Faithful and True? The History of Mentalities and the Catholic Church's Response to the Sexual Abuse Crises

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Denial, cover-up, refusal and the double *crises*

Wave after wave of news about the sexual abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as its cover-up, pound against the Church walls. This has been going on for almost forty years, because that is how long it has been since reports emerged in Canada and shortly afterwards in the USA of priests who committed sexual violence against children and young people. Stimulated in particular by the revelations of the Boston Globe's 'Spotlight Team' in 2002, the attention of the media and the public, primarily in western Anglophone countries, was initially directed towards abuse in the Catholic Church. The second major wave of reports on this topic started in 2010 with news of abuse at the Canisius College in Berlin and, over the course of the following years, it also reached those countries in which, for various reasons, there was no public reporting and no public discussion.

With the announcement of the indictments against former Washington Archbishop McCarrick and the presentation of the 'Grand Jury Report' in Pennsylvania in mid-2018, a new storm broke out, this time not only or not mainly because of the startlingly high number of abuse victims and perpetrators among the clergy – one could almost think that the Church and non-Church general public

have become accustomed to these monstrous figures. Rather, for the first time the failure, not only of a bishop or provincial, but also the decades-long denial and cover-up of abuse by the hierarchy and their completely inadequate ways of reacting came into focus. The additional wounds inflicted on victims and their families by tactics of self-defence, institutional protection, and a total disregard for the needs of those affected, as well as the lack of a culture of accountability throughout the power structures of the Catholic Church, have since then come to the fore with full force. In the USA, for example, this has meant that people no longer only speak of the abuse crisis with regard to the abuse and the individual perpetrators, but that the term 'the double crises' has now become common. This refers to the crisis that the abuse itself triggered, and the tremendous crisis of trust that makes many people in the Church – lay people, religious and priests alike – doubt the will of their bishops and provincials to really work through and prevent abuse, as well as the thorny questions about the suitability of the office holders to cope with their tasks. The 'Cologne Church Crisis,' which since the end of 2020 has led to headlines hitherto unheard of in Germany against a cardinal, another archbishop, two auxiliary bishops and the vicar general, made it clear to everyone that even in Europe, those who until recently could apparently be considered untouchable have become vulnerable and that the credibility of the Church leadership is largely lost because of its alarmingly poor overall dealings with the victims of abuse and the perpetrators.

The waves of indignation, anger and bitterness are unstoppable, and yet nothing seems to be moving behind the thick walls of the Church fortress, among whose defenders and residents not only clerics but also lay people can be counted. The same mistakes are repeated over and over again, the same reaction patterns occur again and again, the waves repeatedly bounce off apparently ineffectively. As a result, more and more people are either abandoning the Church internally or leaving it, including those who until now have been very much identified with their faith and their communities. Many have now gained the impression that the Church as an institution is not faithful and true, that the flock has lost its shepherds (and not vice versa) and that the Church must perish in its present form so that something new and alive can arise. When Cardinal Marx offered the Pope his resignation as Archbishop of Munich and Freising in a letter dated 21 May 2021, he took up a word from the Jesuit Father Alfred Delp,

who was executed by the National Socialists in 1944: 'We are – so is my impression – at a certain 'dead point,' which, however, that is my Easter hope, can also become a 'turning point'... to turn to the people, to the lost.'

In addition, the same demands for change have been put forward for years and decades and nothing (or far too little) is happening on *aggiornamento*. Even the introduction of corresponding legal requirements does not seem to have any effect. The Church and its representatives seem like the 'castle' in Franz Kafka's novel bearing the same name: a bureaucracy that is inscrutable and choking on its inner contradictions; a lord of the castle who remains and works in secret as a human being, but controls everything; the castle itself, which cannot be penetrated because there are no easy and comprehensible ways into it.

It is particularly frightening that denial and cover-up of cases of abuse, transfer of abusers instead of punishment, refusal or delay in processing in the sense of a comprehensive inventory of crimes that have occurred and dealing with those affected and perpetrators, as well as the often half-hearted approach to prevention are common phenomena. All of this can be found uniformly in the entire Catholic world, that is to say in almost every country on earth: a kind of unity that is truly not worth striving for.

Obviously, this is due to something that is deep in the bones of the Catholic Church: a mentality, or better, mentalities in which neither coercive measures (tightening of the law) nor educational measures at all levels are sufficient to achieve effective change in attitudes and behaviour. What are these specifically 'Catholic' mentalities that lead to such stubborn and unteachable (re)actions on the subject of abuse, and how can one understand their historical development and effectiveness?

History of Mentalities

The history of mentalities is a historical approach that was founded in the second half of the 20th century by the *École des Annales* and was particularly popular in France. This interdisciplinary field of research deals with the investigation of the origin, meaning, and historical development of mentalities, more specifically with the question 'what part did human beings as thinking, feeling, wishing beings have in (those) processes,' and through which human beings became what they

were. Such a 'historical anthropology' is in search of the subjective factor in history, 'of historical subjectivity, of past mental life, of past sensibility.' In other words, it is about comprehending human self-understanding and human attitudes in the face of personal, regional, or international significant events or social realities and vice versa, and how these attitudes shape developments and events: how did people feel, think and justify their actions? In order to fathom these affective, cognitive and ethical-action-oriented dispositions, it takes a 'joint venture in which psychology, cultural and ethno-anthropology, social history and numerous other hyphenated stories participate.' According to Burke, the interest is particularly directed at the description of mental orientation patterns and collective attitudes that are reflected in the thinking of ordinary people as well as the formally educated elite. The aim is to find out which unspoken and often unconscious assumptions and perceptions determined everyday thinking and the collective ideas and values adopted in a specific historical context. It is about the content and form of these basic assumptions. In addition to the conceptual expression in metaphors, categories and symbols, the inner structure of attitudes and assumptions should also be uncovered, which has formed over relatively long periods of time and increasingly shapes people in their experiences and actions as individuals and in larger groups more than they realize.

The topics and methods of the history of mentalities are correspondingly broad: the spectrum ranges from micro-historical studies of villages or regions to the analysis of pictorial and written testimonies and everyday ways of life, to pictures or personal sources such as diaries or letters. A powerful example of the approach and variety of methods used in the history of mentalities is Philippe Ariès' *History of Childhood*, in which he discusses the development of ideas and perceptions of childhood in Western European societies since the Middle Ages.

The history of mentalities thus asks about 'collective worldviews, attitudes, patterns of orientation anchored in everyday life that determine people's actions and their attitudes in concrete situations,' which decisively influence the emergence, maintenance, and transmission of social structures and their application in one's individual life. It is believed that these processes are complex, mutually reinforcing, and largely unconscious. This also explains why such deeply and long-established mentalities usually change only slowly or

are difficult to change from the outside. If one looks at the history of mentalities with an awareness of this peculiarity and limitation, then it can open up new subject areas and insights beyond one-line cognitive explanatory patterns.

In order to take stock of what has happened in the Catholic Church in recent decades – perhaps one should say centuries – with regard to abuse and its cover-up, a historical perspective offers at least an important additional starting point for answering three questions that I have asked myself in the course of the years meeting people from all continents: 1) How can it be that the same emotional reaction patterns, cognitive expressions, and behaviour can be observed in Catholic circles all over the world (leaders and Church people) when it comes to the topic of abuse? 2) Why is the overall learning progress so slow despite the considerable efforts made in much of the global Church both to increase knowledge about risk factors and the consequences of abuse and to create the legal bases to define responsibility and accountability in a way that can be implemented? 3) Why is there a reluctance to deal with this topic, which is rationally incomprehensible for many outsiders, but also more and more Church insiders – although one could know that not dealing with it will contribute to its perpetuation? Closely related to this is the question of why one does not learn from what the Church had to endure through the abuse scandal in countries such as the USA, Ireland, or Australia with great losses of credibility, energy, or even money?

One gets the impression that there is a specifically Catholic mentality that makes it difficult to actively approach those affected and to acknowledge the suffering that has arisen, to admit guilt, to come to terms with the situation and to get involved in prevention. Instead, very similar reaction patterns can be seen worldwide: those affected are rejected and devalued; guilt and responsibility are denied, trivialized or dismissed; processing is either refused or delegated to lawyers, canonists, psychologists and psychiatrists; prevention work is entrusted to specialists without being integrated into normal Church activity.

How could it come to this with an institution that is supposed to proclaim the gospel of God's love and charity and whose founder gave his life willingly instead of saving himself with power, money, or subtle subterfuges?

Elements of Catholic mentality – where do they come from and how do they function?

Given the complexity and sheer breadth of the subject, what follows can offer no more than a shorthand listing of what goes into the prevailing mentality in the Catholic Church toward abuse. It should already be noted here what will be taken up again below: of course, in the oldest existing and largest institution in the world, one cannot lump everyone and everything together. Of course, more data and differentiated representations would be needed. Still, I think one can dare to name elements that result in something like a Catholic mentality in the face of abuse.

Many of these elements have shaped the Church of today as a result of important processes of change in Church and society over the past 250 years or so. The initial thesis to be deepened is the following: the Catholic Church, which in Europe until the beginning of the modern era had unlimited religious power and far-reaching political power, has lost its primacy in various fields since the Reformation and then increasingly since the middle of the 18th century and has adopted a defensive position. In the field of culture and science, there was more and more emancipation from the ecclesiastical tutelage and an increasing confrontation of enlightened philosophy, the natural sciences, and the humanities (as we call them today) against ecclesiastical positions. The confrontation with the ideals of the French Revolution, the theory of evolution, and modern psychology was particularly incisive. The secularization and the end of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, the emergence of the nation states and the incorporation of the Papal States into the Kingdom of Italy were experienced and interpreted as a traumatic attack on the sovereignty and secular power of the Catholic Church. Industrialization and the migration of large parts of the population to the cities made it difficult for priests to have direct contact with the faithful. In the 20th century, nationalist as well as communist movements and regimes acted explicitly in an anti-Church manner. The suffering of the world wars and the many other wars as well as the immeasurable atrocities of the Holocaust, genocides, and countless human rights violations brought many people, not only to despair, but also to doubt the Christian message of God. In many secular areas and institutions, women have taken on previously unattainable roles and positions. In the Catholic Church, this process is progressing very slowly or not at all, depending on how you

perceive it. The rapidly developing digitization that began in the last decades of the 20th century and the resulting unlimited pluralization in the truest sense of the word represent a fundamental challenge for the traditional forms of communication, prayer and ritual in the Church. Even if, with his writings and speeches, Pope Francis is an undisputedly important voice in the fight against climate change and for the preservation of creation, for most contemporaries this plays a minor role in what many consider to be the most important issue facing humanity. When it comes to the big questions of sexual and life ethics – in the dispute over abortion and euthanasia laws as well as in the gender discussion – the Church is not perceived as faithful and truthful, but almost inevitably as the intransigent nay-sayer that hardly makes any concrete and constructive contributions to the debate, and very many do not listen (anymore) with the argument that the Church has completely lost its moral authority because of the multitude of abuse cases.

These few keywords should suffice to make it clear that the institution of the Catholic Church, especially in the last 250 years, has experienced the developments in central areas of life as a political and ideological disempowerment and as an attack on its independence. From a Depth Psychological point of view, one could compare this with a continuing and progressive narcissistic insult or wounding. The far-reaching consequences of this experience can be assumed by many in the Church to be a latent or pronounced pessimistic attitude towards the 'world,' a defiant defensive behaviour and the attempt to stop or prevent any kind of change in the liturgy, in the doctrine of the faith and in external appearance, longing to turn back time. While the self-image has long been experienced as: 'We are omnipotent and we can explain and control everything because we are infallible' (driven to the climax by Pius IX in the longest pontificate in Church history), many in the Church leadership feel it the more and more in recent decades: 'We are at the mercy of the critical media and other voices, we are being treated unfairly' and recently also 'Too much is asked of us' (e.g. Bishop Feige of Magdeburg). To make matters worse, the relationship between faith and reason, between Church or religion and the world (considered as 'modern,' 'post-modern,' or 'post-post-modern') was not really clarified, not even by the second Vatican Council, which took two steps forward and one step back in this regard. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini SJ described the situation of the

Church three weeks before his death in 2012: 'The Church is 200 years too late. Why isn't she shaking? Are we afraid?' Fear, despondency and discouragement are evident in the statements made by many Church leaders, who withdraw into their corral, largely isolate themselves, and immunize themselves against any kind of criticism. Significantly, the contradiction between the gesture of such messages (accompanied by the insignia of the divine and secular power of earlier times) on the one hand and their actual effect on the other grows from time to time: often this has the effect of 'the emperor's new clothes' (cf. H.C. Andersen's fairy tale) where the Emperor 'holds it out'(!) and allows the procession to continue, although he realizes that people have noticed his nakedness. The core sentences of this Wagenburg mentality, a defiant self-assertion, and the self-stylization of victims (!), which I have heard in one form or another in the course of my lecturing work from clerics and non-clerics from all parts of the world, are: 'I am the bishop (Superior General, Provincial, etc.), I do not need to justify myself to those who do not understand the special nature of the Church.' 'The media want to destroy the Church – that is a clear sign that we are on the path of following the Crucified. We are attacked because we cause discomfort.' 'The victims only care about money.' 'With the others – religions, in sports, at school, in families – there is more abuse and nobody is looking.' 'We have to stick together. My priest is part of the family.' 'He promised me he wouldn't do it anymore. Everyone makes mistakes. Anyone who regrets and promises to improve must be forgiven.' 'I have a clear conscience, I can clarify this with my Lord God.' 'I don't need any controls or further training, I know what I'm doing.'

This and more could be subsumed under the catchphrase 'clericalism': a mentality that derives solely from holding a priestly or episcopal office, causing one to feel superior to the common Church people – including lay people in Church service – and claim special rights for oneself. If the combination of parish leadership and sacramental ministry leads to the priest and even more so to the bishop being responsible but simultaneously feeling more and more omnipotent, then there is a great danger that sooner or later one will succumb to the temptation to use this power for oneself, exploiting or abusing others for their own purposes. Many victims of abuse say that they experienced sexualized violence primarily as an abuse of power and often express it with these or similar words: 'The sexual act was

bad, painful, shameful. But what hurt and hurt me the most was that I couldn't escape the fact that the one who abused me was overpowering.' In those who see themselves as privileged and untouchable, and to whom a special respect from others as well as absolute trust is shown, a clerical mentality can easily set in: 'Because I am a priest, I can take what suits me. Not because I want to seek God and follow Christ, not because I've reflected more, not because I've thought more about faith, no, but simply because I'm a priest, that's why I'm entitled to it.' This expresses narcissistic personality elements that can be further promoted by the prevailing type of training – in seminaries, where the seminarians often live in a special world that bears no resemblance to that of their contemporaries, nor to the real life situation of priests in parishes today. In this environment, which is shielded in various respects, relationship patterns can thrive in which healthy criticism is practically impossible, in which one can become dependent on some others, allowing extensive and long-lasting cliques to develop. The McCarrick Report recently showed what dysfunctional processes this can lead to in a 'male union' world of its own. Three of the four New Jersey bishops who were asked by the then nuncio in 2000 to provide information on whether allegations against McCarrick of sexual acts with young men were true, 'provided inaccurate and incomplete information to the Holy See.' This confirms the view that the appointment of a bishop or the investigation of a bishop's misconduct should not only be in the hands of bishops, but should also involve independent experts.

For those who grew up in the Church, who owe it everything – education, role, reputation – and who therefore also see their task in protecting the institution, it is sometimes simply inconceivable that in the Church and through Church representatives lives of vulnerable and defenceless people were destroyed. After all, who could look into the mirror and discover a horrible grimace there without being startled and looking away immediately? Powerful repression mechanisms come into play, which lead to the suffering of those affected and their family members being denied their due attention or being deliberately ignored – as recently testified by the former Bishop of Aachen Mussinghoff – and to the fact that the remaining risks in the case of perpetrators are spiritualized rather than being recognized for their seriousness.

The fact that this mentality can be found among those who are charged with caring for the salvation of souls is deeply alarming and

often destroys the foundations of the relationship with God. Indeed, for many victims of abuse, as well as for those who are secondary victims (e.g. family members), the loss of trust and faith is the deepest wound left by the abuse. This spiritual dimension of abuse has been and is largely ignored in the Church – in contrast to legal and psychological issues. All too often it was and is primarily about avoiding a public 'scandal.' An unrealistic idealization of the institution and a great deal of shame in publicly admitting wrongdoing or crimes reinforce this tendency. 'Non fare brutta figura,' or 'Thou shalt not produce a scandal' is the eleventh commandment of the Church, this being an implicit and often also explicit maxim for action – known as an ostrich policy or salami tactic (one only admits what is already known) – practised by so many ecclesiastical bodies. Such an approach almost inevitably creates a longer and more far-reaching scandal, as could be illustrated by many examples. Many see a wave of indignation coming at the Church that they cannot quell with the resources they have. It gives the impression of going under. This leads to institutional insecurity, flight from responsibility, paralysis and fragmentation of memory. Archival records are 'coiffed' in favour of the institution – and this at an institution whose moral authority rests on its credibility and veracity. But apparently, in a mentality of self-immunization and self-pity, the fear of one's own vulnerability, of the admission of crime and sin dominates so much that one's actions contradict one's own mission diametrically. This is all the more astonishing since individual Catholics are promised God's forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation – confession – on condition that they repent, confess and repair the damage. If the effectiveness of the sacrament is also assumed in relation to the Church as a whole, one has to ask: With regard to the abuse, where were there signs of deep remorse, a clear confession of guilt, and sufficient reparation? Only when all three elements are present can one speak of forgiveness in the context of abuse.

The fact that this mentality is so widespread and effective is probably mainly due to the fact that the question of emotional, psychosexual and relational maturity does not play a central role in the selection and training of candidates for the priesthood and in the appointment of bishops and other leaders. This can have fatal consequences, because in this way those two basic human needs that interact in sexual violence are not addressed and dealt with: power and sexuality. Sexuality

is much more than just the sexual act. The way someone lives their sexuality expresses their personality. It often serves to satisfy other deep-seated needs – such as for recognition, closeness and affection, but also for confirmation and dominance. It is therefore particularly devastating when these unconscious needs, which are often hidden and unconscious in sexual desire and action, are combined not only with a striving for power, but also with an apparently unassailable position of power.

Sexuality has always been a shameful and difficult subject for many Catholics. This statement has long become common knowledge, despite all the doctrinal and theological statements that present sexuality as a divine gift and speak of its beauty. The diverse and complex reasons for this would have to be presented in a separate study. Here, just two factors should be pointed out that have influenced the mentality in the Catholic Church in relation to sexuality: first, the New Testament imminent expectation of the return of the Lord, which is why everything else – including sexuality, marriage and children – are presented as secondary; second, in the Latin tradition, the influence of St Augustine on the doctrine of original sin, of pleasure as a sin, and of sexual intercourse permitted only in marriage between a man and a woman and with the aim of procreation. For some time now, however, the official Church positions on contraception and divorce have hardly been understood or accepted, even by most Catholics. In hardly any other area of life does the Church seem so far removed from the attitude towards life and the behaviour of most people as it does in the subject of sexuality. It is felt to be particularly outrageous when those who inculcate sexual abstinence themselves abuse minors or vulnerable adults. If these sexual crimes are then either not punished at all, or done so too slowly, disproportionately or leniently by the Church leaders, that knocks the bottom out of the barrel and destroys credibility.

Mockery, scorn and anger are inevitable reactions to this double standard – preaching water and drinking wine. This applies above all to the question of the assessment of homosexuality against the background that all known statistics show that most sexual assaults by priests are directed against male minors. It should be borne in mind that homosexual assaults do not always indicate a clearly homosexual orientation. At least in the past, for example, priests hardly had direct contact with girls. Acolytes were male, priests usually only taught boys

in the schools, and youth work was also done separately according to gender. The lead researchers of the John Jay studies from the USA call the abusers of the 1950s to 1980s in the Church 'opportunists': they took what they got. The real problem with sexual abuse is not sexual orientation, but abuse of power and failure to address basic human needs.

The organizers – Cardinal Cupich, Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop Scicluna, Fr. Lombardi and I – of the meeting of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences and the Superiors General in February 2019 were clear about the fact that the structural, institutional components that made the abuse and its cover-up possible must be looked at critically. This brought another element into focus that plays a major role in the Catholic mentality: the remarkable reluctance to assume responsibility. One gets the impression that Church leaders consider honour and the feeling of power (so far practically unlimited in the respective area of responsibility) to be desirable. But when it comes to taking responsibility and assuming personal consequences, up to and including resignation, as in politics or business, there is almost always a lack of courage to take the step. The reason given is that one was called to this office by God and therefore has to remain faithful, or that one leaves the decision to the Roman authorities or the Pope. A proven means for more transparency and clarity in the definition of responsibility is expressed in the Anglo-Saxon world, which is influenced by Protestantism, with the notion of accountability. One can translate accountability into Italian, Spanish, French or Portuguese by paraphrasing what is meant. However, in none of these four languages spoken in countries where most Catholics live is there an equivalent noun that could render 'accountability' as used here. If you do not have a term for something, it means that you do not think about it, talk about it and address it accordingly. A small example that this is obviously the case with accountability in Catholic countries is the Vatican information policy, which – with a few exceptions such as the McCarrick report – does not disclose the reasons for extraordinary bishops' resignations.

In the context of such an article, this should suffice to identify some elements of what constitutes the specifically Catholic mentality in the face of abuse and its cover-up. It was also pointed out above that this naturally does not apply to everyone to the same extent. But at least trace elements of it can be found consciously and unconsciously in the

vast majority of those who count themselves among the spiritual and cultural power of the Catholic Church and hold a leading role in it.

Paradoxes and the possibility of a change in mentality

Fear, insecurity, shame in dealing with sexuality or striving for power are pronounced in everyone to different degrees. But there are also some observations that do not simply make the overall situation appear black and white. Some of this seems paradoxical and provokes further thinking. In a broader sense, these paradoxes also belong to the Catholic mentality.

What is most obvious is that in *one* Church there are victims *and* perpetrators at the same time. If the statistics of clerical abuse are to be believed, then it can be assumed that a relatively large number of victims – especially those who do not speak to anyone about it – have not left the Church. This also means that the trauma that those affected have experienced is present in them and through them in the Church: when they take part in services, when they are involved in parishes or with Caritas, when they seek spiritual advice. This should never be forgotten: great sensitivity is therefore always required in the celebration of the liturgies, in parish meetings, in gatherings and discussions. The fact that there is hardly any prayer for victims of sexual violence in the Church speaks volumes about how much they – their pain, their bitterness, their searching and their hope – are separated from everyday faith. Instead of finding a way with them to articulate their own spiritual quests and their personal and professional competencies, many say they have the parish, religious province, or diocesan door slammed in their face.

Also, with regard to the 'other' side – the perpetrators – it can be stated that it is hardly noticed that many of them – even after a possible release from the clergy – were and are members of the Church. That should be food for thought and action: how do you treat people in your own ranks who have committed crimes, those who are aware of it, and those who cannot believe it? How can one insist enough that perpetrators need supervision and support, especially in order to prevent further abuse by them?

In one Church, among those charged with the task of prosecuting, there are those who do so conscientiously, and there are those who cover up, deny, downplay. The latter could be described as 'secondary offenders' whose legally positivistic, derogatory and hard-hearted

behaviour sometimes hurts victims and secondary victims more than the actual act of abuse, according to their testimony.

More and more people from the one Church understand the importance of safeguarding and are committed to it. Others, on the other hand, think that one should not talk so much about this topic, so that one can concentrate again on 'the actual pastoral questions.' In the terminology of the trauma therapist Ursula Enders, the Church in its members is at the same time a traumatizing and a traumatized institution. This tension is difficult to bear for people on both sides of the spectrum.

Another paradox has already been indicated above: clericalism does not only exist among clerics. The same phenomenon can also be found among lay people: namely, when one takes certain liberties from a certain Church position and makes unjustified claims to certain premises, equipment, company cars, prestige based on one's own role. However, in the case of ordained clerics, the spiritual-religious dimension is explicitly added to justify inviolability and specialness.

If you ask about the image of the Church, then many people have the idea of an absolutist, centrally structured, clearly organized and authoritarian-hierarchical institution. Undoubtedly there were and are such practices. But mostly these are measures by Roman authorities, such as in the case of complaints about teaching, in which one does not know who decided what and why. Such practices can also be seen when a pastor in his parish behaves as though he were a bishop, and a bishop in his diocese behaves as though he were the pope, without tolerating contradiction or criticism. The latter reveals a phenomenon that was surprising to many: the Catholic Church reveals, at various levels and in many processes, an almost inscrutable conglomerate of responsibilities and complicated chains of command and responsibility. It is precisely this lack of clarity that encourages abuse and its cover-up, as was unmistakably described in the Deetman Report in 2010: You push the balls back and forth, in the end nobody is to blame. An example of this is the following: if a religious priest who is a pastor in one diocese abuses a young person in another diocese, which superior is then responsible for what? How is an affected person supposed to know who to contact? It is incomprehensible to many that, although laws and guidelines are passed by Rome or the Bishops' Conference, these are not properly known or acknowledged and all too often not observed by those who are responsible for their implementation on

the ground. To make matters worse, Church criminal law can hardly be compared with state criminal law in terms of its interpretation and application: there are, for example, no clear and published criteria for comparability, the definition of elementary procedural rights, a separation of powers based on the state model. All in all, this has greatly damaged trust in the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and promoted the impression that *Suprema Lex* is not *salus animarum*, as the CIC's canon 1752 states, but that it is ultimately about protecting one's own cronies.

The image of the all-powerful pastor, who has more say in the village than the mayor, continues to be circulated in public. That may still be the case in some parts of the world, and in individual cases also in our part of the world. However, the feeling of many priests is different, especially because of the abuse scandals: they are deeply insecure and feel exposed to a general suspicion: 'Are you one of those who rape children?' The best expression for this general suspicion is the English term for priests who have *not* abused: they are the non-offending priests. Even the negative definition makes it clear that as a priest you are always in the 'boat of abuse.' Against this background, many questions arise – How can those who are wrongly exposed to general suspicion be supported and accompanied? How can Church leaders meet their duty of care towards their employees without losing sensitivity to wrongdoing? What should a theology of priesthood look like in the context of a theology of vulnerability and the right exercise of power?

If these elements and paradoxes of a Catholic mentality are real, then it is easy to understand why the mood among Catholics in many places is depressed, despondent and confused. If you then consider how difficult it is to change mentalities, the question arises as to whether and how exactly this could be achieved. One of the criticisms of the history of mentalities is that it is difficult to explain how, given the longevity, effectiveness and resilience of mentalities, it is possible for them to change. However, there are not only micro-adjustments that imperceptibly and very slowly change customs and attitudes, but also major crises that can give rise to change: 'Sometimes a problem intrudes from outside and causes a crisis. Sometimes it is the crisis itself and an honest acknowledgment of it as such which enables one to ask the right questions in order to begin deepening our understanding of the issues involved and showing a way forward. Sometimes horizons cannot be broadened unless they are first broken.'

In the history of the Church there have always been collapses, which contemporaries experienced no less dramatically than today's double crises. The train of the Catholic Church, especially in the 'old' Catholic countries, has been racing towards a wall at high speed for many years. More and more people, including those in the Church, are realizing that a real break is coming or, as a German bishop put it in a private conversation a few years ago: 'Everything must collapse before there is new life again.'

As the very painful and disappointing experiences of the past few years have taught, the Church can only regain the trust it has lost when its representatives openly and honestly admit their mistakes, crimes, and sins and do everything possible so that those burdened with hardship in it find places of healing and, where possible, reconciliation. This includes the Church leadership and Church people facing up to what happened in the past in terms of crimes and cover-ups, and for those affected by abuse to have their natural and self-responsible part in coming to terms with the past. In this process, divisions and polarizations must be overcome: clearer laws and norms *and* a change in customs and attitudes are needed; psychology and (ecclesiastical) law *and* theology in the face of abuse are important; only the coexistence of ministers *and* 'lay people' can bring the Church back on the path to being considered faithful and true; the cooperation of dioceses *and* religious orders is necessary for a consistent and coordinated approach. The suppressed and hidden pain, fear, and despondency that are concealed in shame must come to light. Theology, psychology, canon law and spirituality must work together. This is disillusioning and is often found painful and unbearable. Quite a few are shattered by it, others run away from it. This is understandable from a human point of view, even if from a spiritual point of view, it would be the confirmation of faith in the just and merciful God who took upon himself suffering and the cause of suffering in Jesus. Rediscovering Jesus Christ beyond the well-established and all too often empty Church routine, precisely where people have suffered unspeakably at the hands of Church representatives, is the central challenge for a Church that neither wants to be swept away by tsunami waves, nor entrench itself in a hermetically sealed and sterile castle. As circumstances (of society as well as those of individual life) change – and it is widely felt that they have changed – then the way we seek God and are Church must change as well. Then the Catholic mentality will change. Then the water of the waves will not rush in uselessly, but will make the earth water and bear fruit.