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RESPONDING TO SHAME WITH SOLIDARITY

Sex Abuse Crisis in the Indian Catholic Church

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Abstract

By analysing the clerical sex abuse crisis through the lens of shame, the Indian Catholic Church will be better equipped to identify unhealthy patterns of internalization and deflection that prevent healing in the aftermath of these traumatic wounds. In this article, I first explore the issue of gendered violence in the Indian context and how the pervasiveness of shame transforms survivors into scapegoats. I then consider the relational nature of shame and its connection to the institutional church's temptation towards insularity. Finally, I explore how solidarity through a preferential option for survivors mitigates the internalization of shame by survivors and challenges the irresponsible deflection of shame by the institutional church so that both may journey together toward healing.

Keywords: Clerical Sex Abuse; Indian Catholic Church; Kerala; Shame; Solidarity; Syro-Malabar

*"Jesus had his mother nearby when he faced suffering and death. But my mother, the Church, left me all alone in my time of pain."*¹ During a

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meeting with Pope Francis, an abuse survivor used these words to express her profound sense of betrayal when seeking guidance and compassion from the Church—a Church that considers itself the mother to more than one billion people around the world. Many have felt abandoned by this mother for failing to protect and defend them when they expressed their physical, psychological, and spiritual trauma. Sex abuse is not only a problem of the Western church but can be found in every local church throughout the world.² Recently, the scandal has irrupted in India, with two notable cases happening in the southwest state of Kerala. In 2017, Fr Robin Vadakkumcheril of St Sebastian church in Kannur was arrested for repeatedly raping a teenager who later gave birth to a child placed in adoption services.³ Two years later, the courts sentenced him to twenty years in prison. In 2018, Bishop Franco Mulakkal was arrested after being accused of raping a nun several times between 2014 to 2016. His trial is currently underway.⁴

Like the crisis in other parts of the world, these cases have provoked numerous reactions in India and throughout the diaspora. Some stand with the accusers and victims to amplify their voices and to bring attention to the patriarchal norms that have long dominated Indian culture. Others refuse to admit the possibility that such violence can occur, giving into the impulse of self-preservation to protect the institution's reputation. Many remain silent, unsure of what to say or how to express themselves. All responses, however, can benefit from recognizing the power of *shame* and its capacity to blind communities to the truth of the situation. While shame is often misunderstood as a solitary experience of wounded pride or damaged self-respect, it is better expressed as a *self-conscious* emotion that reflects a relational awareness of self in connection to others and social norms.⁵ Because of its relational nature, shame has a direct

¹Hans Zollner, SJ, "The Spiritual Wounds of Sexual Abuse," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 27 Apr. 2020, www.laciviltacattolica.com/spiritual-wounds-sexual-abuse/.

²Bettina Böhm, Hans Zollner, et al., "Child Sexual Abuse in the Context of the Roman Catholic Church: A Review of Literature from 1981-2013," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 23 (2014) 635-656.

³Onmanorama Staff, "Pope Francis Expels Rape Convict Kerala Priest Robin Vadakkumchery," *English Manorama Online* [Kerala], 1 Mar 2020. <https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2020/03/01/fr-robin-vadakkumchery-expelled.html>

⁴TNN. "Kerala: Bishop Franco Mulakkal asked to appear in court on July 1." *Times of India* [Gurugram Haryana], 11 June 2020. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/bishop-franco-mulakkal-asked-to-appear-in-court-on-july-1/articleshow/76326986.cms>

⁵Peter N. Stearns, *Shame: A Brief History*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017, 2.

effect on the capacity of a church community to restore communion following the wake of sexual abuse.

By analyzing the clerical sex abuse crisis through the lens of shame, the Indian Catholic Church will be better equipped to identify unhealthy patterns of internalization and deflection that prevent healing in the aftermath of these traumatic wounds. In this article, I first explore the issue of gendered violence in the Indian context⁶ and how the pervasiveness of shame transforms survivors into scapegoats. I then consider the relational nature of shame and its connection to the institutional church's temptation towards deflection and insularity. Finally, I explore how solidarity through a preferential option for survivors mitigates the internalization of shame by survivors and challenges the irresponsible deflection of shame by the institutional church so that both may journey together toward healing.

The Pervasiveness of Violence and Shame

On the evening of December 16, 2012, a 23-year old paramedic student later nicknamed 'Nirbhaya' – or 'fearless one' – was brutally gang-raped on a private bus in New Delhi. Beaten and mutilated, she was left half-dead on the side of the road. Despite being found by a Good Samaritan and securing emergency treatment, she died two weeks later.⁷ Often referred to as a "watershed moment,"⁸ this horrific incident captured national and international attention as thousands of protestors from across the country met as early as the next morning to oppose police inaction and vocalize the need for greater safety of women in public spaces.⁹ While demonstrations lasted for nearly two weeks, the media covered the incident for two months. Academics also recognized that despite the significant amount of research regarding domestic violence in India, extraordinarily little has been dedicated to the stunning 1293.3% increase in rape cases between 1971 and 2015. Responding to these events, a 2018 study used state-level data to assess the major

⁶While this article focuses on violence against women in relation to the sex abuse crisis in the Indian Catholic Church, it does not claim that boys and men do not also face harm. Future research must be conducted about how the patriarchal norms of Indian society influence the experiences of shame felt by male survivors of sexual violence.

⁷Julia Hollingsworth, Swati Gupta and Manveena Suri, "7 Years after Bus Rape and Murder Shocked the World, Attackers Hanged in New Delhi," *CNN* [Atlanta] 20 Mar 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/19/asia/india-rape-execution-intl-hnk/index.html>

⁸Sharanya Basu Roy and Sayantan Ghosh Dastidar, "Why Do Men Rape? Understanding the Determinants of Rapes in India," *Third World Quarterly* 39, 8 (2018) 1435.

⁹Shakuntala Rao, "Covering Rape in Shame Culture: Studying Journalism Ethics in India's New Television News Media," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 29, 3 (2014) 154.

determinants of rape within the country. Their conclusions revealed that a lack of educational or economic status had little to do with the increase in gendered violence. Rather, engrained misogynistic views of women in Indian society bear primary responsibility for the high occurrence of rape in this culture.¹⁰

These findings support what Miriam George refers to as the *gender paradox* in Kerala. Since the 1970s, the international development community has praised this southern Indian state as a model for its literacy, life expectancy, and mortality rates. However, while women from Kerala enjoy higher levels of education and employment, they are still bound by traditional expectations that their primary place is in the home as a daughter, sister, wife, and mother.¹¹ Anthropologist Partha Chatterjee explains the origins of this duality by suggesting that a new form of patriarchy emerged at the end of British colonialism and the dawn of Indian nationalism. This new patriarchy, she argues, allowed women to pursue formal education to help India compete in the postcolonial global market but insisted that the women of the newly independent nation must not forget their symbolic role as preservers of culture. While India may appear like other nations in public, its superiority resides in the spirituality of the domestic sphere, symbolized by what are thought to be feminine virtues of self-sacrifice, chastity, submission, and devotion.¹² Thus, the education of women is often regarded as an ornamental passport to marriage. Cultural practices discourage women from pursuing careers that interfere with their primary domestic roles. Should a woman be employed, misogyny almost always emerges in the home through both financial control of the woman's earnings and reassertions of male dominance through domestic violence, reinforcing dependence in all areas of life.¹³

Despite high rates of domestic violence throughout India, the home is consistently envisioned as safer than the public sphere. As one female journalist acknowledges,

I face unwanted looks, touches, and gestures from getting on a bus to go shopping. I am careful never to make eye contact with strangers, never smile at anyone, keep my mobile phone and a small knife with me, do not go out at night... [In Indian culture] women are part of home and family,

¹⁰Roy and Dastidar, "Why Do Men Rape?," 1444.

¹¹Miriam George, "In the Midst of a Storm: Distress of Kerala Women," *Affilia* 26, 3 (2011) 307.

¹²Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, 6-9.

¹³George, "In the Midst of a Storm: Distress of Kerala Women," 306.

so there is nothing wrong with confinement. Home is safe, roads are unsafe. Men, on the other hand, belong outside...¹⁴

Whereas many Indian “men do not fear everyday encroachment on their bodies and personhood,”¹⁵ the general culture assumes that eve-teasing (a euphemism for sexual harassment), sexual assault, rape, and other forms of violence are natural consequences of a woman’s unnatural desire for autonomy in the public sphere. This cultural divide between the private and the public supports a number of rape myths, such as “‘only bad girls get raped’; ‘any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to’; ‘women ask for it’ and ‘women cry rape only when they’ve been jilted or have something to cover up.’”¹⁶ These myths, which are rooted in misogynistic assumptions, render women and their experiences invisible to both themselves and to those who have power over them.

Shame reinforces this invisibility through an anticipatory conformity to patriarchal norms. While there are several cultural-specific reasons for why a woman may feel shame, the violation of her body is one of the most common.¹⁷ Because chastity is central to the image of a “good woman” in Indian society, women are taught from a young age that it is their responsibility to avoid any situation that may threaten their purity. The association of a woman’s name with the violation of her chastity devalues not only her status in society, but also tarnishes her family’s honour. A corollary to the public persona of the “good Indian woman” is the “slogan ‘What will others say?’ which is repeated like a mantra by many Indian mothers.”¹⁸ Any proper understanding of the consequences of gendered violence is disrupted by this deep-rooted need for honour and social acceptance. Patriarchal norms that have been internalized for generations force a woman to be concerned with the reputation of her family name regardless of the violence that occurs behind closed doors. This anticipation of shame is reinforced by the media, which often depict a rape victim with “grainy images of a woman sitting in a corner with her face covered or blurred (CNN-IBN), a woman draped in a white cloth, often associated with widowhood (Aaj Tak),

¹⁴Rao, “Covering Rape in Shame Culture...,” 162-163.

¹⁵S. Ghosh, “Why Did You Go There? Gender and the Public Place,” *A Unique Crime: Understanding Rape in India*, ed. S. Bhattacharjee, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, 242.

¹⁶M.R. Burt, “Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38, 2 (1980) 217.

¹⁷Rao, “Covering Rape in Shame Culture...,” 162.

¹⁸Manisha Roy, “Mothers and Daughters in Indian-American Families: A Failed Communication?,” in *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 105.

or a woman sitting on a hospital bed with her face covered with a *dupatta* or scarf (India TV)."¹⁹

As theologian Denise Starkey notes, hiding is intrinsic to and inseparable from the experience of shame. In fact, the Indo-European root (*kam/kem*) of the word "shame" connotes a sense of covering, veiling, or hiding.²⁰ Shame reflects a totalizing experience of unworthiness. This tension between hiding and exposure reveals the powerful gaze of society through which the self redefines itself. Through this societal gaze, the survivor is forced to take the responsibility of sexual violence upon herself, becoming a scapegoat to carry the community's judgements of impurity and uncleanness. For Starkey, this internalization of blame leaves the wound of sexual violence open to a "pre-ordained track of interpretation" that not only reinforces the invisibility of the victim, but also sends the "healing wisdom present in the [Catholic] tradition down dead-end tracks."²¹ Particularly in terms of sexual abuse within the institutional church, we must understand the *relational* nature of shame before exploring this healing wisdom, which promises to interrupt the cycles of violence that abandon many to the margins of society and the church.

The Relational Nature of Shame

Psychotherapist Patricia DeYoung develops a relational understanding of shame by defining this experience as "*one's felt sense of self disintegrating in relation to a dysregulating other.*"²² DeYoung examines how the self fractures in relation to another who is unable to properly receive what is shared. In the context of clerical abuse, the words of the young survivor to Pope Francis capture this dynamic: "my mother, the Church, left me all alone in my time of pain." By abandoning her to her trauma, the Church became a *dysregulating* presence that left the well-being of the survivor *disintegrated* without the proper psychological and spiritual resources necessary to become whole again.

When a person's sense of meaning and purpose has been interrupted by sexual violence, it is natural to reach out in search of compassion. However, in many cases, survivors are silenced by relatives and Church officials who would prefer to ignore or conceal the incident. Rather than being in empathic attunement to the needs of the survivor,

¹⁹Rao, "Covering Rape in Shame Culture..." 163.

²⁰Denise A. Starkey, *The Shame that Lingers: A Survivor-Centered Critique of Catholic Sin-Talk*, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009), 37.

²¹Starkey, *The Shame that Lingers*, 36.

²² Patricia A. DeYoung, *Understanding and Treating Chronic Shame: A Relational/Neurobiological Approach*, New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015, 18.

this negative response threatens the integrity of the survivor's identity. In addition to the initial violence committed against them, survivors must now deal with the consequences of social rejection:

Instead of feeling connected to someone strong and calm, I feel alone. Instead of feeling contained, I feel out of control. Instead of feeling energetically focused, I feel overwhelmed. Instead of feeling that I'll be okay, I feel like I'm falling apart. This kind of experience is the core experience of shame. All of it has something to do with needing something intensely from someone important, and something going wrong with the interaction between us.²³

Instead of Church officials offering experiences of relational connection in response to sexual violence, there is instead, most often, a pattern of silence, judgement and callous indifference. These negative responses only serve to distance survivors from those in whom they can confide. Survivors eventually learn to replace the unmet relational needs of intersubjectivity with an abstract objectification of self. In this experience of fragmentation and abstraction from self, survivors who are faced with silence and shame often no longer recognize the validity of their own desires for wholeness and integration. Rather, the rejection and disgust of others often becomes the salient social framework that is available to make meaning of their pain. From this point forward, their identity is shaped by this objectification, leaving them with the conviction that their needs are inferior and unworthy of attention.

While the silencing mechanisms prevalent within the Indian family structure lie beyond the scope of this paper, the intentions that motivate the dysregulating presence of the institutional church must be further examined. Each local church is not separate from the soil from within which it takes root. The Indian Catholic Church is undoubtedly committed to the Gospel and to the care of its flock, but it is not impervious to the patriarchal norms that structure shame and gendered relations within the subcontinent. Any abuse of power expressed as clericalism is built on and presupposes the social norms that construct patriarchy. The ineffective response to clerical abuse demonstrates how the social scripts concerning shame shape not only Indian society, but also the Indian Church. While the recent 2020 statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) expresses a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual abuse,²⁴ the hierarchy must recognize how the inability to deal with its own

²³DeYoung, *Understanding and Treating Chronic Shame*, 21.

²⁴Saji Thomas. "Zero Tolerance: Indian Bishops Get Tough on Sex Abuse," *Union of Catholic Asian News* [New Delhi]. 19 February 2020. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/zero-tolerance-indian-bishops-get-tough-on-sex-abuse/87253>.

shame dilutes these words and prevents them from possessing the transformative power of the Gospel.

Rather than engaging with this trauma from a survivor-centred approach, the Indian clergy has often been more concerned with scandal and exposure. As a minority faith community within a predominantly Hindu context, the institutional church has frequently prioritized the gaze of wider society before the care of broken souls. The culture of shame that pervades the Indian subcontinent gives permission to both perpetrators and defensive lay Catholics to repeat rape myths that project blame back onto the victims. When accusations of sexual violence first surface, it is not uncommon to hear dismissive questions concerning the woman's presence outside of the home or for the accusations themselves to be regarded as retaliation against the church. While these responses are often understood as the institution's desire to maintain power, Starkey argues that they actually reveal a deflection of ecclesial shame. In most instances, the church's initial response to accusations of abuse express profound denial because such allegations threaten the very identity and moral standing of the Church within society. This deflection of shame is dysregulating precisely because it mimics ancient patterns of scapegoating that push accusers and their stories to the margins.²⁵

If denial is not possible, then attempts at cover up to avoid scandal also reflect the "defensive responses to shame that lead to the protection of accused priests and church resources."²⁶ In their book *A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church*, Frank Bruni and Elinor Burkett depict this dynamic of ecclesial shame in the US Church when they describe how many

Church leaders' discomfort with thinking or talking about sex colored their responses to incidents of abuse in ways that proved destructive and irresponsible. Projecting their own sense of shame onto victims, they often assumed that those children and their families had no more desire or inclination to discuss what had happened than bishops themselves did. They assumed as well that families wanted the matter handled quickly and quietly, without the intrusion of police officers, lawyers, and the news media. Their reticence and secretiveness left many victims feeling forgotten, discounted, cast away. Victims sensed that Church leaders had little appreciation for how deeply they had been wounded.²⁷

The focus on hiding the situation exposes the presence of ecclesial shame in the bishops' *dysregulating* response. This approach also

²⁵Starkey, *The Shame that Lingers*, 111.

²⁶Starkey, *The Shame that Lingers*, 102-103.

²⁷Frank Bruni and Elinor Burkett, *A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, New York, NY: Perennial, 2002, 169.

reflects what Zollner describes as a “bunker mentality” within the Church that tries to resolve problems privately without input from the public. In the past, bishops often extended false mercy to perpetrators, believing that they have all the means necessary to solve problems and prevent further abuse within their jurisdiction.²⁸ Unfortunately, this approach only created a closed system that in effect privileged the words and actions of the clergy against those of their accusers. This approach misunderstood the biblical notion of *scandal*. The real stumbling block to healing is not the public’s opinion of the institutional church, but the fragmented lives that bear a shame that is not theirs, but that of their perpetrators.

These distorted attempts at self-preservation result in a perpetual blindness concerning the sources of shame and shame avoidance in the Church. Both deflection and insularity contribute to the dysregulating presence of the Church, which only continues the evil of sex abuse by silencing victims into invisibility. In this shared culture of shame, it is necessary for the Indian church to participate in a collective examination of conscience that does not hide from these wounds so that it may allow the healing wisdom of the tradition to renew the whole church from within.

Solidarity as a Preferential Option for Survivors

This healing wisdom has been expressed in part by the instruction concerning a preferential option for the poor, which has become integral to Catholic social teaching since the close of the Second Vatican Council. The papacy of Pope Francis has encouraged this emphasis by emboldening the Church to go to the peripheries of social and ecclesial power to discover the face of Christ among the marginalized.²⁹ Theologian Roberto S. Goizueta explains this preferential option by first acknowledging that while God’s love is universal, it is not neutral. He explains the preference of divine love with a simple analogy:

If a mother finds that a fight has broken out between her strapping teenage son and his much smaller sister, the mother will not hesitate to try to “liberate” the smaller girl from the brother’s clutches—precisely because the mother loves her two children equally. In that context, the mother’s love for her son will take the form of a call to conversion, though he will not likely see it that way. Were the mother to take a neutral stance and not get involved because she “loves her children equally,” the young daughter

²⁸Zollner, www.laciviltacattolica.com/spiritual-wounds-sexual-abuse/.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (14 November 2013), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, §20.

would not experience the neutrality as love. In a situation of division, a neutral stance provides implicit support for the divided status quo and, therefore, implicit support for the persons benefiting from the division, in other words, the most powerful. Neutrality, like silence, is consent.³⁰

In the context of clergy abuse within the Indian Catholic Church, both the clerical perpetrator and the abused survivor are children of the same mother by the grace of baptism. In this situation, the redemption of both depends on how the mother chastises the one who should know better in defence of the one who is more vulnerable. As a call to conversion, the mother's intervention does not replicate the dynamics of scapegoating mentioned earlier because it is motivated by a desire to bring both perpetrator and victim back into right relationship with God and the faith community.

Should the institutional church continue in a mode of self-preservation that prioritizes clergy over victims, it communicates a defence of the status quo that is not unlike the misogyny that pervades the rest of Indian society. This concern with public scandal undermines the understanding of the powerless and the marginalized communicated by the Gospels. Rather, the institutional Church must follow the model provided by Christ by enacting a preferential option for survivors, subverting the mechanisms that drive accusers to the margins of society in shame. Only through this authentic form of discipleship can the Church work as leaven within society, renewing it from within through the very relationships that constitute both. A solidarity that expresses a preferential option for survivors must first re-examine the relationship between sin and shame. It must then recognize how the antidote to shame is empathic vulnerability, which not only mitigates the sense of isolation internalized by survivors, but also discourages irresponsible deflection by the institutional church.

In terms of sin, post-conciliar theologians developed a personalist relational-responsibility model that emphasized the moral agency of individuals, their embodied subjectivity, their socio-historical connectedness to others and the environment, and the fundamental equality and dignity of all. In his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), Pope John Paul II expresses this personalist orientation when he describes *solidarity* not as

a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is

³⁰Roberto S. Goizueta, "The Preferential Option for the Poor: Christ and the Logic of Gratitude," *Jesus of Galilee: Contextual Christology for the 21st Century*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011, 177.

to say to the good of all of and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.³¹

This definition of solidarity moves beyond an individualistic notion of sin by recognizing the social dimensions of oppression that awaken personal responsibility for the preservation of the common good. Solidarity recognizes the interdependence of relationships that is capable of sustaining both mutual listening and mutual correction for the sake of Christian maturity.

Nevertheless, issues of clerical abuse are often dominated by older legalistic models of sin that judge actions not so much according to the harm that is done, but according to the extent that they depart from ecclesial rules. This model focuses more on obedience to church law and individual acts of penitence. According to Starkey, the

emphasis on obedience, sanction, and the threat of eternal punishment does nothing to encourage persons to develop an increased sense of responsibility nor does it promote an understanding of obedience grounded in respect for persons as moral agents capable of moral discernment.³²

The focus on privatized sin falsely reduces morality to that of a wrong choice, ignoring the complex issues of power that constitute the web of human relationality. In the context of clerical abuse, this legalistic emphasis often forgets the needs of the sinned-against because it perpetuates a sense of individual shame that is absolved privately between sinner and God in the context of sacramental confession.³³

Solidarity expressed as a preferential option for survivors, however, interrupts the power of shame to privatize sin by emphasizing the broken relationships that must receive attention with empathic vulnerability. If shame's primary strength lies in the desire to isolate individuals from others through hiding, then empathic vulnerability responds to this invisibility by allowing perpetrators and survivors to be fully seen, known, and loved. This love, of course, is received differently. For perpetrators, it will be received as a corrective call to conversion and for survivors as a form of protection and justice. For survivors, this is often the proper response that they seek when they first search for compassion from the Church after experiencing the trauma of abuse. An institutional Church that has not dealt with its own sense of shame when accusations arise is also devoid of an

³¹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, § 38.

³²Starkey, *The Shame that Lingers*, 91.

³³Justo L. González, "The Alienation of Alienation," in *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against*, ed. Andrew Sung. Park and Susan L. Nelson, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001, 64.

empathic response to genuine suffering. As Starkey notes, “*shame* about *shame* leads to an aversion to another’s experience of shame.”³⁴ Yet, the institutional church can overcome its own temptation to shame avoidance by entering into the space of vulnerability with marginalized survivors and accompanying them in their sorrows.

Conclusion

This capacity to anticipate shame’s distorting power is not easy. Jesus, however, modelled a healing wisdom for the Church by acknowledging his human vulnerability both in the desert at the start of his ministry and in Gethsemane at the very end. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus wrestled with three temptations of self-preservation that promised invulnerability in the form of wealth, glory, and dominance. Understood from the external gaze of society, all three would have granted his ministry immediate honour and status. His only defence against these temptations was a profound trust in the will of God. Even this trust, however, was tested in the garden of Gethsemane, as his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. In great agony, Jesus begged the Father to remove the cup of shame that would culminate in his humiliating death on the cross. Yet, he persisted in the face of this fear, resisting any attempt at deflection. Jesus entered the very depths of human shame as he hung naked on the cross, utterly vulnerable before the gaze of public scrutiny.

It is this Jesus who tells every baptized Christian, “if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). To deny oneself is to resist the temptations of self-preservation that promise a false security over against those who have been shamed. To take up one’s cross daily is to live in constant recognition of our vulnerabilities as a community of faith in need of unceasing grace to grow in Christian maturity. Finally, to follow Jesus is to live as he lived and to love as he loved. Only in this way can we truly know and love the God of Christian revelation, the One who hears the cries of the poor and is on their side. In the context of clerical abuse, solidarity expressed as a preferential option for survivors fully recognizes this shameful crisis as an experience of crucifixion for all who belong to the Body of Christ. Nevertheless, such solidarity persists in the face of this shame because it maintains an unyielding hope that this Body will be whole again through the promise of the resurrection.

³⁴Starkey, *The Shame that Lingers*, 100.