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Safeguarding

Reflecting on Child Abuse,
Theology and Care

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PEETERS

RESURRECTION AS AN ART OF LIVING: RESTORING FAITH AFTER ABUSE¹

Hildegund Keul

Die Auferstandenen
"Wo sind
die Auferstandenen
die ihren Tod
überwunden haben
das Leben lieblosen
sich anvertrauen
dem Wind
Kein Engel
verrät
ihre Spur"

Rose Ausländer²

"It's time to protect the children and restore the faith." Michael Sugar raised this appeal in February 2016 when he received an Oscar in the prestigious category of "Best Picture" for his film *Spotlight*. Much has already happened in recent years in many countries with respect to both processing and prevention in connection with the protection of children. But what are the prospects with respect to restoring the faith, recovering it, or even finding it for the first time? The Church claims to mediate the salvation of God and advocates belief in the resurrection. But it was prominent representatives of the Church who brought such destruction into the lives of many of those who had been abused. Promising good,

¹ This article is part of a research project on vulnerability which is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Projektnummer 389249041.

² The Resurrected

Where are / the resurrected / who have overcome / their death / who care life? / Who put their trust / in the wind?

No angel / reveals / its traces. Rose Ausländer, "Die Auferstandenen," in *Regenwörter. Gedichte*, ed. Helmut Braun (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), 18.

resurrection, and salvation but bringing evil, destruction, and humiliation (*Heil verheißen, aber Unheil bringen*) – this contradiction places the Christian faith in doubt. What is wrong with the message when something like this happens? Has the Church's own message of salvation made it blind to the misery it brings about?

Victims of sexual abuse also point explicitly to the fact that the Christian faith has been deeply wounded. And it is, indeed, primarily not the faith of the perpetrators but the faith of the victims.³ The expectation of the members of the "GottesSuche"⁴ group is therefore double. On the one hand, the churches must simply perceive how much abuse and covering up such abuse has wounded the faith of the survivors. On the other hand, the victims expect that the churches will accept their responsibility by working on restoring this faith. "Even though it often seems otherwise, victims of sexual misuse (still) expect something from the Christian churches."⁵

Because the damage to faith concerns its core, the recovery of faith must also start there. Belief in the resurrection thus becomes a theme. What does resurrection mean for those people who have been so deeply wounded by sexual violence? What does the belief that those who have been humiliated will be the "resurrected," that they will overcome death, contribute to this issue? "And it is not at all only the victims of Catholic priests who need spiritual help. Those who have been and are the victims of sexual abuse in their families, by people in their neighborhoods or in non-church institutions ... also need to have their faith restored."⁶

This contribution focuses on the question of how belief in the resurrection, which has been wounded by abuse and its cover-up, can be recovered and restored. We will first discuss the victims' breaking of the silence as a sign of the times in its relevance for theology and church. Then we will look at the wounds and vulnerabilities of the victims so that we can then discuss belief in the resurrection from that perspective. In the final section, we will offer some suggestions for church praxis.

³ The faith of the perpetrators remained undisturbed before the investigation of abuse cases, whereas the faith of the victims was detrimentally affected. What that means – both humanly and theologically – still needs to be investigated.

⁴ www.gottes-suche.de is a "platform for women who have experienced sexual violence and use the resources of the Christian faith for living with continuing trauma."

⁵ Erika Kerstner, Barbara Haslbeck and Annette Buschmann, *Damit der Boden wieder trägt. Seelsorge nach sexuellem Missbrauch* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2016), jacket blurb.

⁶ Kerstner, Haslbeck and Buschmann, *Seelsorge*, 15f.

1. *Schweigebruch*: the provocation of a sign of the times for theology

The movie *Spotlight* is about sexual abuse by priests and its cover-up by the church leadership, about lawyers who earn money from it, journalists who would rather not investigate too closely, the politics of a city that covers up the violence against children. But what the film especially shows in all of this is that it makes the viewer aware of the social process that takes the unheard-of theme of sexual abuse out of the realm of silence and allows it to be talked about in public. The “breaking of the silence,” *der Schweigebruch*,⁷ can be followed in the film sequences that express the – for this – necessarily shocking revelations, deep emotions, and acts of resistance.

Until thirty years ago, it would have been impossible for a film like *Spotlight* to be made, let alone to receive such an award. Back then, the women’s movement initially thematized the sexual abuse of girls. Even though these debates did not lead at first, either in society or in the Church, to the required results, they did lay the foundation for breaking the silence. Sexual abuse in families was something outrageous, something that lay outside the discourse, as the French philosopher Michel Foucault called it.⁸ What happened in families, parishes, and sports clubs was so unthinkable that people did not talk about it. It was never mentioned because it was outrageous and unheard-of – a shameful, unseemly violation of taboos. What is unheard-of remains unheard because we cannot bear to hear it.

That sexual violence is thematized today in public and the sexual abuse of children condemned is a sign of our times. In addition, that the general agreement to prohibit abuse doesn’t work in concrete cases is also part of this. To hear the unheard-of and to break the silence, one must endure painful confrontations. Time and again, resurgent social conflicts indicate that it not only concerns an internal problem of the Church but is truly a sign of our times.

⁷ Cf. the title of the following book: Mary Hallay-Witte and Bettina Janssen, eds., *Schweigebruch. Vom sexuellen Missbrauch zur institutionellen Prävention (From Sexual Misuse to Institutional Prevention)* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2016). Cf. also Barbara Haslbeck, *Sexueller Missbrauch und Religiosität. Wenn Frauen das Schweigen brechen. Eine empirische Studie (When Women Break the Silence: An Empirical Study)* (Berlin: LIT, 2007).

⁸ “It is always possible one could speak the truth in a void; one would only be in the true, however, if one obeyed the rules of some discursive ‘policy’ which would have to be reactivated every time one spoke.” Michel Foucault, *The Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage Books / Random House, 2010), 224.

In the German-speaking church, the significance of this sign of our times for theology and pastoral care is only in the beginning stages.⁹ The Church also has a specific task here. The people of God, Vatican II stated, strives “to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age” (GS 11). The Church has a duty to search for the presence of God in the signs of the times and to respond to those signs. The conflicts in the debates about abuse draw our attention to where the Church has abandoned or even betrayed its own task. Instead of showing the survivors the strengthening presence of God, this presence is just not sought. The Church can only find its way back to the Gospel if it confronts its own potential for bringing destruction and evil into people’s lives, a potential that is still operative. The breaking of the silence there includes a theological provocation: it issues a challenge to process anew the core themes of theology. What do they have to say to this sign of the times, in whose history of guilt the Church is entangled? To discover this, we need to look at those wounds and vulnerabilities that characterize the lives of the victims.

2. Vulnerability: the violence-enhancing power of wounds and scars

In the context of abuse and sexual violence, vulnerability is a decisive but often underestimated problem. Plural, partially non-transparent effects of power are operative here, demanding a sharpened attentiveness.¹⁰ At first glance, the vulnerability of victims is easily perceived. But

⁹ The *signs of the times* was established in recent years as a specialist term in systematic theology. It is significant that the book Christoph Böttigheimer and Florian Bruckmann, eds., “*Glaubensverantwortung im Horizont der ‘Zeichen der Zeit’*” (Freiburg: Herder, 2012, QD 248) – which was foundational for the German-speaking world – did not discuss sexual abuse.

¹⁰ In recent years, *vulnerability* has turned into a key concept in academic debates and for interdisciplinary research. The discourse shows how important it is to distinguish between injury/wounds and vulnerability. Vulnerability is a category of the future. It refers to a potential, a possibility. It is a future category that has various effects of power, destructive and constructive, in the actual present.

In vulnerability discourse, one normally finds a contrariety between “vulnerable, weak, attackable” and “resilient, strong, safe.” But for theology and especially for incarnation, the praxis of voluntary vulnerability is very important. My thesis is that under special circumstances resilience can even grow out of vulnerability (cf. my website, www.verwundbarkeiten.de).

we should not underestimate the vulnerability of the supporters, witnesses, institutions, and even perpetrators. There is one's own vulnerability, but there is also the vulnerability of others – and both mutually enhance each other. This also applies to institutions that tolerate sexual abuse when they cover it up. Already here the institutions' own vulnerability exercises an unspeakable power that the concealment of sexual abuse by church leaders has revealed.¹¹ Without a doubt, ignorance, carelessness, and arrogance could also be found among school principals, abbots, and bishops on this issue. But there was a weightier motivation: to protect the Catholic Church, thus their own religious community, from any possible damage. They feared the wounds that would result if the Church were exposed in public as an institution that brought evil into peoples' lives.

The desire to protect one's own institution contains a potential for violence: the other is wounded so that oneself is not. This "Herodian strategy"¹² results in defense mechanisms that exclude the victims, place them under suspicion, and wound them again. In a kind of pre-emptive strike, which would block the revealing of sexual violence, the survivors become the victims of further violence again. The vulnerability of one's own institution operates here as an unspeakable, violence-enhancing power that turns against the victims. The Herodian strategy later turns on the institution because covering up the abuse disrupts the trust in the salvific mission of the Church.

- The Church needs to acquire sensitivity to the unspeakable power that lies within its own vulnerability. Only when it conquers the grasp of this power can it resituate its belief in the resurrection.

In the preventive protection of its own institutions, the effects of unspeakable power that can originate in a *feared* injury become apparent. Painfully, victims of sexual abuse also experience the effects of this power that comes from vulnerability. For the victims, the actual harm done by the abuse, which affects both body and soul, is at the center. Their human dignity is assaulted, and they have to struggle in the presence of themselves and others for the acknowledgement of their dignity. Violence causes wounds, adds injuries, makes one sick, and places one's life

¹¹ The film *Spotlight* makes the viewer aware of the danger that can lie within the desire to protect one's institution, one's school, one's newspaper, one's city, or the Church.

¹² On the Herodian strategy, see Hildegund Keul, *Weihnachten – das Wagnis der Verwundbarkeit* (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2013), 19-25.

in danger. It is voracious and eats its way through one's entire life until, in the worst case possible, it pushes one to the brink of death.

But where does this all-devouring power come from, which even blocks present and potential (social, financial, cultural, political, natural, artistic) resources for life? One cause for this can be found in the effects of this power that continues to affect people even after the wounds have healed. A scar still remains, marking one's own vulnerability. The scar is a constant reminder that a new injury is possible. But this too concerns a *feared* injury that one wants to avert. For that reason, people rely on hedging strategies and construct protective walls around themselves. Others close to the victim must not get a chance to hurt them again. That is why victims keep people at a distance. But it is precisely because they are victims of violence that they need attention, love, and ecstasy in particular.¹³ So hedging strategies can become devastating for intensive relationships and sexual relations. But it also functions in other, everyday contacts. Because victims want to protect themselves, they are in danger of blocking what could contribute to their healing.

Not only the wound itself but the vulnerability as well that the wound "embodies" exercises a devastating power. The lifelong effects of sexual abuse have their origin in this violence-enhancing power of vulnerability. Here too, the constant presence of the absent one plays an important role. The scar that remains makes what is absent present. The perpetrator has not lived nearby for a long time, and the violent acts happened long ago, but the absent one remains present in the effects of vulnerability. An intense, happy love relationship can stabilize a life and even aid its recovery and animate it – but it is precisely this that victims of sexual abuse find impossible. Thus, the violence affects – of all things – those very resources that are necessary to overcome the injury. The suffering in the past proves to be so overwhelming that people can still feel its effects years later. As long as this vicious circle continues, the survivors remain the victims of sexual abuse.

- Pastoral care and spiritual counseling after sexual abuse requires sensitivity to the effects of power that are operative in the increased vulnerability of the victim. Only when these effects are recognized can survivors break through them.

¹³ On this, cf. Kerstner, Haslbeck, and Buschmann, *Seelsorge*, 202-206.

But does the vicious circle of the victim function inevitably? What possibilities are there for stopping it? How can one escape the effects of the power of violence and start a process of healing? These questions are among those asked by victims and others involved. They are also questions for theology. No one can undo sexual abuse that has happened. But what can belief in the resurrection contribute to releasing the victim from continuing to suffer from the effects of the power of her wounds and scars? How can it prevent them from being helplessly subjected to these effects and enable them to resist and overcome them? To explore this question, we need to look more closely at the concept of victim.

3. Victim and sacrifice: a precarious relation

The concept of victim is a controversial one in the context of sexual abuse.¹⁴ Many reject it outright. This is not surprising, for the phrase “Du Opfer (You victim)!” is an insult in German juvenile slang, an insult that specifies passivity, lack of power, and revilement.¹⁵ It is interesting that there is a dispute in theology about the term as well, with respect to the view of the death of Jesus as victimization.¹⁶ Theology has, in the meantime, found a solution by distinguishing conceptually between victim and sacrifice. English and French, for example, have two words, whereas German unfortunately has only one. Now the question arises as to how far this distinction can be pursued in the context of abuse.

- *Victim*: a person becomes a victim of violence and suffers a severe injury; something happens to one that one has no influence over. In this assault, a person is passive, weak, without any power, humiliated, silenced – one is victimized.
- *Sacrifice*: one is willing to give some resources for a higher cause, thereby risking injury. This gift can come from one’s own resources or from the resources of others. In both cases, one shows strength, power, and activity: one is capable of sacrificing something or someone.

¹⁴ Cf. Carol Hagemann-White, “Opfer – die gesellschaftliche Dimension eines Phänomens,” in *Dokumentation des Symposiums “Edel sei das Opfer, hilflos und gut?”* (Berlin: Berliner Fachrunde gegen sexuellen Missbrauch an Mädchen und Jungen, 2008), 20-32; cf. www.strohthalm-ev.de.

¹⁵ Cf. [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opfer_\(Schimpfwort\).html](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opfer_(Schimpfwort).html).

¹⁶ On the debate on victim in theology, cf. Maria Katharina Moser, *Opfer zwischen Affirmation und Ablehnung* (Vienna, Berlin: LIT, 2007).

Victim and sacrifice – both forms of *Opfer* are relevant for sexual abuse. The abuser “sacrifices” the child for the sake of his or her own pleasure, lust, and power. The child is thus turned into a victim. This shows that the relation between victim and sacrifice is precarious. Both need to be distinguished, but they cannot be separated because the sacrifice that is made often does not come from one’s own resources but from the life-resources of others. In that case, the sacrifice victimizes the other and increases his or her vulnerability. In the context of the Church, a special potential for violence opens up here because religious communities attribute a positive value to *Opfer* in the sense of sacrifice.¹⁷ Thus, by referring to the higher sense of sacrifice (for the sake of God, the religious community, the tradition, etc.), the victimization can be hushed up or legitimized. Perpetrators of sexual violence then have an easy job of it, given that the victim serves the greater whole, such as the community, which is very engaged and brings a sacrifice to the charismatic leader.¹⁸ Even though a stance is taken in the political context against human sacrifice (*Menschenopfer*), in the religious context one is nonetheless prepared to make one under the proper circumstances. “Human sacrifices” by the Church produce “human victims.” This is the core of the evil that the cover-up of sexual abuse has produced.

No one wants to be a victim – especially not publicly. A special difficulty arises here for leaders who want to be viewed publicly as strong personalities – weak people are not *leaders*. If they state in public that they have been the victims of sexual abuse, they are initially associated with weakness. This can adversely affect how people see them as leaders.

The association of victims with weakness is widespread in society. This outlook expresses a reality, because the victimization is a grasp of power that actually wounds, inflicts pain, weakens, and humiliates. Victims experience powerlessness that suddenly increases their own vulnerability. Avoiding the word *victim* will not change this fact. But the decisive question is whether people remain caught in victimization’s grasp or if a solution can be found. How can the violence-enhancing power of vulnerability be interrupted, broken, or thwarted?

If someone is injured, she or he responds, for good reason, with protective and defensive strategies. She perhaps isolates herself, distances

¹⁷ German has the saying: “Priesterleben ist Opferleben” (A priestly life is a sacrificial life). The context of sexual abuse exposes the danger of this saying. The victims of the sacrifice may be the others.

¹⁸ Cf. Mertens, *Psychische Gewalt*, 87-92.

herself, withdraws, and makes herself as invulnerable as possible. Defense mechanisms are essential for people who have been hurt. But what protection is it precisely, what does it effect, and what does it prevent? A shadow side of self-protection is that one can become untouchable. One cannot communicate openly from behind walls. If one takes refuge behind so many protective fences, in the long run one separates oneself from life itself. One distrusts those who are actually trustworthy and those institutions that could offer support. Trust is therefore so important in the processing of pain, hurt, and healing.¹⁹ Protection strategies can hinder life and make a love relationship impossible. Love means you have to open up your borders, which makes you vulnerable. It is precisely on the basis of the act of opening oneself up, to touch and be touched, that love can exist at all. The ability to be moved, touched, entails an openness that makes one vulnerable.

An individual emerges from the silent isolation of the victim when he or she opens himself or herself up, speaks, engages in conversation, communicates, divulges something of himself or herself. One has to risk vulnerability. That is not easy for those who have been wounded. It is a very hard way, often accompanied by mortal fears. One has to sacrifice those defensive strategies one has appropriated that prevent participation in life itself. These protection strategies initially were important and valuable; they had a decisive function. But it is precisely this valuable aspect that must later be given up, be “sacrificed” in the truest sense of the word, so that one can once again take up communicative living. People want to cling to their protective strategies, but they need to let them go. To break free from victimization’s grasp requires a self-determined sacrifice. And like every sacrifice, this one demands a victim as well. For the sake of a higher goal – namely, to get back to living and to have control over one’s life again – one must make oneself vulnerable.

The perfidious long-term effect of sexual abuse consists in *being* sacrificed and so victimized; but, as a consequence, it is difficult to make a self-determined sacrifice, i.e., a gift that serves the intensity of life. Because one will perhaps be hurt, one tries to avoid making oneself vulnerable. But just as sacrifices can lock life up, so there are sacrifices that can open life up. Thus, a sacrifice can consist in the victim of sexual violence pressing charges for these acts and making them public. The first charges made were especially drastic because the victims thereby

¹⁹ “Missbrauch macht Vertrauen schwer” (Abuse makes trust difficult), Kerstner, Haslbeck, and Buschmann, *Seelsorge*, 16.

made themselves the most vulnerable. They experienced the victim aspect of that sacrifice especially. But without that sacrifice, the silence would never have been broken.

The way out of victimization is through sacrifice. Here we can see its positive, creative potential. Sacrifice happens in everything one loves or develops a passion for, such as when one loves someone else, brings children into the world or takes care of them, punishes human rights violations, becomes involved on behalf of creation, and works for human solidarity. One sacrifices time and energy, material goods and personal attention, creativity and competence. To live is to exert oneself, to work oneself to the bone, to devote oneself. Intensity bursts out when one gives oneself completely to love and commits oneself in the service of love. To stand for a cause or for a human individual leads to strength of conviction, joy in life, and drive.

In contrast, the silent powerlessness of people who have been victimized and stay behind their walls is dangerous – first of all for themselves but also for others. Many victims attempt to emerge from the loss of life they have undergone as victims by sacrificing another to the goal of their own quality of life. This can happen either intentionally or not. *Not deliberate* – one sacrifices others when one pulls possible supporters, for example, into the spiral of victimization. This can happen quite quickly in families and among close relations. Resignation and desperation are contagious; they have a destructive potential that also affects the lives of others. The victim hopes for a better life, but in the end the spiral is accelerated when others are also drawn into the vortex.

The victimization of others is *deliberate* when they are made part of the victim's revenge. Admittedly, powerless anger and the need for lacerating revenge will bring permanent violence for oneself. A dictum states, "Whoever seeks revenge keeps open his or her own wounds." If victims remain entangled in anger, they will not escape the destructive power of violence. This spiral determines perception and imposes tunnel vision. The inescapable focus on one's own wounds suppresses life resources that are actually available.

4. Living with wounds – trusting the miracle of transformation

The alternative appears at first almost unavoidable: either the victim powerlessly falls silent, in which event the violence stays with him; or the victim aims for revenge, in which case the violence moves back and

forth between perpetrator and victim. In both cases, the violence increases. Over against these alternatives, Christianity has developed a third option, based on the resurrection of Jesus: the belief that transformation is possible, especially for survivors of violence. Even when suffering deep wounds, one is able not only to survive but to truly live: a life in fullness that can be experienced intensely, passionately, with all one's senses and alertness, right down to one's fingertips. Mary Magdalene represents that belief in the wonder of transformation in a special way.

This assertion may surprise some, for in Christian reception history, Mary Magdalene has been primarily, but wrongly, interpreted in the context of her own guilt, shame, and repentance.²⁰ The *Schweigebruch*, however, reveals a completely different context. Here we can see in an exemplary fashion how theologically relevant this sign of the times is. This biblical woman, whom the tradition already quite early called "the apostle to the apostles," was a victim of extreme violence at several points in her life. The Gospels record that she had been possessed by seven demons (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9). Unfortunately, they do not mention what powers these demons embodied, but, apparently, Mary Magdalene was under the spell of an inexpressible, extremely violent grasp of power before she met Jesus and was healed. Nevertheless, the period of life after that also ended dramatically, for Mary had to watch Jesus die on the cross; according to Matthew 27:61 and Mark 15:40, she was present when he was placed in the tomb and was thus confronted with the body of a beloved individual that bore the traces of deadly torture.

Mary underwent this traumatic experience again when she set out for the tomb on Easter morning. The Gospel of John relates how she, sobbing, stood at the resting place of that person she loved and at whose hands she had experienced healing (John 20:1-18). She is one who is deeply wounded. Her hopes have been crucified, her love shattered, her life stifled. But she encounters the Resurrected One and everything changes. Out of the woman who had been devastated comes a woman who is full of life, who meets the challenges of the young Church with

²⁰ On the biblical Mary Magdalene and the history of the interpretation of her as a figure in the Gospel, see Silke Petersen, *Maria aus Magdala. Die Jüngerin, die Jesus liebte* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011). The extremely dangerous history of the effects that the reception of Mary Magdalene as prostitute had on dealing with women who engage in prostitution to earn a living or those with "illegitimate children," in, for example, "Magdalene asylums" and "laundries" has only been tentatively researched. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdalene_asylum.html.

strength and courage, resourcefulness, and confidence.²¹ At the tomb, where only death was expected, life was opened up to her. Previously, she was completely dominated by the violence she had suffered. But now she experiences a change in power from death to life. Not only is she a witness to the resurrection, but she experiences it in her own body: she herself becomes one of the resurrected.

Biblically, Mary Magdalene represents the belief that the miracle of transformation is possible, even for survivors of extreme violence. In this transformation to resurrection, hurts can heal, and even the silent power embodied in the remaining scars is broken. The wounded person escapes from the powerful grasping of violence, without passing it on to others. The scars are still there, but they no longer determine one's life. At the tomb of Jesus, Mary Magdalene is placed in the position of not having to give up her hope but of realizing it in the here and now. She practices belief in the resurrection as an art of ordinary living.

Our look at Mary Magdalene provides the first indication of how the Church can restore faith damaged by abuse and cover-ups. Breaking the silence forces theology to put the victims of violence and their vulnerability at the center. Thus, the gospel message opens up anew in a problem that is of great social relevance. Confronted with the problem of abuse, theology cannot shift belief in the resurrection to a placeless beyond. Rather, theology is challenged to rediscover this belief in the vulnerabilities of the present. Only with this discovery can faith be situated today, in the present.

Mich dem Leben in die Arme werfen
 "Wir sind auf der Suche
 nach einer Kraft,
 die uns aus den Häusern,
 aus den zu engen Schuhen
 und aus den Gräbern treibt.
 Aufstehen und
 mich dem Leben in die Arme werfen –
 nicht erst am jüngsten Tag,

²¹ The Church has credited Mary Magdalene with much, right up to the evangelization of Provence, a foreign country on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. The Legend of Aurea relates that she was sent out with three siblings from Bethany, with the later Bishop Maxim, and a dark-skinned servant named Sarah on a ship with no sails and landed near Marseille at the fishing village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. (Cf. *Legenda Aurea* 96: "Die Heilige Maria Magdalena," in *Legenda Aurea – Golden Legend Vol. II*. (= *Fontes Christiani*), ed. Jacobus de Voragine (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 1235-96.

nicht erst, wenn es nichts mehr kostet
 und niemandem mehr wehtut.
 Sich ausstrecken nach allem,
 was noch aussteht,
 und nicht nur nach dem Zugebilligten.
 Uns erwartet das Leben.
 Wann, wenn nicht jetzt?"²²

In experiences of extreme violence, it is very difficult to find a way out of the role of victim. Here it is not a question of the utopia of an untainted world but one of practicing resurrection as an art of living. Attention is therefore directed at this turning point: the miracle of transformation. Those signs of hope by which the change in power from death to life succeeds are sought persistently. The paschal art of living cannot be achieved without struggling with the forces that involve death. It cannot be achieved without this resistance that dares to speak out where it is not wanted. The greatest miracle of life is the healing of wounds, the wonder of the transformation from death to life, which turns powerless victims into witnesses to life. Transformation, conversion, and metamorphosis therefore play a central role in Christian faith. No one has to remain who he or she is. With the resurrection before them, people can break the usual patterns of behavior, leave well-traveled roads, and dare to make a new beginning. For "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim 1:7, NKJV). The spirit of fear and timidity stands in the way of transformation. To believe in the resurrection means the opposite – to entrust oneself to God, energetically, lovingly, and prudently. Faith in the resurrection is to be taught and practiced in such a way that it enables victims to overcome their status as victims and become survivors.

That such a transformation is in fact a miracle can be seen in many places in the context of sexual abuse. It is not a matter of course for the Church either but a profound challenge to believe in the miracle of

²² Luzia Sutter Rehmann, Sabine Bieberstein, and Ulrike Metternich, eds., *Sich dem Leben in die Arme werfen: Auferstehungserfahrungen* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 2002), <http://edoc.unibas.ch/dok/A2507530edoc>, 9.

Throwing Myself into the Arms of Life

We are searching / for a power / that drives us out of our homes / out of our shoes that are too small / and out of our graves. / Rising and throwing myself into the arms of life – not only on the Last Day, / not only when it no longer costs anything / and doesn't harm anyone, / To reach out to everything / that still endures, / and not only to what has been granted. / Life is expected of us / When, if not now?

transformation and to capitalize on that in its daily praxis. The Church has to be transformed from an institution that trivializes and hides abuse into an institution that protects victims, supports them unreservedly with all the resources at its disposal, and prevents further victimizations. Whether it believes in this miracle of transformation itself is demonstrated by where it fails or succeeds in this transformation. Breaking the silence reminds it of its task to support people in the name of Jesus, to trust in the miracle of transformation, and to travel the liberating road of healing. The problem of the violence of sexual abuse challenges the Church's mission of salvation. It must restore its belief in the resurrection by removing it from the unreachable hereafter and placing it in the midst of human vulnerability, in the midst of the daily praxis of humans who are caught in the spirals of violence. Where else, if not in the midst of oppressive experiences of violence, exclusion, and victimization, is resurrection needed?

5. The resurrection as the Christian art of living – the other power of vulnerability²³

“Where are the resurrected?” That is the question the poet Rose Ausländer poses. By “the resurrected” she means those who have overcome their own death and the violence they have suffered and who “caress life.” The Christian faith in the resurrection does not represent a naïve sense of “everything will work out well.” Its home is not found in beautiful utopias but in the midst of the brokenness of life that the cross embodies. Resurrection happens where the apparently overwhelming power of death is disempowered and life unexpectedly breaks through. Therefore, this faith is realized as an art of life that resists what is opposed to it, what destroys life, damages people, and forces them into powerlessness. Belief in the resurrection entails God's presence in the midst of the injuries suffered in life, a presence that lifts up those who have been battered in life. The key word “resurrection” was developed in the New Testament as a metaphor on the basis of everyday experiences of getting up. Ulrike Metternich has shown that the Greek text of the New Testament uses the same word and verb form when it says of Jesus “He is

²³ On this, cf. Hildegund Keul, *Auferstehung als Lebenskunst. Auferstehung als Lebenskunst; Was das Christentum auszeichnet* (Freiburg: Herder, 2014).

risen” and when it speaks of getting up or rising in the stories of Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:15), Jairus’s daughter (Matthew 9:25), the paralytic (Mark 2:12), and Mary, Martha’s sister (John 11:29).²⁴ Falling to the ground, being humiliated, and being lifted up are a pervasive theme in the Gospels.

This secular connection raises the question whether the hope of resurrection only applies to members of the Christian community. What happens to those who, unlike Mary Magdalene, do not “see” the resurrected Lord? A position on this question taken by Vatican II is insightful. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) says of the Christian person: “linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope” (GS 22). The Christian calling is tied to the paschal hope that faith in the resurrection bestows. But this faith is not exclusive: “All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery” (GS 22).

The Spirit of God offers all people the possibility to be associated with the paschal mystery in their own lives. This association is already established in and through the Holy Spirit by God. The Spirit of God also appears unexpectedly in the lives of people outside the Church and leaves signs that point from death to life. The task of the Church is to perceive these signs with the victims of violence, to decipher them, and to name that perspective of the resurrection that liberates people from victimization’s grasp for power. No one can point at God and say, “There he is; there she is.” But people can point out to each other where they see traces of his or her presence. God talks in soft tones that speak of resurrection. It can also be where God seems to be distant and strange. “God is truly near to you, where you are, when you are open to this Infinite One. Then, namely, the distance of God is at the same time his incomprehensible all-permeating Nearness.”²⁵ Cautiously expressing such hidden traces of God’s presence is the task of a Church that wants to restore faith after the silence about abuse has been broken.

²⁴ See Sutter Rehmann, Bierberstein, and Metternich, eds., *Sich dem Leben*, 176.

²⁵ Karl Rahner, *Theology and Philosophy*, trans. Karen Kilby (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 120.

Belief in the resurrection does not close its eyes to the grasp of the power of violence, which leads to a vicious circle. But it brings a different power into play, one that appears more quiet and more unspectacular but is no less effective because of that. The apostle Paul discovered it when he complained to God about a wound, the famous “thorn in the flesh.” God encouraged him by saying: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). To show vulnerability and to make oneself vulnerable can release strength and even resilience. Vulnerability also means that one is open, not cut off by walls and barbed wire, and can be moved, is ready for conversation with strangers, to communicate with others, and is willing to change. When a leader says that he has been abused as a child, he makes himself vulnerable. But he also shows that the status of victim can be overcome, and he contradicts discrimination against victims of violence. In voluntarily risking his own vulnerability, his strength grows.

To understand anew belief in the resurrection from the perspective of the challenge of sexual abuse is a future task of theology. This opens up a connection to that interdisciplinary discourse of vulnerability and resilience that has experienced a resurgence since the end of the 1980s. “The reference to resilience contains the promise to be able to respond robustly and flexibly to the upheavals. One looks at the personal, social, cultural, economic, or ecological resources that help people be less susceptible to disruptions and to overcome radical changes.”²⁶ What contribution can belief in the resurrection make to the advancement of resilience among victims of abuse? To ask questions like this in the context of research into resilience and to thus introduce resources from theology into these secular debates is new; here, theology is confronted with a completely new task.²⁷

²⁶ “Der Verweis auf die Resilienz enthält das Versprechen, robust und flexibel auf die Umbrüche reagieren zu können. Der Blick wird auf die personalen, sozialen, kulturellen, ökonomischen oder ökologischen Ressourcen gelenkt, die hilfreich sind, um gegen Störungen weniger anfällig zu sein und radikalen Wandel zu meistern.” Markus Vogt and Martin Schneider, “Zauberwort Resilienz. Analysen zum interdisziplinären Gehalt eines schillernden Begriffs,” *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift (MThZ)* 67, no. 3 (2016): 180–194, 180. See also in the same volume: Hildegund Keul, “Vulnerabilität und Resilienz – christlich-theologische Perspektiven”: 224–233.

²⁷ Elias D. Stangel discussed the question as to whether faith promotes resilience (Elias D. Stangel, *Resilienz durch Glauben? Die Entwicklung psychischer Widerstandskraft bei Erwachsenen* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2016). He points out that in German-speaking areas – completely unlike the English-speaking world – faith is barely perceived and researched with respect to its effect of enabling resilience (Stangel, *Resilienz durch Glauben?*, 214). His empirical study, which concerned a “homogenous group of highly religious people,” ten individuals from the Salzburg Loretto prayer group, and comprises

Can the distinction between victim and sacrifice also take us further in the debates on resilience? From a theological perspective, it is striking that, in the local context, vulnerability is usually treated exclusively on the level of victimization and is understood as disruption, loss, failure, danger, damage, and threat. Current studies in resilience research thus define vulnerability “in the sense of a constant danger and impairment of well-being and life chances.”²⁸ But does increased vulnerability actually always lead to a decrease in resilience or can – under what circumstances? – strength grow out of vulnerability? The significance of sacrifice for resilience has not been researched until now; here a considerable lack of research can be noted. Theology can provide analytical tools if it transforms its internal theological discourse of sacrifice, which it conducts with a view to the Eucharist, for example, into the new discourse of vulnerability and resilience. With the research on victim and sacrifice, the various effects of the creative power of vulnerability can be analyzed. But at the same time this means that the binary code of “vulnerable, unsure, imperiled, weak, susceptible” versus “resilient, sure, strong, durable, protected” is broken. The voluntary risking of one’s own vulnerability can be a sacrifice that actually leads one out of a situation of victimization and strengthens resilience.

Daring to commit and dedicate oneself in the vulnerable vitality of life – that is the challenge for people in the spiral of violence of victimization. Despite the real danger of being hurt, such a commitment opens life up. It can develop a different power that does not originate in superior strength but grows out of vulnerability; that is why one runs the risk of vulnerability. The Christian faith starts from this power of life. For God himself takes this dare, as Jesus born as a child, in poverty and vulnerability. A theology that is grounded in the incarnation of God in a newborn child, starts with “the other power” of vulnerability. It believes in the mystery of the resurrection that the life given by God is stronger than death. All people *have* to live with their own fractures and wounds – both with those that make them victims and those they suffer voluntarily as a sacrifice. And – starting from the power of the resurrection for life – they *can*.

interviews lasting from 30 to 50 minutes, is certainly persuasive. Sexual violence cannot be discussed in such a context and remains just as unheard as possible wounds to the faith.

²⁸ Vulnerability “im Sinne einer andauernden Gefährdung und Beeinträchtigung von Wohlbefinden und Lebenschancen” (Insa Fookan, “Psychologische Perspektiven der Resilienzforschung,” in *Multidisziplinäre Perspektiven der Resilienzforschung* (= *Studien zur Resilienzforschung 1*), ed. Rüdiger Wink (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), 15.

6. Pastoral care after abuse and trigger-free religious services – restoring belief in the resurrection

The challenge of rekindling belief in the resurrection is one directed at the proclamation of the Church and academic theology as well as at pastoral and spiritual praxis. It is precisely there that a new orientation to belief in the resurrection is needed. How can those affected by abuse find, in belief in the resurrection, what they need for their own lives that helps them resist victimization? In Germany, where the publicizing of the extent of the violation of human rights only began in 2010, the processing of this question is just starting.²⁹ Because the Church has lost society's trust, many do not seek salvation in it at all. But, outside of the Church, sexual violence and cover-ups involve families, the world of work, and social institutions. The goal should be to give shape to what the Church has to offer so that it can also be accepted by people who do not belong to the Church. No one can undo abuse that has happened. But how can belief in the resurrection contribute to putting a stop to the effects of the power of wounds and scars? How can those who have been wounded succeed in not allowing what happened *in the past* to make life intolerable *now*? What resources are there in the midst of resignation and desperation to create stable and viable hope?

- **The impulse of mysticism: present life**

Christian mysticism is a rich resource for precarious healing processes. Sexual abuse challenges the Church to rediscover its resources and to put them to use in pastoral practice. Mysticism finds its basis in the mystery

²⁹ In February 2016, the 6th symposium of the Catholic Abuse and Prevention Committee in Germany grappled for the first time with the “Opportunities and Risks of Spirituality: Pastoral Challenges and Aspects of Healing in Sexual Abuse (Chancen und Risiken von Spiritualität: Pastorale Herausforderungen und Heilungsaspekte in der Missbrauchsthematik),” http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2016/2016-034a-Programm-Fortbildungstagung-2016.pdf. - For the global context in 2012 see Charles J. Scicluna, Hans Zollner, and David J. Ayotte, eds., *Toward Healing and Renewal. The 2012 Gregorian Symposium on Sexual Abuse of Minors* (Mahwah: Paulist Press 2012). Karl Hillenbrand had already suggested “the offer of long-term counselling by the Church for victims and their families”: Karl Hillenbrand, “Perspektivenwechsel im Kirchen- und Amtsverständnis,” in *Ans Licht gebracht. Weiterführende Fakten und Konsequenzen des sexuellen Missbrauchs für Kirche und Gesellschaft*, eds. Wunibald Müller and Myriam Wijlens (Münsterschwarzach: Vier Türme-Verlag, 2011), 153. On mysticism as a movement that was inspired by belief in the resurrection, cf. Hildegund Keul, *Auferstehung als Lebenskunst*, 72-114.

that is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ – and is present in the daily lives of people who risk commitment in the midst of their own vulnerability. It lives as a practice of resistance that checks the paralyzing grasp of power that violence exercises and opposes it with that other power that sets the Spirit of God free in those who were held bound. In that way, Meister Eckhart (b. 1260) placed the notion of *letting go* at the center of Christian spirituality: the overpowering grasp can only be loosened when one learns to actively let go, if only for a moment. What is missing – and what is present? What is operative – and what is possible? Hidden life resources are cautiously, and at the same time persistently, sought. Where letting go occurs, there secularized people approach that mystery of life that mysticism pursues. In the midst of all the wounding and destruction, they rely on something indestructible that makes transformation possible.

- **Rituals of healing and trigger-free worship services**

Ritual competence is part of the brand of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church should continue to develop this in the future so that it can have a liberating effect when counseling victims of abuse. Rituals in the right place at the right time and with the right words are powerful events.³⁰ If they are based on belief in the resurrection, they give direction, make transformation possible, and also enable one to act in difficult situations. The Church has the task of developing special rituals of healing with and for victims, for individuals. To that end, the Church needs to train personnel who are knowledgeable in the area of sexual abuse, have the required ritual competence, and understand how to use the resources of mysticism. With a view to religious services, project groups to which victims can make a significant contribution and are intended to work on a supply of trigger-free worship services would be helpful. How challenging this will be can be seen solely in the fact that the phrase “Father, thy will be done” can be a trigger for people who have been misused by their biological fathers. But it is precisely because the challenge is so great that it has to be met – it shows how great the underlying problem of God-talk is. The experiences from such special, violence-sensitive religious services would have to be fed back into the form of other religious services, including

³⁰ On the significance of rituals, cf. the classic Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1969).

the Sunday Eucharist celebrations so that other people will be supported in their overcoming the violence they have suffered and, in this sense, promote transformation.³¹

- **Gender-sensitive pastoral care**

The constant challenge of sexual abuse requires gender-sensitive pastoral care. The perspectives of women and men are not only equal but also different. In Germany, the exposure of abuse in churches, in which boys were victimized at a higher rate than they generally are in secular environments, meant that attention was primarily focused on boys and men. The women of the “Gottes-Suche” group rightly complain: “Girls (and women) have been lost to view.”³² Has, perhaps, a case of tunnel vision developed here in Church and society that marginalizes sexual violence against girls and women?

Especially in view of the problem of the victim, gender-sensitivity is necessary. Christoph Bösch demonstrates³³ and states that it is particularly difficult for boys to identify as victims because it contradicts the social images of masculinity as comprising strength and autonomy. On the other hand, it is not good for girls either if their own experience and social perceptions of femininity concur in ascribing a victim status to women – this reinforces the difficulty of breaking out of the circle of victimization. In German-speaking areas, gender questions must be posed much more forcefully in the context of abuse and prevention, and its significance for pastoral care must be reflected upon with survivors.

Survivors of sexual abuse who struggle hard to overcome victimization are experts in the struggle for belief in the resurrection. They show how one can live with wounds if one nevertheless trusts in the miracle of transformation, despite all doubts. They are connected to belief in the resurrection to which the gospel witnesses in special ways. Perhaps in the future the Church can learn with and from them what “Resurrection as an Art of Living” means. If the Church is ready to travel this path, then it will win back its wounded faith, for others and for itself.

³¹ After all, the Eucharist celebration goes back to the Last Supper, at which death had a seat at the table, and where Jesus initiated a ritual that made it possible to resist the threatening spiral of death.

³² Kerstner and Haslbeck and Buschmann, *Seelsorge*, 8.

³³ Christoph Bösch, “Unterschiede zwischen männlichen und weiblichen Opfern von sexuellem Missbrauch,” *Prävention. Zeitschrift des Bundesvereins zur Prävention von sexuellem Missbrauch* 6, no. 7 and 8 (2003): 3-5.

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