

Understanding and Deconstruct Systematic Catholic Church Sexual Abuse and Trauma

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ABSTRACT

Although awareness of the Catholic priesthood has increased in recent years, knowledge about its occurrence and consequences as a distinct form of abuse remains limited. The film *Grâce à Dieu (By the Grace of God)* (2019) and other global reports on the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests, based on the real Catholic Church harassment scandal, this article presents a quick review of existing findings on the impact of abuse on victims/survivors. The study examined the context of systematic Catholic sexual assault, defined the concepts involved, made a detailed study of specific films, for the real events behind the film re-design the plot in the analysis of photography, and the introduction of the reality of such events for the construction of public opinion and victims of the powerless. Through the phenomenon of the spiral of silence in sociology, this paper deconstructs the reason why public opinion always tries to ignore/remain silent about such events. As a basis, we study the imbalance of power structure and the deformity of ecumenism in the Catholic Church. The study notes that the residual power of the Clericalism and the trauma associated with each violation are the most central and important parts of this type of abuse. Finally, we consider the reparability of the mechanism of religious institutions. Deep dive explores the causes of the events and then returns to the care and social help for the victims, showing the return of the humanistic spirit.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Sexual Abuse, Clericalism, Trauma-Caring

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to examine and deconstruct the film *Grâce à Dieu (By the Grace of God)* and its reference to the true story of those children who were sexually victimized by the venerable but predatory godfather Bernard Preynat and then extends to the reports of systematic Catholic Church sexual abuse cases. The sexual abuse of young boys by Catholic clerics has catalyzed intensive inquiry into two basic aspects of church life: the sexual abuse of persons by members of a clergy obliged to celibacy, and the response by the authority structure of the Catholic Church. The scrutiny by the secular media has been relentless, and this public exposure has strengthened the resolve of vast numbers of victims to disclose their abuse. After first approaching Church authorities for assistance and redress, most victims have found the Church's internal system unwilling or unable to provide the relief sought. Further,

in many cases, the official Church reaction amounted to a re-victimization, whereby the victims were treated as an enemy force.

Understanding the issue from the occurrence of this case, from the personal problems of the perpetrators to the problems that are implicit in the Catholic system, and on its way to the harmful party, the powerlessness and inaction of the power structures between the legal system and Catholic Church, affects the victims in a disguised way; in the end, it is the victims who suffered the severe and lasting effects of trauma, the coping mechanisms that make it difficult to advance the process of charging violations.

Limited by the specific movie, the amount of referred literature directly relating to this essay is deficient. Therefore, the type of literature is directly related to specific arguments. The origin and historical Evolution of Catholic Asceticism mainly demonstrate the history of Catholic priestly celibacy. A Study of Christian sexual

Ethics from the Bible presents how Catholic regard sex. The Christian Hierarchy and its main Denominations elucidate the administrative structure of the Catholic system. *What Is the Relationship Between Church and State?* illustrates the complex relationship between the Catholic church and government from the aspect of the Bible.

Based on previous research, we can find that most of the theses have been developed on problems or deficiencies in the laws associated with Catholic sexual abuse, while others have focused on medical or psychological aspects. The reason why trauma is difficult to recover is that it has a double impact on the victim: physical and psychological. Psychological trauma research has certain limitations. We will add a systematic structural review to the research on psychological trauma to take a broader view of the issue.

To make a succinct but in-depth rapid review of the existing materials, a literature review was conducted according to the previous research path. The retrospective search strategy is primarily designed to find out whether research in similar reports has similar arguments and to cross-reference and cross-reference across multiple disciplinary areas to refine our discussion. These studies and reports mainly include: (a) Selected film-related research; (b) Some Chinese scholars for the Catholic Church's internal related research; (c) Multidimensional analysis of Catholic Sexual assault in the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* and other related journals; (d) Other open web resources.

Structure-wise, this paper started with basic background information relating to the Catholic church, for instance, the Catholic sex ethic, the Catholic priestly celibacy, and priests' circumstances. Then, with a detailed introduction in the major reference of the whole essay, the film, *Grâce à Dieu* (By the Grace of God) From various angles, such as movie introduction, movies inspiration, camera work, and so on, the paper gave a general introduction about the movie, preparing for the next step — reasoning. The reason part was divided into two parts, one focused on the Catholic church and public, the other emphasized dysfunctional power structures and mechanisms that led to clericalism. The first reason is mainly based on the Catholic church system, concerning the analysis of the bishop in the movie, the relationship between the Catholic church and government, oppressed public. Based on the first reason, the essay started the deeper analysis of the Church's power structure interacts with its dynamics, the manipulateness and traumatic bonding of the Clericalism is the most central and important part of this abuse.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Systematic sexual abuse of the Catholic Church is complicated, especially because it has relevance to

religion. Therefore, some essential religious concepts which are related to value and regulation are provided for better analysis.

2.1 Catholic Sexual Ethics

Figuring out how the Catholic church regards sex is the prerequisite of researching the systematic catholic church sexual abuse. The Bible, the holy book of the Christian religion, conveys appreciation and favor for sex. The Ten Commandments provide that **DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY** (at Exodus 20:14) and **YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WIFE** (at Exodus 20:17). hereby, sex is accepted in the Catholic religion, even being appreciated. The key point is to keep fidelity and sexual purity.

2.2 The Catholic Priestly Celibacy

Early catholic pieces of literature have been abundant in ideas about austerity which is fundamental for the catholic priestly celibacy [1]. Austerity, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (the 9th version), means allowing nothing that gives pleasure. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (the 9th version). Based on austerity, Catholics developed a routine of celibacy. Nevertheless, the Bible still says that being celibate is a unique option for some people, like a kind of God's gift [2], which means that being celibate is an alternative, so every catholic staff does not have to keep celibate.

2.3 Compressed priests

Although being celibacy is an optional matter for priests at the beginning. With the development of the Catholic system, the priests were forced to be single to show their loyalty to God. Nevertheless, celibacy ignores these priests as humans. Sexuality is an inherent human drive. Under the severe squeeze between nature and strict celibacy, some priests have attempted to release their libido through a few invisible but convenient approaches. Celibacy tradition became a major internal reason why systematic catholic church sexual abuses have been happening for such a long time, due to against human nature.

3. FILM ANALYSIS

A great amount of catholic sexual abuse has occurred for a long time. *Grâce à Dieu* (By the Grace of God) [3], the basement of this essay, was fictionalized from a true catholic sexual scandal. It is necessary to give a general explanation of this catholic sexual abuse case.

3.1 The Real-Happened Catholic Sexual Abuse Case

In January 2016, in Lyon in eastern France, an incident that which a priest called Bernard Preynat had sexually assaulted four boy scouts under fifteen from 1986 to 1991 was exposed [4]. This priest took advantage of his identification to molest several boys who have been suffering mental and physical torment even grown-up. In that case, Father Bernard was not alone. His prior bishop has covered up his assaults. A sizable group of church staff and officials have known Father Bernard's assaults, but without exception, all of them have kept their mouths. Until victims reveal themselves painful experiences, Father Bernard, the general bishop of Lyon, and even the whole Catholic church system have lightly responded.

3.2 Details of Grâce à Dieu (By the Grace of God)

3.2.1 Brief Introduction of Film Plot

Grâce à Dieu (By the Grace of God), produced by François Ozon, a French director, was released in Angers, France, on 10th December 2018. This movie was fictionalized from the incident that Father Bernard Preynat had sexually assaulted plenty of boy scouts from 1986 to 1991.

Grâce à Dieu (By the Grace of God) is a typical feature film. It has a complex but clear narrative line: three victims of catholic sexual abuse united a lot of victims revealing the pedophilia Father Bernard's assaults and challenging the whole Lyon Catholic church even the Vatican through the press, theme website, public protests, and so on.

To be more logical, exactly, there are two storylines within the film. One is how those victims alter from fighting for justice alone to revolt against catholic church sexual assaults as a team. The other is the process of revealing the whole scandal.

Due to the great amount of relating people, these two storylines maintain abundant emotions, not only criticism but also a recovery road for every victim, a self-examination of the Catholic church system, care for beliefs, and so on. Audiences can tangibly feel every character's feelings through the director's design. Meanwhile, they get a complete understanding of a "God's Eye View" of the whole Catholic priest assault scandal.

3.2.2 Specific Analysis of Camerawork

Compared with the complex scandal, the director chooses a quite calm and simple way to capture it.

Within this movie, the close-up is very common, especially in figure shooting. On these figures shooting, audiences can catch details of emotional change. What's

more, high angle shoots are simultaneously used with a close-up in this film. Several visions use this combination, for instance, a victim is talking with Father Bernard with repressed anger, giving the audience a powerful impact.

The last but not least, even shot movements in this movie are particularly noteworthy. From the beginning to the end, shot movements are simple and smooth. The director utilized Pan Shot, Tilt, Zoom, and Tracking to construct film scenes and illustrate characters' relations. The significant feature of this movie is the still shot. The shot is still even without music, especially, in some scenes about conflicts and collisions. Actors' action is everything, which means the story is everything, without special effects, without garnish Montage, only performance, and plot. No matter how vehement or panicked or happy these actors are, the shot is still. Therefore, audiences can objectively feel these complicated emotions and understand the reason, process, and ending of the whole Catholic priest sexual abuse scandal.

The plainest skills were used to display the most intricate emotions, causing the strongest strikes in audiences' minds.

4. PUBLICOPINIO & SILENT VICTIMS

4.1 Public Opinion under the Domination

Public opinion is a supervisor of society. However, limited by political or economic elements, this function sometimes will be surpassed, even wielded by different interest groups.

Catholic churches in French easily belong to the Reformed Theology, which is one of the religious denominations. Within the Reformed Theology, every bishop is elected by all flocks [5]. The Reformed Theology was founded in the period of the Reformation which was the projection of the bourgeois movement happening in Europe in the 16th century. Therefore, in the beginning, the Reformed Theology has serviced the bourgeoisie. Every bishop who was elected by flocks was wealthy, well-educated, and influential. In other words, the bishop is the symbol of society controllers who account for a little proportion of the whole population but take up the most and best of social resources in every area. The Catholic Church has never been a purely religious institution, but rather an integration of local social resources.

This is the reason why people not only show respect to the Catholic Church and its staff but also feel scared about them. Under the circumstances, opinion leaders usually ignore incidents like "a priest sexually abuses a child" because they are all in the same boat. Therefore, the public loses their voice even know something ridiculous is happening.

4.2 Public Opinion Holds Victims of Catholic Sexual Abuse Tongue

In the public opinion field, when a kind of view is in a minority and without more support, people, who held it, will keep silent and gradually deny themselves or even alter their minds in the end. This is the phenomenon of the Spiral of Silence. It easily happens on those issues that social convention strains every nerve to talk about or solve.

Compared with the whole society, victims of sexual abuse are surely in a minority. What is more, the majority of them have suffered from physical and mental illnesses caused by sexual assaults, which makes their resistance tough. Besides, sexual abuse has been an unmentionable subject according to social convention. Victim-blaming has prevailed in recent years. To sum up, a victim of sexual abuse has to encounter traumas, external acceptances, threats from abusers, and so on.

Even less, when the abuser is a priest, things always go worse. The priest is the antithesis of sex in nature. From a public view, it is extremely unimaginable that a priest sexually abused a child. So, victims of catholic sexual abuse burden much more pressure than victims of general sexual abuse.

The elements above mean that public opinion will perform rather silent when a catholic sexual abuse happens. Under the Spiral of Silence, gradually, victims of catholic sexual abuse are accustomed to being quiet.

5. REFLECTING ON CLERICALISM AND DYSFUNCTIONAL POWER STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS

The cases of sexual abuse by clerics are a complex phenomenon, and the actual sexual abuse is the most obvious and dramatic aspect of the whole affair, but it does not tell the whole truth.

Sexual abuse committed by clergy members does not occur out of the blue, nor is it committed on a whim by individuals, the manipulateness and traumatic bonding of the Clericalism that has been created behind him is the most central and important part of this abuse. Abuses committed by clerics cannot be viewed separately from the form in which the Church's power structure interacts with its dynamics [6]. This is essentially a clerical distortion of the church. Clericalism refers to the formal, church-based views of the clergy in the church or the broader political and socio-cultural aspects of the role of guidance and application of social phenomena [7]. As a product of organizational development, sectarianism established the social distinction between officials and members, with the former as the superior and the latter as the subordinate. Such a social phenomenon continues in the church so that members of the church and some non-members of the church will respect the clergy

unconditionally for the wrong to please God. In a 2016 letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, chairman of the Pontifical Council for Latin, Pope Francis said, The pastor does not have to tell the layman what to do and what to say, and laymen know this, and one step ahead of us. Nor does the shepherd have to dictate what the layman must say on different occasions [8]. This suggests that the nature of these incidents of sexual abuse is a manifestation of the manipulation of power by clergy members, who use personal appearances to manipulate and exploit victims in good faith and affect their families, instead of true respect for God. For further research, the influence of the power structure of the religious legal system and the hidden privilege of the perpetrators will be discussed and analyzed separately.

5.1 The Church's Legal System

The Catholic Church has its legal system, commonly known as The Code of Canon Law. The Canon Law provides the clergy with a basic standard of care in dealing with members of the church. As a product of the profound influence of modern western judicature, canon law inevitably causes problems when it collides with modern morality and law. The canon law has direct legislative provisions for dealing with sexual abuse and detailed procedures for dealing with such allegations. The problem is not that modern law or ecclesiastical law does not have a body of law to judge such intractable matters, but that the church establishment has failed to live up to the principle of self-reliance.

5.2 The Perpetrators

Individual aggressors have privileges in the church system — privileges derived from the structure of work, as well as the Clericalism and power structure behind it. The priesthood is characterized by shared authority, trust, isolation, judgment, lack of vision, and limited career mobility, at the same time, the position has a subculture within the symbol (confidentiality, team spirit, maintaining the status quo). Such subcultures explicitly refer to human beings as a "team spirit" that encourages the abuse of power [9].

When such a violation occurs, it is a betrayal that the aggressor can obtain the protection of religious groups and the acquiescence and inaction of the government and legal units. The sexual exploitation of children by a privileged and even designated representative of God is a criminal attack on the psychosocial and spiritual well-being of that person. When perpetrators are sheltered and supported by a larger religious community, victims and families do not draw attention to the sexual abuse of clergy, or the judge allowed the guilty abuser of the clergy to get away with it. The effect of this betrayal is magnified [10]. The resources and attention devoted to protecting the Catholic Church from scandal go far

beyond meaningful support and care for victims and their families.

6. CONCLUSION

Starting with four semi-fictional characters, François Ozon deconstructs the ties between people, people and families, and people and society by dissecting the event from the perspective of the victims. The contrasts and shared experiences of the three main individuals produce a metaphysical spirit of heroic combat. When old beliefs are invaded and hollowed out by sexual trauma, new belief emerges, and even the most vulnerable can discover the superhuman will to combat the trauma. Sexual assault and body persecution result in a widespread religious crisis that transcends from individuals to groups, which derives two dimensions from this circumstance. The first is that once a victim is sexually harassed by a priest, the victim and his or her related personnel (family or society) will lose their faith in the church, causing religious doctrines to malfunction. The second is about other religious insiders (except the perpetrators), questioning church interior organizations, which implies that church members doubt their faith as certain black sheep are inevitably ruining what they are passionate about, putting them in a crag-fast predicament that will most likely be misidentified as bad ones by the public.

Rethinking and mending religious setups or mechanisms, including this grand old ideological system, is a dreadfully challenging and time-consuming process, and achieving a flawless state is virtually impossible. Additionally, we all know that the psychological trauma caused by sexual assault to the victim may be significantly greater than the physical injuries; physical wounds are likely to be healed, but psychological trauma is irreversible, and self-healing is arduous for most victims. Throughout their lives, they are bound by fear, apprehension, and distress. As a result, now is the time for society to focus on the rights of the victims themselves, whereas only their voices can positively impact the world. This is not merely about external help to heal the psychological scars of the victims, it is also about the regression of the humanistic spirit in the sense of society, which is about human rights, dignity, and value. Society pays increased recognition to the victims' psychological processes and reshapes their value as human beings, representing humanistic spirit recurrence and demonstrating the humane care that this current era should have.

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