

ABSTRACT
TOWARD A LAY ETHIC OF SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE ABUSED
BY CATHOLIC LEADERS

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The sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic church has caused widespread harm to both those abused and the church community. While theologians and the church magisterium often attribute the crisis to abusive priests and their moral failings or psychopathology, the response from the laity has been largely overlooked. This dissertation addresses that gap using the pastoral spiral.

Chapter 1 examines the harm done to those abused and the wider church, exploring theological causes such as abusive priests, episcopal failings, the valorization of suffering, unquestioning obedience to hierarchy, and structures like clericalism and hierarchicalism. These factors created a climate where the effects of abuse rippled out into the entire church and conditioned the laity to be passive.

Chapter 2 considers why the laity might be passive, identifying three areas: theological neglect, psychopathology, and structures. Historically, the laity are defined negatively, resulting in their work being seen as outside the church. Psychologically, lay people have defense mechanisms and beliefs that interfere with action. Daniel Daly's work on structures shows how structural clericalism and hierarchicalism have formed the laity to be passive and obedient. As Jesus interrupted the workings of oppressive structures in the temple when he turned tables, the abuse crisis has interrupted the work of the church. The laity are called to respond.

Chapter 3 investigates how the laity can respond through relationships with God and those abused. Jon Sobrino calls this solidarity, which supports the laity in seeing themselves within structures related to the abuse crisis and identifying their power. Lay people can engage in accompaniment, advocacy, or prevention, guided by virtues such as courage, humility, generosity, mercy, and fidelity and through discernment of spirits.

Chapter 4 draws from attachment theory to explain how relationships of solidarity might work. Those abused must perceive lay people as safe haven and secure base. Skills such as anticipatory empathy, listening without judgment, and observing those abused are essential. Christian communities can offer support and accountability.

The dissertation concludes with reviewing the work of *Awake* for practical ideas for lay people to engage in accompaniment, advocacy, and prevention, and become ambassadors of hope.