

Imagining the 'Ecclesial We' as it Accompanies the Marginalized and Excluded Synodally

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1. The Ecclesial We

2. The Voices to Listen to

3. Accompaniment and forgiveness, a Belgian case study

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1. The Ecclesial We

Synod of Bishops – FD n° 6

"We cannot deny that we have faced fatigue, resistance to change and the temptation to let our own ideas prevail over listening to the Gospel and the practice of discernment. Yet, the mercy of God, our most loving Father, purifies our hearts, thus enabling us to continue along this journey. Acknowledging this, we began the Second Session of the Assembly with a penitential vigil, through which, feeling our shame, we asked forgiveness for our sins, and we lifted up our prayers for the victims of the evils of the world. We identified our sins: against peace, against Creation, against indigenous peoples, migrants, children, women, and those who are poor, in our failure to listen and to seek communion. We were brought to a renewed understanding, namely, that synodality requires repentance and conversion. In celebrating the sacrament of the mercy of God, we experience unconditional love: the hardness of heart is conquered, and we open ourselves to communion. This is why we want to be a merciful Church, capable of sharing with everyone the forgiveness and reconciliation that come from God: the pure grace of which we are not masters but only witnesses."

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First insights

- 'Ecclesial we' cf. Serena Noceti
- Acknowledgement of shortcomings (and a wide variety of them)
- More broadly in the Church
 - A certain continuity of asking for forgiveness or emphasizing the need of not forgetting painful experiences and prevention of abuse
- Pope Leo XIV to "Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors"
 - "the experiences of victims and survivors are essential reference points. While they are certainly painful and difficult to hear, these experiences powerfully bring the truth to light and teach us humility as we strive to assist victims and survivors"

2. The Voices to Listen to

The title of this presentation: FD 19

“God’s heart has a special place for the poor’ (EG 197), the **marginalised and the excluded**. Therefore, they are at the heart of the Church. The whole Christian community is called to recognise in those made poor the face and flesh of Christ, who, though He was rich, became poor for us so that we might become rich through His poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).”

FD 55

"Many of the evils that afflict our world are also visible in the Church. The abuse crisis, in its various and tragic manifestations, has brought untold and often ongoing suffering to victims and survivors, and to their communities. The Church needs to listen with special attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons with Church appointments. Listening is a fundamental element of the path to healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation. At a time characterised by a global crisis of trust, which encourages people to live in distrust and suspicion, the Church must acknowledge its own shortcomings. It must humbly ask for forgiveness, must care for victims, provide for preventative measures, and strive in the Lord to rebuild mutual trust."

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FD 56

"Listening to those who suffer exclusion and marginalisation strengthens the Church's awareness that taking on the burden of wounded relationships is part of its mission. The Church does this in order that the Lord, the Living One, can heal them. **This is the only way that the Church can be "as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity" (LG 1).** At the same time, being open to the world allows one to discover that the Spirit has sown the seeds of the Gospel in every corner of the globe, in every culture and in every human group. These seeds bear fruit in the ability to live healthy relationships, cultivate mutual trust and forgiveness and overcome fear of diversity. They also give life to welcoming communities, promote an economy respectful of people and the planet and bring about reconciliation after conflict. History leaves us with a legacy of conflicts motivated also by religious affiliation, undermining the credibility of religions themselves. Much suffering has been caused by the scandal of division between Christian communions and the hostility between sisters and brothers who have received the same Baptism. The renewed experience of ecumenical momentum that marks the synod's journey opens the way towards hope."

First insights

- A certain kind of 'abstraction'
 - and the 'ecclesial we' fades into the background
- The Church needs to do something so that the Lord can heal
- Intimately connected to sacramentality
 - With reference to LG 1.

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3. Accompaniment and forgiveness, a Belgian case study

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“Tonight, the Vatican seems to have realized that only the victims of sexual abuse by priests and members of religious orders can help the institution change.”

« Ce soir, le Vatican semble avoir pris conscience que seules les victimes d'abus sexuels par des prêtres et des religieux peuvent aider l'institution à changer. »

“Abus sexuels dans l'Église: 15 victimes belges reçues par le pape Léon,” Journal télévisé 19h30, with V. Dupont, G. Mariani, and P. Dorliguzzo, RTBF, November 8, 2025, <https://auvio.rtbf.be/media/journal-televise-19h30-le-19h30-3401652>.

Background & context

- ...
- Visit of Pope Francis to Belgium in 2024
 - Including meeting with victims and survivors of abuse
- Follow up meeting of Pope Leo XIV
 - November 2025
- ...
- ⚠ Rik Torfs: “In this day and age, the status of victim is sacred. Even though victims aren’t saints”. – *Le Soir*
- ⚠ “We are all perpetrators and victims”. – *Tertio*

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IN HET NIEUW

Terlinden onder vuur



Slachtoffers eisen dat aartsbisschop met 'gebrek aan empathie' opstap

Tien overlevenden van seksueel misbruik in de kerke vragen de paus om het ontslag van aartsbisschop Terlinden. Die is sinds 2014 aartsbisschop van de slachtoffers. Een ontslag lijkt uitgesloten, maar er speelt meer.

Le Soir

Le Soir WEBSITE 08/11/2025 - 21:42

Pédophilie dans l'Eglise : des victimes belges demandent au pape la mise à l'écart de l'archevêque Luc Terlinden



Quinze victimes belges d'agressions sexuelles au sein de l'Eglise ont été reçues ce samedi par Léon XIV. Elles ont le sentiment d'avoir été écoutées. Le manque d'empathie de l'Eglise de Belgique a en revanche été dénoncé : certaines victimes ont remis une lettre au pape demandant la mise à l'écart de l'archevêque de Malines-Bruxelles, Luc Terlinden.

van aartsbisschop te onthefen | VRT NWS: nie...

vragen aan
e van

Meer info



e Belgische slachtoffers
als aartsbisschop te
nmerkt door een gebrek
cht op het beschermen
richte schade."

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A case study: inductive analysis of 23 articles

- Instead of limiting myself to 'anecdotes'
- A more comprehensive study of public reactions in the media (FR and Dutch)
 - No interviews
 - 23 articles collected through *BelgaPress Academic*
- Inductive analysis (work in progress)
 - First round of coding: 81 codes
 - Second round of coding: applying these codes and occurrence
 - Systematizing into larger topics

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Thematic

1.  Accountability & Responsibility
2.  Institutional Failure & Distrust
3.  Political & Societal Response
4.  Financial Justice & Compensation
5.  Psychological & Emotional Impact
6.  Recognition, Healing & Closure
7.  Spiritual & Religious Dimension
8.  Voice, Dialogue & Testimony
9.  Process, Reform & Future Actions
10.  Internal Dynamics & Group Tensions
11.  Key Figures & Symbolic References

The topics most often mentioned

1. Financial aspects of the abuse (39)
2. Evaluating promises and progress (22)
3. 3000-euro additional compensation 18
4. Damage control, sweeping things under the carpet, and keeping up appearances (16)
5. Psychological care and accompaniment (16)
6. (The importance of) listening 16

What does it 'say/show'

- Less frequent occurrence, however, nevertheless important:
 - Implementing parliamentary recommendations
 - (Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry)
 - Prevention
 - Forcing bishops to make progress (by visiting the pope/ nuncio)
 - The long-term impact of suffering
 - Growing frustration and disappointment
 - The need for open dialogue
 - The constructive meeting with the Pope in 2025
 - The lack of emotional closeness and empathy of Church leaders

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Disclaimer

- Preliminary insights
- Analysis of newspaper articles, careful extrapolation
 - Media coverage can be sensationalist
 - However, it functions as the fourth power
 - It nevertheless provides a picture
- No judgment of character of the archbishop, ecclesial staff or their intended policies
- However, there is a 'perception' problem
- And, as I argue, the victims/survivors offer insights

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4. Walking together and the polarization(s)

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Und jetzt?

- In Magisterial texts (Francis and Leo XIV)
 - The importance of listening and accompanying
 - Internal logic and theological importance of doing justice
 - Not forgetting in order to not commit the same mistakes
- Academic literature
 - The rubber needs to meet the road (Wijlens)
 - Danger of non-performativity (Ahmed)
 - Systemic causes (Bogner)
 - What kind of narratives of/about the Church (Gruber e.a.)

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FD 97

“The attitude to transparency we have just outlined safeguards the trust and credibility needed by a synodal Church that is attentive to relationships. When this trust is violated, the weakest and the most vulnerable suffer the most. Wherever the Church enjoys trust, the practice of transparency, accountability and evaluation help to strengthen its credibility. These practices are even more critical where the Church’s credibility needs rebuilding. They are particularly important in regard to the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.”

Pope Francis & synodality

- Not forgetting what has happened
- Compensation
 - In the Belgian case: Church cannot do this alone (practically, juridically, and financially)
- Accompanying those who ask for it
- However, theologian Hannah James challenges churches to accompany traumatized people beyond their own boundaries
- Polarizations work on different levels
 - Within the group of survivors
 - Within the Church
 - In society and media...

5. By means of conclusion & selected bibliography

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Sacramentality of the Church

- FD 56:
“Listening to those who suffer exclusion and marginalisation strengthens the Church’s awareness that taking on the burden of wounded relationships is part of its mission. The Church does this in order that the Lord, the Living One, can heal them. This is the only way that the Church can be ‘as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity’ (LG 1).”
- The sacramentality of the Church is implied

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Thank you very much.

Questions & remarks

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