

# Healing the Soul of the Church: Ministers Facing their Own Histories of Abuse, Trauma and [1] Addiction

By  
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## Editor's Note:

**This article was written at the invitation of *Guest House Review* specifically for this issue. It is our hope that Church leaders, pastoral theologians, formation personnel, and spiritual directors will take up the issues raised here (and expanded upon in Grant's book with the same title; it is reviewed in our Updates section]. We invite them to continue the dialogue through essays submitted for publication in subsequent issues of *GH Review*.**

## Introduction

It is well known in the field of psychology that untreated victims of childhood abuse are much more likely themselves to abuse someone than are those without histories of abuse (Briere, 1989; Finkelhor, 1984). This issue, in conjunction with the Church's attitudes

towards sexuality and formation, creates a dangerous state of affairs. Keeping a significant number of Catholic ministers as unrecovered victims of childhood abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional) and trauma is an oversight of profound importance.

How histories of unresolved abuse and trauma are connected to clergy abuse should be fairly obvious. The untreated and unrecovered must find some way to contain the effects of their abuse. Due to the inadequate way in which the Church addresses matters related to sexuality, abuse and trauma, a majority of such ministers will turn to some form of addiction or compulsion in order to contain the many issues and tensions that are generated by unresolved trauma. As a consequence, the issue of clergy abuse raises questions about the overall health and soul of an institution that claims to represent God on earth. This article will be an attempt to address these issues.

As a psychologist my intention is to examine matters that are of concern to both the institution and the faithful. I am not a theologian. Theological issues will be left to the “experts,” and I invite these specialists to reflect upon the issues raised. My primary concern is to educate church members and leadership about the effects of unresolved abuse and trauma and to demonstrate how, if left unresolved, these issues will result in an institution and ministry that are characterized by abuse and addiction.

Raising awareness about these issues will, I hope, help many in ministry who are isolated, suffering in silence, ashamed about their sexuality, and using inappropriate means to deal with the effects of their abuse. At the same time it may minimize the possibility that these individuals will be manipulated or abused by other unrecovered victims who happen to be in power. Every victim of childhood abuse and trauma, be it in or outside of the Church, deserves to receive help and acquire some degree of healing.

## **Abuse Related Factors**

### **Prevalence of Abuse Victims in Ministry**

Twenty percent (20% or 1 in 5 persons) of the American population claims *some form* of [\[2\]](#) sexual abuse before age 18. Clergy and religious are not exempt from these statistics. In the case of church personnel, the actual statistics are probably *higher* due to the fact that a significant number of child abuse victims, coming out of religious backgrounds, are drawn

[3]

to ministry (Grant, 1994).

In the past a small number of vocational paths were chosen, in America and in other parts of the world, as a way to atone for a sense of perceived sin, redeeming the reputation of an abusive family, and avoiding much of the complexity and risk associated with interpersonal sexuality. Others chose to enter ministry in order to acquire educational opportunities, achieve social status, avoid the restrictions of patriarchal marriages and the incessant scrutiny of a homophobic culture that typically questions why adults of the same sex are living together.

Historically, many have been drawn to ministry in the hope that it would offer structure, economic stability, predictability and community. For many, these elements were absent in their families of origin and often their families were involved in some form of substance abuse, child abuse and domestic violence.

### **Abused in the Seminary or Novitiate**

To make matters more complicated a significant number of ministers not only enter ministry with histories of unresolved child abuse and trauma, but many of these same

[4]

individuals, along with others, are re-abused while in ministry. Being re-abused sexually in the novitiate and seminary by one's superiors and/or peers can have long-lasting repercussions. It increases the chance that victims will re-enact their abuse when they eventually acquire position and power.

### **A Lack of Proper Assessment and Screening**

Historically the majority of candidates have not been thoroughly screened in regard to their histories of trauma or abuse. The psychological reports generated by their assessments were, therefore, inaccurate. Well-trained and competent therapists, however, can usually elicit a candidate's abuse history and make appropriate recommendations and referrals. Most applicants or candidates in the past were not asked about their histories of abuse nor were they allowed to work on abuse issues while in the formation process. Every diocese and religious order needs to have a formal written policy that states how it responds to any candidate who chooses to disclose a history of abuse. Orders and dioceses need to decide

ahead of time whether they will provide or pay for therapy and continue to monitor the growth of such individuals as they approach final profession and ordination. Some orders and dioceses may decide that such candidates have to take time off and get therapy at their own expense before being reconsidered for candidacy. Whatever the policy, it needs to be formalized and presented to all candidates before they undergo any form of assessment. How comfortable the organization is with sexuality (for example, its willingness to openly address sexual matters as well as work towards healing abuse) conveys a great deal to candidates about whether it is safe or appropriate to disclose a history of abuse without fear of rejection or stigmatization. This author has yet to hear of any order or diocese that has a written policy on this matter that is made available to all candidates as soon as they declare a desire to enter ministry. As a result of not having such documents in place, most candidates will likely conceal their problematic histories, along with any unhealthy sexual proclivity until after ordination or final profession. Disclosures at this time are usually involuntary and the result of having sexually acted out, been involved in an addiction and/or committed an illegal act.

Candidates should not be “screened out” or eliminated due to a history of abuse or trauma. Rather every organization needs to determine its stance on how it will work with and accompany individuals *before matters of this kind are ever disclosed*. In this way, candidates can decide whether to share in full awareness of what the organization will do in response to their disclosures.

## **Wounded Healer**

It is well known in the healing professions and ministries, especially in the field of drug and alcohol rehabilitation, that the most effective counselors are those who have personally worked through the issues their clients are struggling with. The concept of a “wounded healer” goes back thousands of years to indigenous spiritualities and the original human healer, the *shaman*.

Treating the abused with care, concern and dignity not only affords them the chance to heal but more importantly the opportunity to transform themselves to the point of wanting to commit their lives to helping others. This is how the Spirit works. It is also “the way of the

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wound” and can engender an authentic spirituality of trauma.

Many people discover the Spirit in and through their traumatic injuries. Traumatic suffering is typically the only thing powerful enough to get people to re-evaluate their priorities. Most people are conditioned to compete, distinguish themselves, acquire status and as much power and wealth as possible. Trauma forces victims to confront socially endorsed versions of happiness (i.e., power, status, wealth). Trauma victims learn quickly that the aforementioned do not and cannot protect or sustain them when rendered helpless and powerless by overwhelming life-events.

In the wake of such experiences some search for something more substantial than the common fair. The majority of such individuals discover that only the love and care of others, along with being connected to something greater than themselves, provides the type of meaning, purpose and motivation that they are seeking. These people choose to become instruments of the Spirit, that is, to provide compassion and connection to anyone who has been shattered and isolated by human cruelty and the inherent lack of safety that underlies human existence.

## Reaching Out

There are many currently in ministry, whether they are struggling with an addiction, sexually acting out, or at risk of abusing another, who have yet to have their histories of abuse and trauma properly addressed. This state of affairs is not only unchristian but is also unhealthy on both a personal and institutional level.

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Most un-recovered victims of abuse have trouble trusting *anyone*, let alone someone in authority who has the power (potentially) to abuse them. They often don't feel safe, and

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have poor emotional and bodily boundaries, gravitate toward power in the mistaken belief that it will protect them from future abuse, or become aligned with power for the same reason.

The hierarchical and power-based structure of the Catholic Church is dependent upon, and grounded in, retaining generations of unrecovered abuse victims. In so doing it perpetrates a “culture of abuse” that allows it to exert control over its personnel. The institutional

church needs to heal itself in many areas before it can regain its health and re-establish credibility with the Faithful. A vital need mentioned in the Introduction is to reach out to and provide healing for ministers abused as children and adolescents, along with those who sustained abuse in adult ministries. For this to happen the Church needs to 1) acknowledge the extent of abuse within its ranks, and 2) make a commitment to develop more collegial and humane ways of relating to its personnel.

## Church Culture

The core of the problem, in this author's opinion, is an institutional culture grounded in power and abuse, combined with inadequate formation practices and unhealthy attitudes towards human sexuality.

The institution's culture is authoritarian, hierarchical, power-based, homophobic, sexually phobic, misogynistic and duplicitous. It is **authoritarian** in the sense that it continues to expect its personnel and laity – no matter how well-educated, informed or mature – to follow the directives of male clerical leadership without question.

It is **hierarchical** in that rank, and the power associated with rank, dictates the power of a pronouncement, rather than its cogency and merit. A lack of accountability further ensconces a system in which some have unlimited power and are beyond criticism or reproach.

It is **homophobic** in the most complicated way. In addition to having a high percentage of ministers, including bishops and cardinals, who are homosexual, the Church continues to hold a policy that homosexuals are disordered and the sexual expression of this orientation is considered an abomination in the eyes of both God and Church. To add insult to injury, pedophiles and homosexuals are often considered to be one and the same, and are blamed

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by the hierarchy for most, if not all, of the child abuse perpetrated by male Church ministers. The Church's stance on homosexuality alone should be enough to expose the institution's hypocrisy and lack of health on matters related to human sexuality and Christian morality.

It is **sexually phobic** in that it is afraid of human sexuality on several levels. Sexuality has been, and still continues to be, conceived as rooted in sin, exists primarily for procreative purposes, and is a major threat to the celibate priesthood. A missed opportunity is the lack

of an official pronouncement on human sexuality that would actually help Catholics approach and express their sexuality in a way that reveres human embodiment and interpersonal intimacy, while bringing them closer to both God and salvation.

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The Church is **misogynistic**, despite the cult of Mary. The Church continues to characterize women (all the way back to Eve) as temptresses and inferior. This is in spite of the fact that religious women, particularly in America, keep the institutional Church running and afloat.

The institution is **duplicitous** in that its public *persona* regarding sexuality, money, avarice and power is radically different from the one that operates outside public view. In spite of its many pastoral ministries, mostly run by religious orders, the clerical Church is committed to worldly power, wealth, indulgence and intrigue on many levels. As a result, the public and private lives of many Church ministers are radically inconsistent. Most of what is seen in public attempts to fit some sort of Christian and celibate ideal of equalitarianism, health, compassion and decorum. The remaining aspects of human nature are left to be worked out or expressed in private and behind closed doors.

The above dynamics send many in the direction of duplicity, hypocrisy and addiction. Not allowed to work through the many interpersonal and developmental challenges that are part and parcel of the maturation process, along with an avoidance of childhood wounds, a significant number of ministers turn toward addiction and/or some form of inappropriate sexual expression in order to manage internal conflicts and unresolved needs. Such movements are done with the express purpose of attempting to cope with the fact of being ill-prepared to deal with demands of their jobs, along with the challenges of their interior and interpersonal lives.

## **Waves of Abuse and Sexual Acting Out**

A quick look at the full range of abuse issue raises several additional concerns regarding the health of the institution and its personnel. The extent of abuse on the part of Catholic clergy and religious does not stop with the abuse of children by male ministers. In fact there are several additional “waves” of abuse that have been breaking on shores all over the world but which the Church has worked quite hard at keeping out of the press and public awareness.

The Second Wave involves religious women who, like their male counterparts, have sexually, physical, emotionally and spiritually abused both children and vulnerable adults.

Wave Three involves the sexual abuse and assault of religious women by priests and religious.

Wave Four, as mentioned in an earlier section, involves seminarians and novices who have been abused by their peers and superiors while in the seminary and novitiate.

Wave Five involves the abuse of several disempowered populations that have yet to reach the “complaint window,” such as the blind, deaf, indigenous and refugee communities.

Wave Six includes a number of priests and religious, both male and female, who are

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involved in other forms of sexual acting out and/or are caught in the throes of some form of sexual addiction.

Wave Seven is the most damaging of all because it challenges the Church’s entire credibility. This Wave involves a significant number of men and women who are not

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celibate.

## **Handling Controversy and Scandal**

To make matters even worse the institutional Church has not been honest or transparent in the face of any matter that threatens to contradict its public image, for example, matters related to scandal, controversy and dissent. In addition, its legal representatives have not been concerned with the pastoral needs of the Church’s victims.

Institutional leaders and their representatives have used disinformation, half-truths, lies and a litany of excuses to defend the institution rather than approach abuse allegations as opportunities for critical reflection and renewal. This manner of responding to the public has been a public relations nightmare. Many no longer trust the Church or see it as a pastoral institution. In addition, several priests, religious and laity have left the Church as a result of how it has handled the abuse scandal and treated many of its wounded and/or unjustly accused ministers.

## Celibacy

Many wonder whether mandatory celibacy is responsible for the entire matter of clergy abuse. If this were the case, the Church would only be dealing with priests and religious who were having consensual sex with other adults. In actuality, such a scenario – mature adults engaging in intimate, committed and long term relationships with their peers – might bode well for the institution. In reality, however, much of the sex engaged in by clergy and religious is secretive, guilt-ridden, enacted under the influence of alcohol and other drugs, and relies upon the power and status afforded by the ministerial office.

The problem is not celibacy *per se* but how celibacy is defined and taught by sexually unhealthy adults. One would be hard pressed to find a healthy version of celibacy within any “church pronouncement.” Existing versions offer little or no help regarding how to evolve into one’s unfolding sexuality to the point where sexual expression is foregone in full awareness of its limitations and capacity to injure. Sexual interaction of any sort, licit or illicit, can be quite damaging if not supported by commitment, honesty and concern for the well-being of the other. This demands a degree of sexual maturity that seems to be lacking for some ministers.

Ironically, the Church as a result of its attitudes towards sexuality set up the very situation it claims to abhor. By depriving priests and religious of an opportunity to explore their sexuality, in and through committed peer relationships (both before and during candidacy), the institution forces its ministers to jump over or short-circuit several important developmental challenges. This hop-scotch approach to emotional and spiritual development usually ends up in some form of truncated development, despair or compulsive activity.

Celibate formation is primarily delivered in terms of didactic education. Candidates are not formed in intentional communities with both sexes and every sexual orientation and configuration (i.e., married couples, heterosexuals, homosexuals etc). If, however, formative communities could be structured around open and frank discussion of sexuality, accurate information, comfort with every sexual orientation and in and through intimate peer relationships (not necessarily involving sexual contact but which would be emotionally intimate nonetheless) then anyone moving towards final vows or ordination would know that it would be counterproductive and immoral to conceal anything that might damage his/her psychospiritual health and the well-being of another.

Since this type of formative environment typically does not exist, a great deal of important and/or problematic material goes underground and into the shadows, where it festers and waits to be triggered by overwork, internal stress, interpersonal problems, unbearable loneliness and some form of abuse.

In over a hundred candidate assessments this author found that it was almost inevitable that when a candidate expressed that 1) s/he had an active sex-life prior to seeking admission or currently, or that 2) s/he had an “unusual” sexual history (such as child abuse, a sexual addiction or homosexual orientation), then that person was asked to leave the candidacy or seminary program.

Such decisions were typically made by members of the formation team who were sexually inexperienced and had great difficulty considering – let alone understanding – the multifaceted nature of human sexuality, the effects of unresolved child abuse, and/or age-appropriate sexual experimentation. In most instances candidates were humiliated and hurt by the experience. Some abandoned their vocations; while the majority were just more careful next time around when applying to an order or diocese. As a result, an institutional culture grounded in denial and secrecy was put in play from the very start of their ministry careers.

## **Power and Sex**

The Church has known for centuries that to form young men and women before they’ve had a chance to fully mature allows the institution to groom and shape them according to its specifications. At the same time, keeping individuals uncomfortable with their bodies and sexuality enables the institution to control them.

Anyone in tune with his/her body and feelings has an innate compass from which to discern right and wrong, as well as what is going on in any situation. Finding intimacy, support, love and pleasure in and through intimate sexual relationships makes it hard to domesticate individuals. They know that they are valued, loved and empowered by the love and embrace of the other. As a result, they are hard to fool and hard to control.

To have potential priests and religious formed by people old enough to be their parents short circuit’s normal human development. The importance of learning and growing through peer interactions is by-passed. In essence, young people are asked to become premature adults without having had the chance to first become adolescents and young

adults. The costs of such a truncated developmental process have been advertised on the front pages of newspapers across the globe.

Similarly, to skip over a history of abuse and trauma, especially in regard to one's sexuality, is a recipe for disaster. Such injuries do not go away on their own; they just go underground and get expressed in a variety of disowned and compulsive ways, including hypersexuality and/or feelings of disgust and contempt for anyone or anything sexual. What is repressed and/or disowned typically gets expressed in sexual obsessions, sexual addictions and various forms of sexual acting out. To contain and avoid the affective roots of such problematic behavior turns most people toward some form of addictive substance or process.

### **Ongoing Formation**

Lastly, ongoing formation processes in regard to sexuality are frequently non-existent or inadequate. Typically, they are operated by in-house providers, namely people familiar with church attitudes and policies on sexuality. In the main they are theoretical. At other times these programs are run by individuals, both inside and outside of the Church, who have poor sexual boundaries and who, under the guise of body work or massage, sexualize their participants.

Today, formation is being done with older individuals who are not necessarily more sophisticated when dealing with material related to sexuality, interpersonal relationships and trauma.

## **Then, Where is the Hope?**

If the institution of the Church is to heal itself and recover its soul, then it must surrender its unhealthy ways of approaching sexuality, abuse and scandal. It must work hard to put processes in place that diminish the disparity between what goes on in the public life of the Church and what takes place in the private lives of its ministers. The institution has considerable "shadow work" to do if it is ever going to heal itself. Shadow work involves acknowledging what is hidden by the public *personas* of both ministers and the institution. Much of what has been written in this article has been an attempt to bring into the light what is typically hidden by Church leaders and their pronouncements on matters related to

sexual abuse and addiction.

If Church leaders could open the doors and windows of the institution and allow it to be accurately examined, then it could address how its over-emphasis on image, power, control, secrecy and illicit sexuality has not only contributed to the sexual abuse phenomenon but also left the institution in a state of ill-health and disrepair. Considering how many priests, religious and lay people have left the Church in the last 30 years should be cause for serious reflection. A great deal of healing could be accomplished if the Church would consider the following:

The Church needs to develop a **theology of sexuality** that brings *all* of the Faithful closer

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to salvation and God. It needs as well to develop a **spirituality of trauma**, that is, a spirituality that enables its wounded members, along with the entire institution, to acknowledge the amount of suffering and pain that it carries within its ranks and that it has caused others.

In considering its wounds and transgressions as pathways toward humility and reconnection, it could turn betrayal and pain into life. In acknowledging its faults, being held accountable, rehabilitating itself and asking for forgiveness from both God and the laity, the Church could become a beacon of hope for anyone or any institution that believes it is beyond redemption.

## **I. A Theology of Sexuality**

A Christian approach to sexuality would view the human body and sexuality as the embodied or incarnate aspect of the Spirit. The Spirit, in its most general sense, calls everything to become aligned with and connected to every living thing and the Intelligence or Power that animates the universe.

Sexuality is the embodied and finite expression of the Spirit. The desire is to be in relation to, and intimately connected with, a single individual. When done in a way that is mutual,

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consensual and respectful, the Spirit is transmitted and enhanced in both participants. Therefore, sexual union has the potential to be one of the most profound and powerful ways in which people relate and grow. In the best sense of the term, sexuality involves bringing one's total being to another in an open and undefended manner so that a true communion

and exchange of body and soul can take place. The crucial dynamic is attempting to engender an authentic connection.

One's personal spirit (aspect of the divine) is shared with the beloved. Each is not there primarily to gratify him/herself but to join with and commune with the other. There are few experiences in life that can compare with the beauty and power of such an exchange. There is no way, whether it is done with the intention of procreating or not, that this type of union could be considered sinful or "dirty." On the contrary there are few moments that are purer or that bring one closer to the pulse of life and God than an intimate and respectful sexual

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union.

The story of the watch fob and comb, often told at Christmas time, characterizes a Christian and healthy understanding of sexuality. In this story a husband and wife struggle about what to get the other for Christmas. They are poor and have almost no money. Yet they want to give something special at this time to express their love for each other. The woman only has her long and beautiful hair and the man only a gold watch passed onto him by his father. The woman decides to cut and sell her long hair in order to buy her husband a watch fob for his gold watch and the husband decides to sell his gold watch to buy a pearl shell comb for his wife's beautiful hair. When exchanging gifts at Christmas the expression of self-sacrifice and love transcends the value of either material gift. What is ultimately exchanged is the heart and spirit of the other, which no material gift or physical sensation can replace in value. In essence, in authentic sexual union each sacrifices him/herself in some profound way in order to care for and meet the heart and soul of the other. The intent is to transcend personal need and in so doing create a higher plain of love than could be achieved by either in isolation.

In a similar view, if the Church is going to continue holding the notion of celibacy, it must develop not only a better, more connected version of celibacy but a more user-friendly method of helping its personnel achieve celibacy. Only then can it be freely and maturely chosen.

The Church does not know how to help ministers deepen into their celibate commitments. Historically it initially formed its ministers when they were inexperienced and immature. It then gave them the false impression that they were fully formed and could then go on autopilot for the rest of their lives. When dealing with such a complex phenomenon as

sexual maturation and development (which changes and is challenged at every developmental juncture, including old age), formation practices need to continue over the entire lifespan.

Expanded and ongoing formation practices refer to receiving guidance and practice (regarding the meaning and purpose of human sexuality) at every major developmental period in one's life. For example, teenagers struggle with body image, self-esteem, feelings of being attractive, an explosion of sexual hormones and feelings, clarifying who they are attracted to and dating several different types of people in order to eventually sort out the type of person they will eventually want to marry and share their lives with.

Young adults work on settling down, forming commitments, being faithful to one person and developing an increased capacity for intimacy. Middle aged men and women usually experience less of an emphasis on whether they are attractive or not and more on appreciating and deepening into their long-term and committed relationships, as well as trying to integrate the effects of menopause and bodily aging into their unfolding sexual identities.

The notion of celibacy that will be described below requires a high degree of psychosexual development. One needs a profound spirituality, considerable maturity, and experience with human sexuality in order to embody the following:

To relate to another primarily as a child of God – that is, as a being who is made in [\[15\]](#) the image and likeness of God – means never objectifying or diminishing the other. Every interaction with another either enhances or diminishes us. A psychologically and spiritual mature individual wants only to foster the Spirit in the other. As a result, this type of individual avoids any interaction, be it sexual or not, that could injure or diminish another. This kind of individual knows from experience that life-giving sexuality requires commitment and some degree of exclusivity.

Even these elements might not be enough to meet the emotional needs of some people, however. The emotionally and spiritually mature individual realizes that sexual interaction can bring out the most primitive and unmet developmental needs of the other. One committed to celibacy and ministry would be unable to devote the majority of his/her time and energy to a single person, which is often what is expected once sexual exchanges take place that are not driven by force, coercion or selfishness. On the contrary, many people

have experienced abuse, objectification and diminishment as the result of sexual exchange. Due to the pain and expectations that surround their sexual histories, sexuality has to be approached cautiously or avoided, out of respectful concern for the well-being and spiritual development of the other.

## **II. A Spirituality of Trauma**

A spirituality of trauma is countercultural. It asks individuals to embrace personal suffering rather than deny or deflect it. This type of spirituality asks individuals to move away voluntarily from positions of power and status – the ephemera of control – and head in the direction of their fundamental humanity, embracing their inherent vulnerability and helplessness in the face of forces that are beyond their control. These individuals know that this is the common ground they share with all living things. They know that they are limited, finite and ultimately unable to handle the complexity, fluidity and lack of guarantees that make up human existence. They come to accept a spirituality characterized by brokenness and imperfection (see, for example, Kurtz & Ketcham, 1993).

The aforementioned attitudes are not easily accepted. Usually they are the result of having worked through considerable pain and struggle. The ego or socially constructed dimensions of self wants power and control. The soul or Deeper Self plants itself in uncertainty and its inherent dependence on God and others. To allow the soul dimension of self to ascend usually takes something powerful that forces the ego to step aside.

It usually takes some form of trauma or loss, or a fundamental conversion to cause such a shift. No one moves easily into this territory. Typically only when individuals are helpless and broken do they realize that they will not be able to put themselves back together again without help. If these individuals can be met in this debilitated space and treated with dignity then they can be changed. No longer will they be ashamed of their limits and fundamental human needs, nor will they be attracted by the demands or allures of image-self and consumer

world because they know that these things could not protect or sustain them in their hour of need. Instead they commit to something more foundational.

Traumatic wounds, if properly embraced, teach individuals that the only thing that matters in this world is to respond to and alleviate distress whenever and wherever it is encountered. It is in and through one's wounds that individuals are able to recognize

themselves in the other. People are healed through this recognition and the type of care it evokes. Many speak about this healing experience as a kind of personal *redemption*. The term “redemption” conveys the depth of the experience.

Individuals may look up to the powerful and seemingly “together,” but they are not healed by them. It is when one recognizes him/herself in the other, that is, as myself albeit under different conditions, that the spirit of the other is both touched and healed.

In a similar fashion, the institutional church – itself in search of forgiveness and redemption – must admit its faults to concerned others and a caring God before it can fully acknowledge its transgressions and accept its fallibility and inherent need for others. In so doing the Church avoids the temptation to become inflated to the point where there is no room left for God. Without aligning itself with its wounds, the institution rather than God becomes the priority. The institution becomes enamored with itself and addicted to its own image rather than that of its Maker. A Church, like an individual addict, does not seek recovery, or find redemption, unless it is held accountable by concerned others who can not be manipulated or deceived by the addict’s cover stories and avoidance maneuvers. As mentioned earlier, trauma and addiction work are grounded in paradox. Working in and through the consequences of being wounded, broken and addicted individuals and enabling institution are each afforded the opportunity, not only to heal themselves but also to become instruments of the Divine and beacons of hope.

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[www.richardsipe.com/Articles/2005](http://www.richardsipe.com/Articles/2005)

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The title of this article is almost identical to a book written by the author over 15 years ago. *Healing the Soul of the Church: Ministers Facing Their Histories of Childhood Abuse and Trauma* was rejected by 25 Catholic publishing houses back in the early 1990's. At the time publishers felt that the topic would not generate sufficient interest to warrant a publication. Some of the same points mentioned in that book are presented in this article.

Sadly, the information and recommendations mentioned in that book have yet to be implemented by an institution that continues to struggle with matters related to the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults. A lot has happened in the years since having written *Healing the Soul of the Church* in 1994. My latest book *Preying Upon the Faithful: The Catholic Church, Clergy Abuse and the Myth of Celibacy* is encountering a similar reaction from Catholic publishing houses.

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These statistics have been replicated in research studies by Russell (1986) and others over the last 18 plus years.

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Please refer to *Healing the Soul of the Church* for a more detailed description of the reasons why many victims of childhood abuse trauma are attracted to a religious vocation.

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This is based on having assessed and/or treated over three hundred church ministers, run twenty-week long

sexuality seminars for over 500 clergy and religious, worked in a residential treatment center for clergy and religious for 3 years, investigated over 100 cases of clergy abuse and worked for Church leadership on matters related to the sexual abuse of children, in 8 countries, and over a 12 year period. The author has shared this observation with Church leadership for over 15 years with almost no response.

In the same vein the core message of *Healing the Soul of the Church* (namely, how many Church ministers have unresolved abuse and trauma in their backgrounds) has pretty much been ignored by Bishops and Religious Leaders across the US and around the world.

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*The Way of the Wound: A Spirituality of Trauma and Transformation* (1997) refers to another book written by the author.

[6]

Abuse is human-generated trauma, whereas some traumas are accidental or acts of nature. A number of psychological, existential and spiritual issues typically follow in the wake of traumatic events while human-generated trauma implicates other human beings, i.e., if one human being can abuse a child, especially a social guardian, then every human being can be considered a potential abuser.

[7]

This is especially significant because several instances of clergy abuse involve professional boundary violations, i.e., ministers in their roles as teachers, spiritual directors, coaches and Youth Workers, who abuse children and vulnerable adults that are under their care.

[8]

Consider Pope Benedict's recent pronouncement while on an April 2008 trip in the US. He stated that much of the abuse in America has been perpetrated by a small number of pedophiles. This statement is made in view of the fact that over 4000 priests in the US have been accused of molesting minors, \$2 billion has been paid out on abuse claims, and six dioceses have been forced into bankruptcy as a result of payouts they have had to make to victims.

[9]

The Cult of Mary is an interesting phenomenon. Who could argue that the mother of God was not the epitome of beauty and femininity? At the same time, this feminine ideal is characterized as asexual (Virgin birth, that is, immaculately impregnated) and dedicated to the will of two male figures (namely, her Father in heaven and his Son on earth).

[10]

Sexual acting out refers to affairs, one night stands, compulsive masturbation, addictions to pornography, uncommitted relationships and sexual relations that involve power disparities, i.e., with children, vulnerable adults, prostitutes, masseurs etc.

[11]

Richard Sipe's research (1990, 1995) found that 50% of American priests are practicing celibacy at any given time (Sipe, p.13, 2002). Note that Sipe uses the term "*practicing*" rather than "*are*" when referring to the adherence of priests to the rule of celibacy. This suggests that 50% or 23,500 plus priests in America are not celibate. These statistics say nothing about religious men or women..

Supposedly an important, if not defining, component of celibacy is abstinence. The laity has been lead to believe that priests and religious do not engage in sexual acts with self or others. Therefore, if the general public realized how many priests and religious are not adhering to their vows of celibacy, then the Church would run the very serious risk of losing complete credibility on any matter related to sexuality or morality.

[12]

The Church is currently making some progress in this direction with documents such as *Pastores dabo vobis*. Yet how it translates these insights into formal initial and ongoing formation practices is still not sufficient.

[13]

The matter of understanding "consent" has been a problem for Church personnel. It is hard to make an argument for consent and not coercion when one party, for example a church minister, has far more power than a child in grade

school or a distressed adult who is working through issues in counseling and/or spiritual direction.

[14]

Union implies that one brings his/her whole being to the other and not just a reduced presence, such as just his/her genitals. In addition there is no way that the needs of one individual in such a union can take precedence over the needs of the other. In fact, such a union *requires* that each is primarily focused on the needs of the other and not necessary his/her own pleasure. Pleasure is not the focus but the by-product of such a union!

[15]

To objectify is to reduce a human being down to a part of him/herself (e.g., a part of his/her anatomy)