, more benefits the concerned need in safeguarding children, the vulnerable and the needs of those heinously damaged by clerical sexual abuse. It ought to be supplemented with a theology of the cross.

Within its framework we can perhaps best interpret the cross of Jesus, with his agonised death being such a part of our salvation history, as placing the unconditional self-giving love of God in intimate contact not only within the personal history of every human, but also with the resurrection of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as our hope and our future.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem just before his arrest and death, he proclaimed, 'when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all people to myself' (Jn 12:32). I am taken with Cardinal Ratzinger's explanation that this statement indicates the whole direction to which John's gospel points – that the crucifixion appears as a process of opening, for every person to be drawn into the embrace of Jesus Christ in order to arrive at union with him – the true goal of humanity.² This understands Christ as essentially the man for others. As he explains, the future of man lies in 'being for', and being a Christian means essentially changing over from 'being for' oneself to 'being for' one another. It involves abandonment of self-centredness in order to follow the crucified Jesus and exist for others.

To talk of Jesus as Saviour, I end this reflection with a sentiment of Elizabeth Johnson's which might prove helpful for our brothers and sisters wounded particularly by clerical sex abuse – that in Jesus Christ crucified we are gifted by God with an historical yet enduring encounter with the mercy of God which impels us to conversion, sustained by hope of the resurrection of the flesh of all of us.

Notes

¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, New York: Orbis Books, 2019.

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990, part 2.

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