An unfinished story of conversion: clerical sexual abuse in Poland

A communications case study on betrayal, healing and trust recovery

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ABSTRACT

Poland is one of the most Catholic countries in the world. 33 million out of its 38 million people (92.9% of its population) declare themselves to be Roman Catholic. Church initiatives for the needy, whether poor or immigrants, are everywhere. The Church is a robust and influential institution, strengthened by the pontificate of the Polish Pope, John Paul II, who is considered not only a saint but also a national hero. In many aspects, Poles could be put as an example for Catholics in other countries. But there is an issue in which the Church is not at the vanguard: the fight against sexual abuse. Recent cases have eroded the solid trust Polish people put in their Church. More recently, the documentary Tell No One, released in two parts in May 2019 and May 2020, was a turning point, and the confidence in the institution visibly plummeted. This case study tells the recent story of the issue of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in Poland, its lights and its shadows. The paper ends with some suggestions for a trust recovery strategy, as recommendations for both Church authorities and their communication offices.

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Introduction: the triggering event

The path leading to the church looked like any other road in the Polish countryside. A vivid and joyful memory for thousands of Polish kids – they walked those pathways every Sunday with their parents to their village’s Sunday mass. A 39-year-old Polish woman takes the same path she used as a kid, but there is no joy in her steps. She goes back not for mass but to confront the Catholic priest who reportedly abused her when she was a nine-year-old girl. Using a hidden camera, she questions him: ‘You destroyed my life… are you aware of that?’

This is the opening scene of Tell No One, a 2-hour Polish documentary by the Sekielski brothers, released online on May 11, 2019.¹ The film shares stories of abuse from the victims’ perspective. Survivors confront their abusers on camera, and the
video shows how those priests refused to show any repentance and still blame the victims for what happened.

The documentary displayed some examples of the abuse of power in the Church in Poland as a widespread and ever-present behavior. Its free release on YouTube had a record audience (as of May 2020, the documentary has had 23 million views, the equivalent of half of the Polish population). Its impact had the magnitude of a public opinion earthquake. The Episcopal Conference was forced to publicly admit, for the first time, that there is an ongoing crisis.

This article aims to examine the main cases of sexual abuse in Poland since 2018, assess the official response in each event, how media reported on it and what its impact was on public opinion, and review the lessons learned by the Church to prevent and fight sexual abuse and rebuild trust.

**Theoretical framework: trust building, scandals and recovery management**

Trust is an elusive concept: ‘We perceive trust like air, only when it is scarce or polluted’ (Baier 2001, 42). At the same time, its consequences inside organizations are evident. It is a necessary element of internal and external cooperation (Tyler 2003), the basis for motivation (Lewis 1999) and change management (Sprenger 2002). In addition, trust has external consequences: it is a source for competitive advantage (Barney and Hansen 1994) while Urban and Sultan (2000, 48) declare trust is the ‘most valuable resource’ for successful companies in the future. For these reasons, trust is becoming more and more relevant for organizational success (Child 2001).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, trust is the ‘firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something.’ In this paper, we will accept the most common definition of institutional trust: the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations regarding another’s conduct (Davis, Mayer and Schoorman 1995). In this sense, it consists in the tendency to ascribe virtuous intent to another individual or entity (Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie 2006).

Trust management became a popular topic after the spate of massive corporate scandals at the beginning of this century: Enron, WorldCom, Parmalat, Arthur Andersen and other giants sparked an interest on how prestigious institutions can lose public trust in the blink of an eye. Soon, experts (Putnam 2000; Turnbull 2002) showed the connection between the public disapproval created by a scandal and its consequences both in terms of economic value and in the quality and strength of relations with stakeholders.

More or less at that time, Edelman revealed its global Trust Barometer (edelman.com). In the 19 years since its launch, the barometer has become not only a useful tool for companies and institutions to understand their environments, but also a fundamental instrument in deciding their strategies and protecting their reputation.

There are several trust management frameworks available. Some of them are academic, such as the Integrated Stakeholder Trust Management Framework, or ISTMAF, proposed by Pirson (2007); others have a more practical approach, such as Reputation Track or Reptrack (reptrack.com), developed by the Reputation Institute in 2006,
which is intended to be used by large corporations or companies in very regulated industries.

Without quantitative and qualitative analysis to support our contextual intelligence (Gregory and Willis 2013), it is very difficult, if not impossible, to properly lead an organization. The intuitive scanning, monitorization and decision-making process is maybe the rule for small and local organizations, but it is a dangerous approach when dealing with complex and articulate organizations (Czarnecki 2009).

Many institutions that do not take a proactive approach to managing, protecting and fostering trust end up dealing with trust only after a crisis or a scandal. We understand scandal as ‘a crisis, but in addition there will be a revelation of a moral misconduct committed by an individual (regardless of whether it was actually committed or if it is merely a presumption), and the indignation as a consequence of this revelation’ (Fronz 2011).

The number of scandals has not diminished in the first two decades of this century. On the contrary, the Institute for Crisis Management (ICM) shows in its annual reports that scandals are more frequent and more severe in their consequences. They affect not only commercial entities but all kinds of institutions: political, educational, cultural, NGOs… and religious organizations.

An interesting finding of various research papers and cases about scandals related to religious institutions is that their stakeholders react the same way as those of other types of institutions (Ivereigh et al. 2019). So, it is possible to conclude that general crisis principles and best practices are applicable also to religious institutions (de la Cierva 2014).

Crisis management experts (Łukaszewski 2013; Walker 2015) studied the most effective strategies for recovering from a scandal. To regain trust, three elements are required: first, the organization has to do internal and external audits after the scandal in order to understand its causes (Chase 1984); second, a reform plan has to follow (Stiglitz 2004): there is no recovery without an internal reform that ensures that the same problem will not be repeated again (Dezenhall and Weber 2007). Third and last, the organization has to establish a different relationship with stakeholders based on consensus and transparency (Veil and Husted 2012; de la Cierva 2018).

These three steps are the core of trust repair, an emerging domain gaining the interest of management scholars (Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer 2009), and the foundation of effective apologies and promises (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper and Dirks 2004; Hearit 2006).

Following this framework, the first topic to be addressed will be the issue of sexual abuse by Polish clergy in chronological order, considering the facts, the Church’s official response and the dent it left in the public’s trust toward the Church. Second, some recommendations will follow based on crisis management and trust recovery, drawing from the best practices defined by Talton (2008) and adapted to each type of stakeholder (Pirson and Malhotra 2011).

Overview of the Catholic Church in Poland

Christianity in Poland dates back to 966 when Mieszko I, the first ruler of the future Polish state, was baptized along with the whole nation. More than a thousand years of
history are visible in Polish churches, chapels and monasteries. Today, churches are packed on Sundays. According to the latest statistics, 32 million out of the 38 million total inhabitants of the country declare themselves Roman Catholic (KAI 2018), out of which, in the year 2018, 38% attend Sunday Mass and 17% receive Holy Communion (Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia 2020).

Through the ages, the Church in Poland was filled with iconic figures such as St. Adalbert, St. Queen Jadwiga, St. Faustyna and the legendary communist-resistance Primate of Poland Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, soon to be beatified. By far the biggest impact in Poland’s modern history was made by Karol Wojtyla, now St. John Paul II. He was not only a pontiff who transformed the universal Church, but he was also the most important reference point for his Polish countryman, Catholics and non-Catholics alike – a rare case of being a prophet at home.

On the political side, in the 50-year-long struggle after the Second World War against the communist regime imposed by the USSR, the Church was probably the most persuasive and effective institution in keeping the Polish identity alive and flourishing. After the victory of Solidarity in the elections on June 4, 1989 (the first free election in the post-soviet era in Central and Eastern Europe), the Church became one of the most influential powers in the country.

**Inconsistency in numbers**

Sexual abuse of minors is like an iceberg: there are many more cases under the water-line of public knowledge than cases reported to the authorities. Researchers such as London et al. (2008) and specialized NGOs like RAINN, Thorn Organization, Darkness to Light or NSPCC point out that only 20–38% of cases are reported globally.

What is important here is that there is a correlation. Knowing the number of reported cases in an area or in a time-period is useful for finding unreported cases and trying to help those hidden victims, and for implementing preventive measures both to protect minors and to find and bring perpetrators to justice. That is why research on these cases is not a waste of time but a fruitful investment for the future.

In countries where the Catholic Church has requested an investigation on the numbers and typology of cases of sexual abuse by clerics, such as the United States (John Jay College of Criminal Justice 2004), Holland (Deetman Report 2011), Germany (MHG Study 2019) or where there was an official investigation run by the State, such as in Ireland (Ryan Commission 2009; Murphy Report 2009) and Australia (Royal Commission 2017), the findings show similar results: from 1950 to 2000, around 4-6% of Catholic priests abused a minor. On different occasions, the Holy See has mentioned that the global figure is around 3–4% (Vatican Press Office 2019).

These figures are consistent with what the Holy See stressed in the Meeting of the Episcopal Conference Presidents on the Protection of Minors in the Church, which took place 21 February 2019 at the Vatican. Several keynote speakers (including Card. Cupich from Chicago, Card. Gracias from Mumbai and Card. Salazar Gómez from Bogotá) underlined that sexual abuse was not present in some countries but was a global issue. Fr. Lombardi (2018), relator of that Meeting, summarized it: ‘Sometimes, there is the illusion that this problem is mainly ‘Western’ or ‘American’ or
'Anglophone'. With unbelievable naïveté people think that this is only a marginal problem in their own country. In reality, to the careful eye, its presence cannot be missed; it is sometimes latent but always capable of exploding dramatically in the future. There is a need to look reality in the face.'

Pope Francis (2019) confirmed that assessment, stating, 'We are facing a universal problem, tragically present almost everywhere and affecting everyone.'

In fact, sexual abuse of minors affects the Church in every country on every continent because it is a part of a broader issue: the issue of sexual abuse of minors in general. According to UNICEF (2017), 1 out of every 10 children experiences sexual abuse globally. Numbers are also significant on our continent: according to the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC 2018), 18 million European children are victims of sexual abuse.

Not only frequent, but also unreported: a third of all countries do not collect this info (Chandy 2017), and frequently underestimated, because many cases are not reported. That's why the UN commitment to achieve the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals, included this goal: "End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children." These crimes happen in different settings: family, schools, sports teams, free-time activities, etc., and all have something in common: an environment of trust, which most predators try to exploit to their advantage. As Pope Francis (2019) has repeatedly said, sexual abuse of minors 'is always the result of an abuse of power, an exploitation of the inferiority and vulnerability of the abused.'

In this context, it would not be surprising to learn that the Church in Poland also had cases of sexual abuse, as in any other country, due to investigative media reports. This, however, was not the case. So far, the number of victims denouncing abuses when they were minors is fairly low compared to other countries.3

Another relevant difference between universal Church’s data and Polish data is the evolution. According to the available reports in other countries, cases of sexual abuse of minors went down: in the 1950s, affected 2.9% of the clergy; 4.5% in the 1960s, 4% in the 1970s, and only 0.2% after year 2000. The tendency in the Church of Poland, as we’ll see later, show the opposite trend.

Let us explore the causes of these divergences in the following section.

The particular Polish case

Globally, sexual abuse cases by clergy were not uncovered by the Church. Rather, the key roles were played by the media, who triggered official investigations. Local legislation also had an impact: for instance, the US legal system favorized bringing these kinds of criminal behaviors to court, and lawyers generated the publicity of those cases as an effective tool to increase both public uproar and economic compensation.

The Polish case has notable traits that explain the disparity in numbers compared to the rest of the world. In my view, four main factors may have contributed to these differences are: the legacy of communist times, clericalism, Church-media relations and Church-political power in Poland. Even if the four are clearly intertwined, it is worth analyzing them separately.
First, communist legacy

During the almost 50 years of communist rule, the Church in Poland operated in a hostile environment. The Church was ‘the enemy’ of the regime and persecution produced many martyrs, such as blessed Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko, a chaplain of the Solidarity movement in Warsaw, who was murdered by the regime in 1984.

During that half of the century, bishops knew that if anything negative that happened inside the Church was leaked and went public, it could bring massive harm. Most of the bishops in Poland today were prelates or had important responsibilities in the Church in that era. Even the youngest ones, who were teenagers at the time, remember communism quite well.

Persecution of that kind experienced for years encourages a mechanism of silence to circulate in the Church’s vessels. Secrecy was a tool of self-preservation. In addition, the Catholic faithful thought — and many still think today — that they have a moral obligation towards their religion that includes avoiding creating a scandal against the Church.

The Polish case is not unique. According to Fr. Hans Zollner, president of the Center for Child Protection at the Gregorian University, and a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors since 2014, there are three issues that Churches that have gone through communist or other totalitarian regimes must overcome in order to properly face the crisis of sexual abuse of minors.

First, the Church must understand its past role as guardian of freedom during the communist era while at the same time having clergy that abused minors. The Church needs to acknowledge that it was not perfect and that not everyone behaved as they should.

Second, for many years the state institutions, media and psychologists were used against the Church by the regime. For that reason, the Church needs to undergo a transformation so that all three can once again become reliable assets and have the right to help the Church by investigating sexual abuse cases.

Third, truth will set you free — the Church needs to face the truth, even if that truth is difficult to face, and investigate. Only by accepting the truth will the Church be able to move forward: ‘I recognize how difficult it was to grasp the extent and complexity of the problem, to obtain reliable information and to make the right decisions in the light of conflicting expert advice. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that grave errors of judgement were made, and failures of leadership occurred. All this has seriously undermined credibility and effectiveness [of the Church in Poland]’ (Zollner 2020).

Second, clericalism

It is well known that Pope Francis regularly singles out ‘clericalism’ as one of the most dangerous threats against the Church, and he connects clericalism with sexual abuse. ‘To say no to abuse is to say an emphatic no to all forms of clericalism’ (Pope Francis 2018).

But he is not the first Pope to connect the dots: when the scandal of clerical sexual abuse caught Ireland by storm, Pope Benedict XVI (2010) wrote a letter to Irish Catholics in which he pointed a finger at clericalism as one of the main reasons for the
Church’s wrong response to the drama of abuse. The German Pope criticized clericalism as ‘a tendency in society to favor the clergy and other authority figures; and a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, resulting in failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person’.

Ewa Kusz, vice-director of the Child Protection Center in Poland, underlines: ‘Clerical culture has a role both in the clergy and lay environment. It is a specific group defense mechanism’ (Kusz 2018) in which the priest takes a managerial role, standing above the rest of the society in an ‘exclusive club’ (Papesz 2018). What is more, lay people only strengthen clericalism by treating the clergy as ‘closer and holier to God by definition, even unstained’ (Kusz 2018).

Clericalism had and still has two different effects. First, ‘powerful’ priests exercise such a strong authority over Catholic families that when a child is abused, his or her parents already look at the abuser with such admiration that it makes it hard to believe their own son or daughter. Second, it creates a culture of silence around them – often laity or religious sisters working with priests knew about the abuse, but never said a word in order to not harm the institution, while the child was harmed in an unspeakable way.

There is one more element that adds to both the argument of clericalism and that of abuse of power. It was already pointed out that while the number of abusive priests declined globally since the 1980s and fell drastically after the year 2000, the opposite occurs in Poland.

‘The reason lies in power,’ Fr. Adam Zak, SJ told the author in a conversation on 26 May 2020. The president of the Child Protection Center in Kraków remembers that in the 1980s, communist persecution was still horrific. But at the same time, the Church’s opposition to the regime became much more powerful thanks to Pope John Paul II. His international presence not only gave the Church unprecedented authority, but Western donors – both individual and public – also decided to channel their financial support into suffering Poles through the Catholic Church.

This help was lifesaving for millions of people in a totalitarian country on the verge of hunger, as many other countries under soviet regime experienced. But, according to Zak, it also had a negative side effect: it gave priests incredible power and relevance in Polish society beyond religion, something that had never happened before. Coincidentally, the number of abuses began to rise steadily in Poland precisely in the 1980s.

Lack of media pressure

The third factor that made the Polish case unique is the lack of media pressure. As already mentioned, in most countries, sexual abuse cases were not uncovered by the Church herself, but rather by media. In Poland on the contrary, most media outlets looked at Church leaders and institutions with considerable respect.

Media mirrors society. Most journalists come from the same society that was formed by the harsh reality of the communist era. Senior mainstream journalists, now in their 40s and 50s, suffered communism and fought for freedom. After recovering liberty,
journalists focused on uncovering the many secrets of the communist regime, as well as on the economic, political and social challenges of transforming a country back into a democracy. Those issues were more newsworthy than child protection, both in general and in the Church.

In fact, media did not begin covering Church scandals until 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall. This might be a sign that Poland has actually reached a mature post-transformational society and is ready to move forward with investigating the institution’s past – one that was previously considered sacred.

**Good relations with the political establishment**

In Poland, Catholicism is an integral part of the political arena. This has been the case since the return to democracy: in all cabinets held by different political parties, several practicing Catholics occupied important roles. But this is even truer since 2015, when the conservative Law and Justice party, born in the Catholic milieu, came to power. Senior public officials, most of them identifying as Roman Catholic, defend a cultural and social coalition with the Church. Because of that, they are far from attacking the Church, but instead seek close alliance with the bishops. Because of that, so far, no political or judicial authority in Poland has started an independent investigation such as the Grand Jury of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Attorney General 2018) or the Federal Australian Government have done abroad.

In summary, media and civil investigations were key in most countries. Only then did some episcopates such as those of the United States, Ireland, Germany and, more recently, France decide to foster their own investigations. Maybe because of the lack of interest both in Polish media and among political authorities, the Church in Poland failed to take the initiative to uncover those cases.

Therefore, the Polish Episcopate has not taken the appropriate steps to properly solve this dramatic issue on its own terms without external pressure — a ‘can’t miss moment,’ as John Allen puts it. As we will see later, someone else is doing this now, and the Church has lost the advantage.

Let’s see in chronological order the three main episodes which broke the so far complete public silence on this matter.

**First exception to silence: the village of Tylawa**

Tylawa is a tiny post-communist village in Southeastern Poland. That region has an unusually high rate of unemployment, vast rural areas and simple, generous people who lead deep and traditional religious lives. The entire village is present at Sunday Mass and parish pastors are viewed as a little lower than God.

It was exactly in Tylawa where the parish priest, Michal Moskwa, abused several girls during a 35-year span.

In 2001, one of the girls told the mother of her schoolmate what the priest did to her. ‘She told me he was putting his fingers down there and, while doing that, he was saying that he is healing her in the name of Jesus Christ’ (TVN2424 2019).
When the mother asked her daughter’s friend when that happened, she replied: ‘Yesterday.’ The pattern of abuse was soon to be uncovered and it was similar to so many abuse cases: a parish pastor with wealth and power; a small, impoverished town; children whom no one cared about, with alcoholic parents who were often abusive themselves – ‘my sisters were jealous that the priest is giving me so much love,’ Ewa Orlowska, one of the victims, recalled (Orłowska 2008).

Lucyna Krawiecka, the lady who first heard the stories, promised herself she would save the girls from further abuse. But she restrained herself from reporting the case to the Church authorities because she was the wife of a Greek Catholic priest. She thought it was not proper to report on a parish pastor of the Latin rite (Gruca 2019).

But when Lucyna heard more grim reports of primary school girls (horrible images I prefer not to repeat here), she took courage, recorded the testimonies of the girls and in March 2001 went straight to the archbishop, Jozef Michalik, who asked her to go directly to the prosecutor, which she did in May 2001.

Immediately afterwards, Lucyna went to the media. She told Radoslaw Gruca, investigative reporter for Gazeta Wyborcza, that she asked the archbishop to share the accusations of the families hurt by the priest with him or with someone from his curia. Michalik reportedly answered: ‘This priest has done so much good for his faithful, and now you accuse him of such bad things?’ (Bujara 2018).

Gazeta Wyborcza broke the news on June 4, 2001 and made headlines throughout the country. Two days later, Michalik sent an open letter to the faithful in which he wrote: ‘I am obliged to express my sympathy toward your pastor and at the same time express my hope that his fellow priests and you, faithful, who know the Church environment better than the aggressive media do, will not lose trust in your pastor, but will show him closeness and express it in prayer’ (Bujara 2018).

Archbishop Michalik is now retired. His biographer, Tomasz Krzyżak, suggests that at that time he believed that the case was an attempt by Greek Catholics to take over one of the Catholic churches in the city, especially since the reporting mother refused to give the bishop names of the victims (Krzyżak 2015). As already mentioned, his reaction confirmed Krawiecka’s initial fears.

It was proved in court that that priest had molested six girls, and the details recounted during the trial brought chills. Additionally, the victims recalled that he was abusing them during catechesis, in front of the boys, who were laughing at them: ‘The humiliation was hard to imagine,’ one of the survivors recalled (Gruca 2019). That priest was convicted in the second court ruling in 2004 and sentenced to two years in prison. He was also suspended for five years and forbidden from being a catechist for eight years.

As for Church proceedings, he was released from the parish of Tylawa before the court ruling in 2003 and was prohibited from being present in the area of the parish. He was also forbidden from performing any pastoral activities (KAI 2019).

What is shocking in this case is that the village turned their back on the victims and on the brave mother who uncovered the story. Even the mother of one of the survivors told her child that she was no longer her daughter and that God will judge her for what she said against the priest. ‘I wanted to be invisible,’ Ewa recalls. After testifying in court, she had to leave her hometown because the villagers called her a traitor and a prostitute (Jabłońska 2017).
Even more shocking is the aftermath of the case. On May 22, 2019, private broadcast network TVN24 broke the news that Fr. Moskwa was still saying Mass in southeastern Poland. They also recorded him on a hidden camera saying to a reporter: ‘I didn’t appeal the verdict. Jesus didn’t appeal either’ (TVN24 2019). He admitted he bathed the girls (‘I gave them a bit of pleasure’) and that the parents often asked him whether the girls can spend the night in the parish (it was confirmed by the victims that the priest paid the families that sent the girls to the sleepovers at the priest’s house).

After the news was aired, the local diocese’s curia apologized and released a statement saying that Moskwa was prohibited from any further public appearances and that a Church curator will execute the prohibitions (KAI 2019).

Beyond the horrific testimonies of the victims, this story brings attention to the wrongdoings not only in the Church (the prosecutor in the first instance who turned down the case was Stanislaw Piotrowicz, now a politician in the Law and Justice party that is currently ruling the country). It also illustrates that a change of heart takes a long time for the entire Church – not only within Church hierarchy, but also in the faithful in Poland, whose attitude toward the survivors was yet a supplementary harm to what they had already suffered. It also shows that the Church needs to revise its protocols about controlling abusive priests even many years after the convictions.

**Second, an abuse of power in the making at Poznan**

The first and most visible tremble of the hierarchical structure of the Church in Poland was the case of the archbishop of Poznan Juliusz Paetz (1935–2019). In 2002, reporter Jerzy Morawski broke the news in the national daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*. Using credible sources, all anonymous, he said that Paetz had abused several young seminarrians for years, abusing his position as their superior. The ‘prize’ of consenting to homosexual activities was the opportunity to study abroad.

Poznan is one of the most important and biggest dioceses in the country. It was the final destination for Paetz after his time at the Vatican, where he was the Secretary for the Synod of Bishops between 1967 and 1976.

Morawski broke his story by saying: ‘None of my informants – clergy or lay people – agreed to publicly disclose their names. However, they did not refuse to talk. They said they were convinced that the press publication will help in what they could not cope with themselves. And they said that it will help the Church. It is about the sexual harassment of clerics and priests by Archbishop of Poznan Juliusz Paetz’ (Morawski 2002). There are things the Polish public knows about the case. But some details, even 20 years later, are still unknown.

We know that the case had been reported to the Vatican before *Rzeczpospolita* broke the news. In fact, John Paul II sent some trusted advisors to Poznan to investigate at the Poznan seminary for four months. Paetz was removed from office soon after. But the Church never made the information public.

We do not know for sure who accused the bishop, but media received some hints. ‘One of the heroes of the case was the rector of the seminary, Fr. Tadeusz Karkosz,’ Tomasz Krzyzak, a renowned Polish journalist and Church analyst, told the author of this paper in a conversation on 2 May 2020. Karkosz closed the doors of the seminary
to his own archbishop, asking him not to visit the seminary again once he learned that his seminarians were abused. Karkosz was later removed from the post and died unexpectedly at the age of 53. It was probably he who reported the case to the Vatican, but after almost 20 years the details have yet to be released by the Church.

We do not know either who brought the report to the Pope. Most journalistic sources, say it is probable that the pontiff’s source was Wanda Poltawska, one of the Pope’s closest life-long friends. According to unofficial sources, John Paul II reportedly cried when he read those documents.

In any case, this event was a milestone for Polish journalism: ‘I was not the first journalist who knew about the case,’ Morawski wrote. ‘There were other journalists who learned about this scandal before me. They had the texts ready, but they were afraid to publish them’ (Ławnicki 2019).

Additionally, since the proceedings of the case are still secret, many inquiries then-left-unanswered are still valid questions today. For instance, what was the role played by the deputy bishop of Poznan at the time, now-Archbishop of Kraków, Marek Jedraszewski?

In a testimony played to the bishops at the Vatican during the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church in February 2019, one of the victims compared the abuse crisis to a cancer in the Church, and another survivor acknowledged that ‘it is not enough to remove the tumor and that’s it,’ but stressed that there must be measures in place to ‘treat the whole cancer’ (Arocho Esteves 2019). For the Church in Poland, the case of Paetz is exactly that – a rotten cancer that spread into to many cells of the Church around the country and until it is fully and transparently removed, Church structures will not be able to move forward.

**Third, a Polish nuncio abroad**

Polish papers also covered another scandal by a Polish clergyman. But this time it did not happen on Polish land.

In July 2013, only four months after Francis was elected Pope, media broke the story that the papal nuncio in the Dominican Republic, Archbishop Jozef Wesolowski, had been accused by multiple altar boys of sexual misconduct. It was the archbishop of Santo Domingo, Cardinal Nicolas Lopez Rodriguez, who personally informed the Pope in late July ‘that there had been ‘serious accusations’ against Wesolowski,’ said the Vatican statement signed by Fr. Federico Lombardi, director of the Holy See press office (Pullella 2013).

In August, the papal diplomat was recalled from the Dominican Republic and on August 21, 2013 (Onet 2018), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith began the trial. The former nuncio was arrested on September 23, 2014 (Ansa 2014) and was under house arrest for 60 days in the Collegio Apostolico dei Penitenzieri, a residence for clerics inside the Vatican.

His trial began on July 11, 2015. The archbishop had been accused of forcing sexual acts, downloading and using child pornography and harming the victims’ mental health, as well as depraving the faithful (Wiadomości 2014). One day before the trial was to start, Wesolowski was admitted to Policlinico Gemelli and, after being released
from the hospital, died of a heart attack on August 28, 2015 (Vatican Press Office 2015).

The disgraced nuncio was buried in Czorsztyn on September 5, 2015. During the ceremony, a moment of silence replaced the homily. Nonetheless, some fragments of Wesolowski’s letters to his family were read aloud, in which the prelate professed his innocence: ‘I am cheerful because I did not commit these terrible deeds. My main fault was being imprudent walking by the sea and having contacts with street children, who later proved to be involved in drug trafficking and prostitution. It is true that I helped many of them, I visited them in prison, prepared them for the sacraments (…). It is so hard to prove it all now, and three of them accuse me of hurting them’ (Dziennik 2015).

Concelebrating the funeral was the auxiliary bishop of Kraków, Jan Szkodon, who will be the protagonist of another event described later in this paper.

Both the cases of Archbishop Paetz and nuncio Wesolowski were also extensively covered by Polish media, secular and Catholic alike. Additionally, some books were published about the abuse of power in the Church in the context of those particular cases, highlighting the hypocrisy and abuse caused by the priests.

Those stories made a dent on Polish public opinion: for the first time, high-ranking Church authorities had undergone internal but public investigations. But their impact inside the Church was even deeper: those cases coincided with a steep increase in the number of denunciations of sexual abuse by clerics. What was happening?

**The Polish answer to the Holy See’s new guidelines**

The first Vatican document directly addressing sexual abuse of minors after the first manifestations of the coming tsunami in the United States was Pope John Paul II’s *motu proprio* Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela, published in 2001. The new law put the acts of sexual abuse by clergy into the category of ‘most grave delicts’ (Pope John Paul II 2001).

From then on, all cases of sexual abuse of minors were to be directed to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose prefect was John Paul II’s closest collaborator, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. When the real dimensions of the plague of sexual abuse were uncovered first by the *Spotlight* investigation in Boston, and soon also by other news organizations in other cities, Pope John Paul II (2002) met with the authorities of the Episcopal Conference of the United States, and famously stated: ‘there is no place in priesthood for those that harm the young’.

It was his successor, Benedict XVI who had to face the crisis spreading into European countries, first in Ireland in 2009, and afterwards in his homeland of Germany in 2010. But the epicenter, in media terms, was still in America. During a press conference on a plane during his trip to the United States on March 15, 2008, Benedict XVI strongly confirmed the words of his predecessor: ‘We will absolutely exclude pedophiles from the sacred ministry; it is absolutely incompatible, and whoever is really guilty of being a pedophile cannot be a priest. (…) These are the two sides of justice: one, that pedophiles cannot be priests and the other, to help in any possible way the victims’ (Pope Benedict XVI 2008).
The German pope has also shown compassion to the victims of sexual abuse, meeting with them during most of his apostolic trips – especially those to the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and Malta (here, even against the request of local bishops).

For Joseph Ratzinger as a person, both while leading the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for more than 25 years, or as the Roman Pontiff, sexual abuse of minors was one of the most crucial issues. He confirmed and systematized John Paul’s *motu proprio* with a series of new ‘Norms on More Grave Delicts,’ which were sent to the bishops in a letter dated May 21, 2010 (Lombardi 2018). It is important, for the content of this paper, to stress that Benedict’s *motu proprio* was published, while the previous one was promulgated but not made public.

Another milestone in Benedict XVI’s pontificate happened a year later, in May 2011, when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith circulated a letter to all the episcopal conferences with the aim of ‘assisting conferences in developing guidelines for dealing with cases of sexual abuses of minors perpetrated by clerics’ in light of the ‘new norms’ established by the Pope in 2010 (Vatican Resources 2020).

Every episcopal conference was asked to prepare its own guidelines or to revise those already existing and to send the new version to the Congregation within one year to allow for any observations to be made (Lombardi 2018).

While ‘many episcopal conferences did not respect the deadline’ (Lombardi 2018), the Church in Poland did. The Polish Episcopal Conference quickly followed the rules coming from the Vatican. This is, step by step, what the Polish bishops did in the period of 2013–2019:

- In June 2009 (even before the 2010 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), the Polish Bishops’ Conference approved guidelines on Church procedures regarding clergy accused of sexual abuse of minors under the age of 18 (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2019a).
- In June 2013, Fr. Zak became the coordinator of the protection of minors at the Polish Bishops’ Conference and opened the Child Protection Center in Kraków. Zak has become one of the most active promoters of change in the Church in Poland. Under his direction, the Center has trained over 5,000 people in the last 5 years and has become the reference point not only in Poland but also in Eastern Europe.
- In October 2013, official statements declared the Church’s position on this subject: ‘We strongly emphasize – there is no tolerance for pedophilia. This is the position of the entire Church in Poland – both clergy and secular Catholics’ (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2019a).
- In June 2014, the conference ‘How to understand and respond to sexual abuses by the clergy,’ successfully organized by the Child Protection Center in Kraków, shed light and knowledge on the problem. The conference ended with a penitential liturgy presided by the bishop of Plock, Piotr Libera. The mass was also concelebrated by the longtime secretary of Pope John Paul II Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, the Primate of Poland Archbishop Wojciech Polak, Bishop Grzegorz Dziwisz, the Primate of Poland Archbishop Wojciech Polak, Bishop Grzegorz Rys (at the time auxiliary bishop of Kraków, now archbishop of Lodz) and the Apostolic
Nuncio, Archbishop Celestino Migliore (Gość Niedzielny 2014). Many interpreted this as a hopeful and eloquent sign of Church repentance for the sins of her own sons. The church was packed with faithful.

- In October 2014, the Polish Episcopal Conference adopted the ‘Guidelines for initial canonical investigation in the event of clerical charges of acts against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue with a minor under the age of eighteen.’ The Guidelines were approved by the Holy See in 2015 and amended in 2017 (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2019b).

- In September 2018, the Polish bishops met in Plock and made the following announcement: ‘Children and young people are a constant concern of the Church, which requires, among other measures, to protect minors against abuse. The position on this matter is still valid and unchanging: zero tolerance for sin and the crime of pedophilia in the Church and in society’ (Child Protection Center 2018a).

- In November 2018, the Polish bishops declared: ‘We have a firm will to cleanse ourselves from sin and the crime of abuse. (…) We repeat after Pope Francis: ‘the pain [of children and young people] and the pain of their families is our pain.’ (…) We apologize to God, the victims of abuse, their families and the community of the Church for all the wrongs inflicted on children and young people and their relatives by clergy, consecrated persons and lay church workers. We ask the Lord to give us light, strength and courage to firmly combat moral and spiritual corruption, which is the basic source of sexual abuse of minors. We ask the Lord to give effectiveness to our efforts to create an open and child-friendly environment in the Church’ (Archdiocese of Kraków 2019).

- In January 2019, following specific instructions from the Holy See, Archbishop Gadecki, President of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, invited all those hurt by sexual abuse to meet with him prior to the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, to be held in the Vatican.

In March 2019, Polish Bishops published a survey with the number of members of the clergy who had been accused of abusing minors from 1990 to 2018 and stated, ‘we strongly condemn all forms of exploitation of minors’ (Child Protection Center 2018a). Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the Primate of Poland was named Delegate of Child Protection of the Polish Bishops’ Conference. As the succession of documents and statements listed above clearly shows, the Church in Poland was very diligent in transcribing the new guidelines coming from Rome into local norms. Let us study now whether these new rules really did change the way Church authorities were dealing with cases of sexual abuse and how much a conversion, a change of hearts and minds that Pope Francis was demanding of the whole Church (Pope Francis 2016, 2017) actually transformed the institutional culture of the Church in Poland.

**Sound advice unheard**

In June 2013, the bishops appointed Fr. Adam Zak as coordinator of child protection of the Polish Bishops’ Conference.
The choice could not have been better. Zak, a longtime assistant for Eastern Europe of the Superior General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, personally assisted Peter Hans Kolvenbach and his successor Adolfo Nicolas when the Jesuits were going through a historical crisis in Germany and other countries. In 2014 he convinced the bishops that education is key in prevention and started a Kraków-based Center for Child Protection.

For years, however, Zak seemed to be the only one who predicted what was really coming. In 2017 and 2018, he wrote two special reports for the President of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, archbishop Stanisław Gadecki, urging that the reaction of the Church in Poland toward cases of sexual abuse be proactive.

Zak warned that the documentaries which were being produced would have a great impact on public opinion and that immediate institutional reaction and a new approach from the bishops would be needed. He urged many decisions: training for bishops and for pastors to deal with those cases, promoting a prevention system, giving the green light to Catholic media on information policy, and creating contact points to make it easier for people to report… But he was not heard.

The tireless Jesuit has been an important ombudsman for the faithful through the years. To quote two of his famous interviews with Catholic media: ‘We are on the verge of a creepy crisis: we start to believe too much in guidelines and in what we’ve already done, so much so that we think the scale of the issue is smaller than elsewhere’ (Zak 2017); ‘I have no reason to believe that things in the Church in Poland were done differently than in the United States or Ireland’ (Zak 2018). Only six months later, those words would prove to be prophetic.

A remarkable press-conference

At the beginning of March 2019, the episcopate organized a press conference to release an official survey on the number of cases of sexual abuse in Poland since 1950 and reported between 1990 and June 2018.

According to the survey, there were 625 victims during that timeframe and 382 abusive members of the clergy; 270 of the cases were closed and 68 priests were expelled from priesthood (Child Protection Center 2018b).

Some data were remarkable. For instance, compared to reports released by other episcopates, the timeframe of reported cases was actually quite recent and yet displayed an exponential growth in reports overtime: in 2001, 5 priests were denounced in the whole country, while in 2017 the number increased to 35 (See Figure 1).

The time in which these crimes were committed shows a different trend than in other countries. Most of the cases in Poland are recent – the majority of them were committed after 1990 (See Figure 2).

The press conference was intended to be a persuasive sign of change in the spirit of responsibility, accountability and transparency, which were the core principles of the Vatican Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, which took place only three weeks prior.

Three bishops were seated at the table in front of cameras and reporters of all major mainstream Polish media: President of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop
Stanislaw Gadecki; his deputy, Archbishop of Kraków Marek Jedraszewski; and Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the newly appointed Delegate for the Protection of Children.

The appointment of Polak as the Delegate for Protection of Children was a major step for the Church in Poland. The fact that the first person in charge of this new role was the Primate displayed the importance Polish bishops were assigning to this new mission.6

The words from the vice-president of the Episcopate felt like a cold shower. Jedraszewski told the media: ‘The Church must be impeccably resolute in the fight against evil, but she must also call for conversion, penance and show mercy to the perpetrators, if they show sincere regret,’ adding that the ‘zero tolerance’ principle is totalitarian and originates from Nazi traditions (Guzik 2019a).

To top it off, president Gadecki added that pedophilia in the Church is actually an ‘ideologically coined’ slogan and ‘quite skillfully chosen’ by the enemies of the Church, and while the problem exists, the media uses it to destroy peoples’ trust in the clergy (Guzik 2019a).
Those comments coming from the highest representatives of the Church in Poland, partnered with the blatant absence of any words of apology towards the victims, sparked outrage among Catholics and citizens in general. Only Polak was compassionate toward the victims, stating, 'Each of the victims should arouse in us, the clergy, pain, shame and guilt.’

Zbigniew Nosowski wrote after the press conference: ‘The bishops’ presidency does not understand that their approach to sexual abuse may be a ‘to be or not to be’ in the Church for many Catholics’ (Nosowski 2019). Also, in an interview with Crux, he added: ‘The hierarchy in the Church has to finally get it that their words in any other social aspect will remain unheard if they will not deal with sex abuse first’ (Guzik 2019a).

That press conference was a sign that the cultural conversion was not yet ensured. Some people considered it ‘just a miscommunication’ and underestimated the real root of the problem: the missing cultural transformation of the Church in Poland. The true crisis was only about to occur, and reality was about to be uncovered.

Like in the oceans, where big waves come in groups of three, the Church in Poland was about to be hit by three big, rolling waves.

The first wave: Gdansk, 2018

It was precisely in Gdansk where the Soviet Empire began to collapse. The city made history in 1980 when an electrician by the name of Lech Walesa founded Solidarity, the first trade union in a communist country. Alongside Walesa was an eccentric chaplain, Fr. Henryk Jankowski. All across Poland, the priest was as famous as Walesa, and his popularity in Gdansk resulted in a big statue of him in front of St. Bridget’s Church, an important landmark of the Solidarity movement.

In December 2018, now 64-year-old Barbara Borowiecka told Gazeta Wyborcza that Jankowski abused her ‘between 10 and 20 times’ (Aksamit 2018). She claimed she was 12 when the abuse began. The priest was well known in the whole neighborhood as ‘the one who chased the kids,’ Borowiecka reported to the paper.

The report provided many graphic details of Jankowski’s long trail of sexual abuse. For instance, there is the story of a Borowiecka’s friend: she was raped by the priest, got pregnant and, after telling her father, committed suicide. The article also recalls the words of Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski, the previous archbishop of Gdansk now deceased: ‘A serious problem that has been worrying me for several years is your attitude toward young men and boys’ (Aksamit 2018), suggesting that the secret about the priest was not as private as it was previously thought. In March 2019, the statue of Jankowski was removed by the outraged Gdansk community in a scene that bore a resemblance to the tumbling of many statues of Lenin and Stalin at the fall of the Communist Regime in Eastern Europe, only with a smaller crowd and an added special symbolic touch: protesters put children’s underwear in the statue’s hands.

Public uproar only intensified when people learned that the case had been reported to the Archbishop three months earlier, and that he had done nothing. Moreover, Archbishop Slawoj Leszek Glodz wanted the statue back on the podium after it had
lain on the ground for several hours. It was Solidarity leaders themselves who decided to take it down for good.

After nine months of silence from the side of the curia, Glodz closed the case. In a letter sent to Borowiecka, one of the aforementioned victims, the chancellor of the diocese explained that it was the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that halted the investigation, stating, ‘it is impossible when the person is dead’ (Więź 2019). The case was closed as of October 2019.

The public did not stay silent after this decision. On November 3, 2019, a group of 100 faithful came to the Gdansk curia to call for the resignation of Glodz: ‘Christ says that we need to care about the little ones, the victims of abuse. We are to care of persecuted priests. We should seek out all those who have left the Church shocked by what is happening,’ Justyna Zorn, one of the organizers of the protest, told Gazeta Wyborcza (Gałązka 2019).

Facing the threat of protests in front of the nunciature, Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio in Warsaw, invited the faithful of Gdansk to a private audience on March 2, 2020. The group asked the Vatican Ambassador what has been done regarding the abuse of power by the archbishop of Gdansk in sexual abuse cases and what action will be taken as reparation for the victims (Dobiegała 2020).

The faithful of Gdansk also sent a petition to Pope Francis, asking him to intervene in the face of the forsaking of victims by their archbishop.

It is unclear whether it was a consequence of the public unrest, however, after the intervention of the nunciature in the Archdioceses of Gdansk, the commission to investigate the case of Jankowski was reopened in April 2020. In a letter published by Więź, the chancellor of the Gdansk curia announced that the Apostolic Nunciature in Warsaw requested Archbishop Glodz to investigate the case (Więź 2020a).

The commission is still working ‘to gather information, in a historical and moral aspect” regarding the prelate, while ‘the collected material will be forwarded to the Apostolic Nunciature in Warsaw.’ Such action, the chancellor of the curia argued, results from the decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which had already ruled that canonical criminal proceedings against the deceased were impossible (Więź 2020).

Therefore, the commission is not technically working on a trial of the deceased cleric. Instead, it is studying the moral grounds of searching for truth in the past – mainly for peace and justice for those who could have possibly been hurt by Jankowski.

When this investigation is finished and sent to the Vatican, it is up to the Holy See to decide how the case will go forward. One possibility is that Glodz will face another investigation – of abuse of power. It is unlikely that he be removed as archbishop, as he is retiring this very year, 2020.

**The second wave: Tell No One, 2019**

May 11, 2019, the day of St. Stanislaus, one of the major yearly festivities of the Church in Poland, was the date chosen by producers and brothers Marek and Tomasz Sekielski to premiere their long-awaited documentary *Tell No One*. The documentary’s director,
Tomasz, an experienced television journalist, anchor and investigative reporter, depicted what is rarely seen on video – victims confronting their abusers.

The result was a powerful portrait of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in Poland. The movie is like a blow to the face of the hierarchy in front of the whole country. This is not a coincidence: ‘I hope that everyone who sees the movie will think about it for several days. And that this film will actually hurt,’ were Tomasz’ explicit intentions.

More precisely, he aimed directly at the Church hierarchy in Poland. He thought that Polish bishops were not following the steps marked by Pope Francis, but instead remained frozen, unresponsive and unreactive, as if this problem was not their problem.

In fact, that was the bishops’ reaction to the first movie accusing priests of being sexual predators – Clergy, released in the fall of 2018. The story was considered ‘a scandalizing image far from reality’ by some, and a ‘blockbuster image of the modern Polish Church’ for others. Nearly two months after its premiere screening, over 5 million people watched it in movie theaters (Gazeta Wyborcza 2018). On that occasion, the Polish episcopate was neither shocked nor wanting to talk about it. The case was thrown into the basket of ‘it’s just fiction, so there’s no reason to worry about it.’

Even if Clergy was a fictional and much exaggerated image of the problems that the Church is facing, it was at the same time the first sign of a cultural change in the public sphere – that talking publicly about the dirty laundry inside the Church was considered acceptable. It was like crying ‘the Emperor is naked’, as in the H. Ch. Andersen’s tale: people saw the problems inside the institution and the Church couldn’t avoid it any longer.

The film had a major impact on society and public debate about what Poles can say about the Church in the public sphere; nevertheless, it did not have much impact on Church communications and structures. ‘It’s just fiction’, was the motto.

On the contrary, cases in the documentary Tell No One, released 8 months later, were true. Real people were harmed. The wrongdoings and secrecy of the Church were in plain sight for everybody to see.

In the introduction of this paper, I told the story of a woman who confronted her abuser. Thirty years earlier, the priest abused her around the time of her First Communion. In a conversation with the elderly cleric, who is now leading a peaceful life in a Church retirement home, she finds out that her suspicions about not being the sole victim were confirmed. When she walks out from the room, devastated, she cries out to the hidden camera: ‘I just knew there were other victims, I knew it!’ She had never reported the crime to anyone but kept the secret for 32 years, just as the priest had asked her to do.

A second male victim also confronts his abuser in the film. Fr. Franciszek Cybula was a well-known figure in Poland, as for many years he was the personal chaplain of Lech Wałęsa, legendary leader of the Solidarity union and later President of Poland.

When the victim, who was in primary school when the abuse occurred, confronts his abuser, Cybula downplays his responsibility by saying, ‘You wanted it, you wanted that little closeness.’

Cybula died just before the film was finished. The documentary shows his funeral, where the Bishop Glodz of Gdansk and many other high-profile priests praised the
deceased cleric. The bishop knew about the allegations: they were officially reported three months before Cybula’s death.

Tell No One was the first Polish large-scale journalistic investigation conducted using crowdfunded money that brought to light all abuse mechanisms written about in literature: secrecy, a web of silence and manipulation around the victim, abusing children from families in need, incorrect Church response, abuse of power, but above all, a sad phenomenon – a Church terribly afraid to face the truth and lacking proper investigation of the cases, not to mention a complete lack of compassion toward survivors.

Public reception of the film, with only a few exceptions, was overwhelmingly favorable. Both conservative and liberal media praised the filmmakers for the courage displayed in showing the grim reality of handling sexual abuse in the Church in Poland. For the first time in Polish public opinion, the victims were put in the ‘Spotlight,’ so to speak, and this brought the country to a halt.

Social media reaction mirrored the reaction seen in mainstream media: ‘The film is powerful, hard to watch, very accurate and very painful. The Sekielski brothers’ documentary may become a part of the Polish-Polish ideological war over values. But it shouldn’t, because it is a fine, professional and engaging work,’ commented the Polska Times (2020).

In fact, if the ideological war was about to happen, it would be declared by the right-wing conservative media that usually put themselves in the role of Church defenders. After Tell No One’s release, even the right-wing website wpolityce.pl published these words written by Łukasz Adamski, journalist and film critic: ‘The documentary by the Sekielski brothers is shocking and painful. Without looking at the political or religious debate (…) this film is about victims looking into the eyes of those who hurt them.’

Other media headlines included: ‘An important lesson for all of us,’ ‘The Irish scenario in practice,’ and ‘This film needs to cause an earthquake in the episcopal conference.’ Jesuit website deon.pl published editorials of two leading experts on abuse. One of them, psychologist Fr. Jacek Prusak SJ, wrote: ‘How to believe after the Sekielski film? We need to go through a period of mourning.’ Fr. Zak stated: ‘Pastors understand they need to see what skeletons they have in their closet.’

What commentators both in secular and catholic media had in common is the mix of compassion, desperation and anger: ‘After a two-hour screening, the viewer will not only be deeply moved, but above all, very angry. He will be convinced that the principle of ‘zero tolerance’ repeated by bishops is simply just an empty phrase,’ Tomasz Krzyżak wrote in Rzeczpospolita, adding: ‘There will be no spectacular dismissal of bishops after the documentary, although questions about their responsibility in some cases must arise’ (Krzyżak 2019).

Krzyżak had foreseen something that the faithful felt under their skin – that the film will be an earthquake that will not cause bishops to change. And this made the faithful visibly lose trust in the Church.

Commenting on the film, a priest working in the Polish Episcopal Conference for many years said, ‘Unfortunately, only movies like this one can force the hierarchy to face the problem. In this sense, the documentary could help the bishops. But I am afraid the film will not be enough to wake up the Episcopal Conference, because
bishops will only wake up if Pope Francis requires the resignation of one of them for disregarding the law’ (Guzik 2019b).

The faithful did not believe in real change either. In a poll conducted nine months after the release of the documentary, the Church noted a visible decrease in trust. In 2016, 58% of respondents said they trusted the Church; in 2017, the number dropped to 52.7%; by the beginning of 2020, the number was down to only 39.5 percent (Dąbrowska 2020).

Those who put a lot of trust in the Church made up 29.9% in 2017, compared to only 15.7% in 2020. Figure 3 shows the impact that Tell No One and the Church’s response had on the Church in Poland.¹¹

The signal sent by the faithful was clear in as early as July 2019. A public opinion poll conducted by the biggest poll provider, CBOS, showed that 87% of Poles stated that an insufficient reaction from the Church to the cases of pedophilia is lowering the authority of the institution.¹² Fifty-eight percent of the respondents said that the scale of abuse in the Catholic Church is bigger than we know from the cases that were already published. Only 30% of the respondents thought that the problem is exaggerated by the media. Worth noting is the fact that 51% of the respondents thought that the Church’s reaction to the documentary was not sufficient. Let us look, then, at the actual reaction.

Only after the documentary premiered, the dioceses revealed what happened to the predatory priests. Three of those featured in the film were removed from priesthood — two before the film’s debut, and the third filed a request for laicization after the documentary’s release. Two more were banned from public ministry but remain in priesthood.

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Figure 3. Impact of Tell No One.
**The Church’s response: things start moving**

*Tell No One* was the first media investigation of child sexual abuse on a large scale in the history of the Church in Poland. The Sekielski brothers’ documentary had done in Poland what the famous *Spotlight* investigation did in the United States: tell the story of sexual abuse by clerics that was obstructed by Church authorities.

The film displayed to Polish people in full scale the vast dimensions of the problem on their own land, which most considered the most Catholic country in the world. In the blink of an eye, a ‘foreign problem’ was exposed in their own backyard, accompanied by the realization that many people in the Church knew it, lied about it and were unable to do the right thing by taking the side of the abused. On the contrary, they preferred to protect the Church’s good name and ignored the victims and their suffering.

The documentary hit the Church in Poland with the force of an earthquake. And not many expected as quick and emphatic a reaction as the one it received within only a few hours of its release – a Copernican revolution, precisely in the homeland of Copernicus.

The first to react was the Primate, Archbishop Polak. Immediately after the release of the movie, Polak issued a video statement saying, ‘The enormous suffering of the people who have been hurt triggers pain and shame.’ Then, after referring to the new papal legislation on sex abuse, he added: ‘No one in the Church can escape responsibility.’

An equally emphatic statement came from Archbishop Gadecki, the president of the Polish Bishops’ Conference. His change, after his unfortunate comments at the press conference in March 2019, when he said that pedophilia in the Church is actually an ‘ideologically coined’ slogan and ‘quite skillfully chosen’ by the enemies of the Church, was remarkable. He said: ‘With sadness and compassion I watched the film produced by Mr. Sekielski, for which I am thankful to the director. (…) In the name of the Polish Bishops’ Conference I would like to say sorry to all those hurt. I am well aware that nothing is going to take away the harm experienced,’ and adding, ‘I am sure that this film will contribute to an even stronger condemnation of the crime of pedophilia, which cannot take place in the Church’ (Wiara 2019).

Not everybody in the Church in Poland took that side of the debate. For example, Archbishop Glodz of Gdansk told the Polish TV news program *Fakty*: ‘I don’t watch any old stuff.’ But the trend was unstoppable even for him, and under the pressure of the Bishops Conference, he had to apologize soon after, stating he ‘was not willing to offend any of those harmed by church sexual abuse.’

So, what in fact had changed in Church authorities after *Tell No One*?

Three elements must have come to mind for the bishops: we can no longer deny the problem, as it was customary for decades; we can no longer ignore the victims, because now they have the attention of the whole society; and we can no longer ignore the faithful, who are raising their voices and demanding decisive action and even resignations.

There were actually some expected dismissals in June 2019, when Maltese Archbishop Charles Scicluna, Adjunct Secretary of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Pope Francis’s point man on sex abuse, travelled to
Poland to address both the bishops and the diocesan delegates for the protection of children.

His trip was scheduled months before the release of *Tell No One*, and even before the February Vatican sexual abuse summit, but it was hard not to see the connection between the lack of action and change of heart in the Polish bishops and him coming to the country.

‘Victims are not enemies of the Church,’ Scicluna told the Polish Episcopate, ‘but wounded sheep.’ Scicluna praised the plans and procedures decided by the Episcopal Conference throughout the years. But then he asked: ‘What are the facts?’

In an interview for National Polish Television, *TVP*, Scicluna also encouraged the victims to report both sexual abuse and abuse of power. Referring to *Vos estis lux mundi*, the Maltese archbishop stressed that, ‘for the first time in the history of the Church, a norm establishes a positive obligation to denounce.’

He might not be a papal envoy, but his visit was a threshold of hope. Two months after the visit, the Primate Polak was equipped with the Office of Child Protection, operating right inside the building of the Bishops headquarters in Wyszynski Square in Warsaw.

To lead this brand-new child protection unit, Polak named Fr. Piotr Studnicki, and the episcopate approved the appointment. His background in communications with a degree from a Pontifical University, his academic expertise as professor of crisis management for the Church and his involvement as Cardinal Dziwisz’s spokesperson in Kraków indicates that transparency would be considered an indispensable element in dealing with the sexual abuse of minors. His experience includes the issue of sexual abuse, since he served as an unofficial spokesperson of the Child Protection Center in Kraków for over a year.

Studnicki saw this assignment as a chance to start new chapter in fighting sexual abuse in the country. Much like the Vatican’s Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, the Polish Office of Child Protection does not deal with specific allegations, which is the task of special diocesan advocates. Instead, it deals with safeguarding procedures and helping survivors of sexual abuse.

The first victory for the Primate and Studnicki was the voting on the St. Joseph Foundation – a fund for victims, for which the bishops gave the green light as recently as October 2019. It is an organization that will be able to concretely help victims after they report a case. It will offer professional help immediately for those harmed, including legal support, psychological therapy and educational scholarships, among other services.

Most importantly, the funds come directly from the pockets of priests and bishops, not from donations of the faithful. A lay woman, Marta Titaniec, was appointed to chair the foundation and Robert Fidura, a victim of child sexual abuse, was given a seat on its advisory board.

It is a fact that, after the documentary *Tell No One*, there was a visible change in public discourse. Bishops were talking publicly about the issue, something previously unheard of.

Yet, there was an important element missing: making survivors a priority. The conversion of heart that Pope Francis was insisting with his words and with his deeds (the
Argentinian Pope made meetings with victims an almost weekly routine) was nowhere to be seen. Bishops were still reserved about meeting with them.

In summary, *Tell No One* promoted a big change: more people, more resources and more communication were put into protecting minors and taking care of victims of sexual abuse by the clergy.

Nevertheless, it was an incomplete turnaround. That year, Francis closed the circle on the issue with his *Vos estis lux mundi*, a papal document establishing the responsibilities of bishops in case they failed to adhere to the norms regarding sexual abuse accusations. It was the fulfillment of the responsibility and accountability principles preached in the Vatican’s Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church. Bishops should feel responsible and accountable not only for their deeds but also for those of their brothers in the episcopate.

But no Polish bishop dared to force Archbishop Glodz of Gdansk to investigate the Jankowski case, and neither did Apostolic Nuncio Penacchio.

It is possible that the Holy See might just be patiently waiting until the bishop of Gdansk reaches the age of retirement in 2020. Nevertheless, doing so would be a contradiction of those principles proclaimed from Rome and would leave for his successor the difficult and unpleasant task of not only investigating Jankowski but also making his predecessor accountable for not fulfilling the new Church laws and not standing by the side of those who were hurt.

**The open case of the auxiliary bishop of Kraków**

It was during the coldest days of winter in Poland, February 2020, when the case involving incumbent auxiliary bishop of Kraków, bishop Jan Szkodon, a personality of the local Church for decades with a crystalline reputation, emerged.

For decades, Jan Szkodon was a significant figure in Kraków – the archdiocese of St. John Paul II. From 1979, he was the spiritual director of the seminary for over a decade, until he was consecrated bishop in 1988. He was known for his deep spirituality and artistic sophistication – he enjoyed painting on canvas and writing poetry. For years he was seen as a sensitive figure of the Church in Kraków (Guzik 2020).

Unexpectedly on February 2020, a year before his retirement, a young civil servant and mother accused him of abusing her in 1998, when she was a 15-year-old girl. In an article published by daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Monika (not her real name) claimed she was often a guest at the bishop’s apartment, and ‘Whether summer or winter, he always felt hot,’ she recalled. ‘He took off his cassock and his shirt and remained in tank top and trousers unzipped halfway’ (Wójcik 2020).

According to the woman, Szkodon encouraged her to undress, touched her breasts, thighs and bit her ears. ‘Monika, God has sent you to me. He wants to teach me tenderness through you’ (Wójcik 2020), he allegedly told the girl.

The day before the Polish paper published its report, Szkodon released a statement declaring his innocence: ‘These accusations violate my good name, which I intend to defend’ (Archdiocese of Kraków 2020a).

Reactions from the bishops varied from distancing themselves from the case altogether to standing in defense of bishop Szkodon to defending the victim.
Archbishop of Kraków Jedraszewski did not release any official statement. His spokesperson informed the media that Szkodon had left the archdiocese for an undisclosed location and that ‘the archdiocese was not aware of the accusations that the bishop is facing’ (Skowrońska 2020).

Archbishop Emeritus of Kraków Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, in a statement released a day after the accusations, stated that ‘the allegations hurt many people for whom Bishop Jan is an authority, a father and a friend. We are all expecting the allegations to be thoroughly and quickly explained’ (Archdiocese of Kraków 2020b).

When Gazeta Wyborcza published the exposé, the case of Szkodon was already being investigated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Polak commented on the case: ‘Any information of that kind brings pain to the Church,’ he said at a press conference. ‘It is a call that we shall always care about – the safe environment for children in the Church. And it is a call to each and every one in the Church.’

The alleged victim of Szkodon did not use the diocesan channels to denounce. In May 2019, she reported the case directly to the Nunciature (she also reported to state prosecutors in August and public officials opened an investigation, which they subsequently had to close due to the fact that the statute of limitations had expired).

‘The first letter on this matter arrived at the Nunciature on May 27, 2019 and was forwarded to the Holy See the same day,’ the Nunciature said in a February 12, 2020 statement (KAI2020).

Nevertheless, it took eight months for Church investigators to listen to the alleged victim: Monika was not asked to testify until January 2020. During that time, Szkodon was performing his duties as an auxiliary bishop of Kraków. On the day of her deposition, January 23, 2020, the nuncio Pennacchio met with Monika personally.

If the bishop is found guilty by the Vatican, he could be the first Polish bishop to not only be removed from office, but also expelled from the priesthood.

If this case was not shocking enough, an even stronger blow was about to hit the Church in Poland in 2020.

**The third wave: Hide and Seek, 2020**

Almost exactly a year after the first part of the tell-all documentary revealing tales of sexual abuse, the Sekielski brothers released the second part of their investigation called *Hide and Seek*. This time it documented not only the sexual abuse of children by priests, but also the abuse of power by the Church hierarchy. This time around, the filmmakers once again carefully chose an important date for the Church in Poland – the documentary premiered just before the celebrations of the Centenary of Karol Wojtyła.

The film showed that, although child protection procedures in the Church have technically been in place for years, many Church authorities were still indifferent to the plight of the victims of sexual abuse.

The film tells the story of brothers Jakub and Bartek Pankowiak, who were abused in their own apartment, while their parents were in the kitchen next door. Jakub was 13 years old when he and his family – his parents and three siblings – moved to the new parish apartment in Pleszewo in the Diocese of Kalisz in central Poland in 1996.
His father was the organist at the parish church: ‘We thought it was a gift from heaven,’ Jakub said about his new home. Even if it was modest, it was more spacious than their previous household, and the parish subsidy meant there was more money available to direct at the care of one of his brothers who was terminally ill.

‘We were the fish that were the easiest to catch,’ said Bartek Pankowiak, Jakub’s younger brother. He was 8 years old when the abuse started. Both brothers were abused by Fr. Arkadiusz Hajdasz, but at first neither knew the other was also being victimized.

The priest was allegedly giving the boys guitar lessons while their parents were busy in the kitchen, but instead he was kissing and fondling each boy in their bedrooms. The brothers were afraid to tell their parents: if their father lost his job as parish musician, the life of their sick brother would be put in danger.

Hajdasz was later moved to another parish in the same diocese, where the pattern of abuse continued. ‘I remember laying naked on his bed. I didn’t even understand what was happening to me,’ said Andrzej, one of the now-adult victims in the documentary.

In 2016, the parents of one of the abused boys secretly recorded a confrontation with Hajdasz: ‘You don’t have to go to the bishop,’ the priest told them. ‘He knows about everything.’

But they did go to Bishop Edward Janiak, but only to receive a reprimand: ‘These are lies and you have to leave now,’ he told the parents.

The bishop then moved the priest to the city hospital, without reporting the case to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as required by Church law. It was not until the case became publicly known in 2018 that Janiak finally referred the case to the Vatican: Hajdasz had been abusing multiple children for over 20 years.

Landscape after the earthquakes

What the first documentary failed to do, the second achieved.

After the documentary aired, Polak immediately announced that he had reported the case depicted in the documentary to the Vatican representative in the country: ‘The film 'Hide and Seek’ shows that the standards of protecting children and youth in the Church have not been obeyed,’ the Primate said in a statement.15

The Primate also gave a reminder that ‘any priest, after receiving reliable information about a case of abuse, is obliged to inform Church authorities about the matter’ (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2020a). Polak also added that, as being the Delegate of Child Protection, after watching the documentary he ‘could not remain silent or remain idle with the facts presented.’

The case is the first in Poland being processed under the rules imposed by Vos estis lux mundi. It was a visible and courageous decision, in line with the guidelines coming from Rome. "The holy people of God are watching and are awaiting from us not simple, predictable condemnations, but concrete and effective measures” to put a stop to abuse, Pope Francis said in the opening of the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church in February 2019.

A month later, Janiak responded with a letter to Polish bishops, dated June 13, rejecting the accusations and attacking the Primate for reporting him. The letter, intended to be an internal correspondence, was leaked to the media and published by
Gazeta Wyborcza on June 15, 2020. In his letter, which ended up being sent to most Polish bishops, excluding the Primate and some bishops considered close to him, Janiak wrote that the Primate ‘issued a verdict’ (Więź 2020b) created ‘great confusion’ and ‘harmed the image of the Church’ by reporting his case. The bishop also claimed that the approval of the St. Joseph Foundation, established by the episcopal conference to support victims of sexual abuse in Poland, was manipulated.

‘Bishops were against the establishment of the foundation,’ Janiak wrote in his letter. He later suggested that even the election of the Primate of Poland as Delegate of Child Protection of the Polish episcopate was also forced ‘in order not to compromise the Primate.’

It didn’t take long for the presidium of the Polish Bishops’ Conference to react. On Monday, June 15, the same day the letter was leaked, the Secretary general of the Polish Bishops’ Conference stated that ‘the appointment of archbishop Wojciech Polak as Delegate of Child Protection of the Polish Bishops’ Conference and the creation of St. Joseph Foundation were approved by a vast majority of bishops during the Episcopal plenary meetings in 2019’ (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2020b).

The guerrilla wars inside the episcopate made the discussion among faithful reach the highest levels of emotions: ‘The faithful are scandalized. We expect the bishops to openly support the Primate,’ commented Anna Sosnowska, editor-in-chief of Aleteia in Poland.16

The debate and outrage spread beyond Polish borders: on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, six hundred and thirty-five Polish Catholics published an appeal at their own expense in the Italian daily La Repubblica: ‘Holy Father Francis! Repair our Church, we beg you!!’ the title of the appeal read. The petitioners wrote to the Pope, ‘Look with kindness on the Church in Poland, where cases of pedophilia have occurred. Loyalty to the institution is blind and deaf – more important than the good of the victims.’

The Director of the Holy See Press Office confirmed to journalists that the Holy Father was informed of the appeal, and added a clear message to all: ‘The entire Church must do everything possible so that the canonical norms are applied, cases of abuse are brought to light and those guilty of these serious crimes are punished’ (Vatican News 2020).

In fact, Francis dissolved any doubt regarding how to handle revelations of this kind. On June 25, the Holy Father asked Janiak to leave the diocese until the end of the investigation, and appointed Archbishop Grzegorz Rys as apostolic administrator sede plena over the diocese of Kalisz.17

On October 17, 2020, The Apostolic Nunciature in Warsaw confirmed in a statement that Pope Francis accepted the resignation of bishop Edward Janiak and banned him from the dioceses of Kalisz, appointing archbishop Grzegorz Rys of Lodz as apostolic administrator of the diocese (sede vacante). The Nunziature also announced that the seminary of Kalisz would be temporary closed.18

It was a clear sign that, for Pope Francis, responsibility, accountability and transparency are inseparable in seeking change in the way the Church deals with sexual abuse and with any other abuse of power and corruption.

Some Polish Bishops seem to be not pushing for but rather resisting change. It is in part a generational issue. As I mentioned before, the Church is still struggling with
communist era’s legacy. During communist times, secrecy was a virtue and it came with a price: the soon-to-be Blessed Cardinal Wyszynski was imprisoned for 3 years and many priests were tortured and killed in communist prisons. No wonder many bishops still think ‘what happens in the Church, stays in the Church.’

However, Polish society as a whole has changed much more rapidly. The faithful do not understand and do not accept that attitude anymore. The contrast is especially radical among young people, who constitute a large percentage of Polish society, as well as of practicing Catholics.

Paradoxically, it was a Pole who started this epochal change in the universal Church. In fact, it was John Paul II who told American cardinals back in 2002 not only that ‘there is no place in the priesthood for those who would harm the young,’ but that ‘people need to know’ about it. ‘They must know that Bishops and priests are totally committed to the fullness of Catholic truth on matters of sexual morality, a truth as essential to the renewal of the priesthood and the episcopate as it is to the renewal of marriage and family life,’ the Polish pontiff said (Pope John Paul II, 2002).

Even more, the Polish pope said several times that the Church ‘has to be a glass house,’ transparent to the outside (Pope John Paul II 1988 ). It seems that this part of Saint John Paul II’s magisterium has not yet been received in Poland. What is worth knowing is that ‘glass house’ has a very special meaning in Poland: according to XIX century Polish literature that Karol Wojtyła had a fondness for, ‘glass house’ was the idealistic Poland – one possible of being reached only in the dream of a father who was telling stories to his young son in exile.

Again, it is worth referring back to the February sexual abuse summit at the Vatican. Valentina Alazraki, legendary Mexican vaticanista and journalist with 45 years of experience reporting on the Church, was invited to address the bishops. Seated within one meter of the Pope, she told them: ‘If you are against those who commit or cover up abuse, then we are on the same side. We can be allies, not enemies (…) But if you do not decide in a radical way to be on the side of the children, mothers, families, civil society, you are right to be afraid of us, because we journalists, who seek the common good, will be your worst enemies.’

Hopefully, Polish bishops will soon realize that their most important task now is not convincing reporters of their transformation, but persuading their own people, the Catholic faithful. The best response to sexual abuse in the Church requires intensifying internal communications – treating lay people like adults and not like children. Until Catholics begin to learn these stories from the bishops firsthand, instead of from the media, the reformation that Pope Francis is promoting in the Church will not make its way to Poland. Although, with the steps already being taken, many hope that change is on the horizon.

And now what?

The aforementioned reaction of the primate to *Hide and Seek* turned a new page in the history of the Church in Poland. For the first time, a bishop took action and put into practice the new rules promulgated by the Holy See regarding a bishop’s responsibility of handling a case of sexual abuse according to canonical law.
What is even more unprecedented is that he did so immediately, without trying to talk first to the accused bishop (although he did consult his move with the board of the Polish Bishops’ Conference). Instead, he chose to speak to the victims featured in the documentary, to check whether their words were accurately gathered. It shows a different approach, completely in-line with what Pope Francis is asking.

It is an unfinished story, as I underline in this paper’s title, but it has to be sent to print in July 2020. What would happen next? In my view, two scenarios are possible. In the first one, the rest of the Polish bishops follow the primate’s initiative and, willingly or not, make this the new standard.

In the second, the other bishops decide to stand on the sidelines, and wait and see until the Holy See takes action on the reported case.

In the former case, the Church in Poland would become an example of conversion, healing and renewal, in its own terms and with its own timetable. In the latter, the Polish case could turn to be a new version of the Chilean crisis in the heart of Europe, as some influential vaticanists have anticipated, quoting anonymous Vatican officials: ‘Poland is the new Chile’ (Piqué 2020; Cernuzio 2020). In other words: a complete lack of control of a non-ending scandal.

What is clear is that the issue is not resolved. More victims will show up on their own or through the active research of the Sekielski brothers (who have already announced another documentary) or by other journalists who may see an interesting field of impactful stories.

In any case, it is important that the Church in Poland not miss the big picture: sexual abuse of minors is a huge social problem worldwide. But the Church will not be able to participate in repair until it is first fixed internally. What it is at stake is not just Church image but a condition sine qua non of pastoral care with the youth.

Lombardi writes (2020): ‘Today, it is important to restore the credibility of the Church community as an educator, an authoritative and reliable guide and companion of the growth of human persons created and loved by God. This credibility needs to be restored not only at the level of external ‘acceptability,’ but at the far more radical one of the inner passion for the service of the other. (…) Ultimately, this is the issue debated in the current fight against abuse. In this way the Catholic Church will be able to resume its task with confidence, its mission of serving humanity in our time.’

This vision toward the future is also Pope Francis’ mind: ‘we have to accept our responsibility before God, before the victims and before public opinion. For this very reason, as a result of these painful experiences and the skills gained in the process of conversion and purification, the Church today feels especially bound to work strenuously and with foresight for the protection of minors and their dignity, not only within her own ranks, but in society as a whole and throughout the world. She does not attempt to do this alone – for that is clearly not enough – but by offering her own effective and ready cooperation to all those individuals and groups in society that are committed to the same end. In this sense, the Church adheres to the goal of putting an end to ‘the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children’ set by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (Pope Francis 2017).
Conclusions and final recommendations

As promised at the beginning of this paper, I would like to apply the theory of trust management and recovery strategies, as explained briefly in the framework section, to the present situation of the Church in Poland as described in the rest of this paper, and make some practical recommendations to the authorities of the Church and their communication managers.

Academic literature on trust, as stated earlier, often starts after an organizational failure that hurts the institution’s relations with its stakeholders. Those failures include fraud, deceit, incompetence, or exploitation (Gillespie and Dietz 2009). Trust management shows that recovering confidence is possible even after serious ‘untrustworthy behavior by organizational agents,’ if the institutional response changes and they ‘demonstrate trustworthiness or ‘symbolize the organization’s ability, benevolence, and integrity’ (Gillespie and Dietz 2009, 16-17). The opposite reaction is expected if the organization’s response includes denial of any responsibility, accusing a third party, lack or reform and restitution, or bad communication with those hurt by the institution (Bottom et al. 2002).

Talton’s model (2008) shows also that three preexisting conditions affect trust recovery: the stakeholders’ willingness to reconcile; the nature of the trustor/trustee relationship; and the enormity of the violation itself. This means that trust repair does not lie solely in the hands of the organization and its trust-restoring actions but is a matter of working together. As Dirks and Lewicki state (2008, 5), trust is repaired after ‘activities by one or both parties substantively return the relationship to a positive state.’

Let us follow the normal steps to trust repair, as explained by different authors, and make recommendations that could be helpful to the Church in Poland:

First, assess transgression

An important action to repair broken trust is to thoroughly assess the situation and determine the exact nature of the trust violation (Schoorman, Mayer and Davis 2007). The assessment phase of reparative management activities must be exhaustive, accurate, transparent, and timely (Bottom et al. 2002).

A practical way of doing this would be to commission an investigation on sexual abuse within the Church, as the episcopates of the United States, Holland, Germany and France have done. It has not been made a requirement by the Holy See, although it was discussed in the Vatican sexual abuse summit in February 2019, but in all those countries such surveys were the first step in the healing process. Otherwise, if a local community is not able to reach the bottom and new cases are uncovered from time to time, healing becomes almost impossible.

This investigation should be done by a third party, so that credibility is ensured (Coombs 2007). This was the case in the investigations commissioned by those four episcopates.

The way I see it, the Pope’s decision on December 17, 2019, to lift the pontifical secret rule in sexual abuse cases is leaning in this direction. But the final responsibility, as usual, lies in the hands of each bishop.
Second, accept responsibility

Lewicki and Bunker (1996) emphasize that recovering trust requires admitting that the institution was the cause of the transgression and of the damage stakeholders suffered. Taking full responsibility for the wrongdoing rather than attributing it to a third party is a key element to repairing trust.

This acceptation should be as specific as possible: any good apology requires a specific explanation of what went wrong (‘this is why I apologize’) and an acknowledgement of personal responsibility (‘it is my fault’). Generic excuses or global ceremonies are not effective at recovering broken trust; they should reach out to local communities.

A practical way of doing this in Poland would be by making sure that all of the different Church institutions (dioceses, parishes, convents, schools, etc.) where there were cases of abuse receive proper apologies as part of the healing process, in the right context: first, in person, and later as a community, with penitential ceremonies.

Third, restoring justice

To recover trustworthiness, justice should be restored (Colquitt et al. 2001). Justice has two integral parts: compensation and retribution. Any good apology requires an offer of repair (‘here is how I plan to compensate the victims’). If stakeholders do not perceive that the situation before the wrongdoing has been restored because victims have been properly compensated (as much as humanly possible), and perpetrators have been punished, it means that the organization it is not worthy of being pardoned or reconciled.

A practical way of doing this in Poland is also twofold: first, put the St. Joseph Foundation at the core of Church activities in order to benefit the victims, and let the victims have a voice in designing protocols and priorities, to ensure that no sexual abuse survivor is lacking in support from the Church. Second, ensure the fulfillment of the processes in due time, according to the new norms, so that the guilty are prosecuted and the innocent are cleared of any wrongful accusations. No cases should be waiting for years in the drawer of an episcopal curia, as has happened in the past.

Fourth, real reform

Trust and change are intertwined. There is no trust recovery after a failure if the organization does not change its wrongful ways; but also, no deep change can be promoted without trust. Any effective apology requires a declaration of repentance (‘it will never happen again’), followed by deeds. Actions are much more important than words: Covey (1989) quotes C.W. Emerson saying, ‘What you are shouts so loudly in my ears that I cannot hear what you say.’

The Church in Poland has very good protocols in place, as explained before. But they have to become a part of daily life in all Catholic institutions across the country. For that, an intense educational and training program for clergy, seminarians, pastoral agents and Catholic families is indispensable, so that those norms become well-known and come to be an integral part of the Church’s new culture.

Authorities should come first. Accountability is an important part of the Church reform that is being promoted by Pope Francis. As stated by the Vatican Press Office
Pope Francis has said: ‘We will follow the path of truth wherever it may lead.’ Both abuse and its cover-up can no longer be tolerated and a different treatment for Bishops who have committed or covered up abuse, in fact, represents a form of clericalism that is no longer acceptable.’

**Fifth and last, transparent communications**

Quality, content, source, and veracity of *information* are key to trust repair (Boyatzis 1998). According to Talton (2008), quality of information requires adequate explanations, given with candor and in person by leaders.

Since 2019, transparency has not been just an interesting civil value with no applications to the Church’s leadership, but in fact it has been one of the principles that need to be put into practice to solve the scandal of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, as well as any other issue.

Valentina Alazraki told to the presidents of all the episcopal conferences of the world, while seated next to Pope Francis: ‘I would like you to leave this auditorium – I do not know if it is too great a hope – with the conviction that journalists are not your enemies, we are neither abusers nor do we cover up. Our mission is to exercise and defend a right, which is the right to truth-based information to do justice. We know that abuses are not limited to the Church: they are in families, in schools, in the world of sports… But you have to understand that we have to be more rigorous with you because of the moral role you have (…). As a journalist, as a woman and a mother, I would like to tell you that we think abuse is just as outrageous as its cover-up. And you know better than I do that these abuses have been systematically covered up, from the bottom up. (…). Communicating is a fundamental duty, because if you don’t, you automatically become complicit in the abuses. By failing to provide information that could prevent these people from committing other abuses, they are not giving children, youth, their families the tools to defend themselves against new crimes’ (Alazraki 2019).

Being a journalist myself, and a mother too, I feel quite sympathetic to what my admired colleague told the bishops, with the Pope backing her. A thousand initiatives come to my mind to change the lack of trust between Polish bishops and reporters: a mindset to understand the need to inform society, openness to discuss what concerns people, proper media training, a handbook on how to communicate sexual abuse cases to victims, local communities, clergy and the media etc.

But again, the starting point should be the conversion of heart and mind to put victims first and fulfill their duties of being good pastors, with the same priorities as Jesus.

**Notes**

1. The film can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrUvQ3W3nV4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrUvQ3W3nV4)
2. It is called “Target 16.2”. Available here: [https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/7th_milestones_meeting/Mikton_Target_16.2_violence_against_children.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/7th_milestones_meeting/Mikton_Target_16.2_violence_against_children.pdf?ua=1)
3. In a report issues in March 2019 by the Catholic Church in Poland, from 1990 to 2018 there were 382 reported priests and consecrated men ([https://cod.ignatianum.edu.pl/images/Dokumenty_w_PDF/ISKK_Wyniki_Kwerendy_opracowanie_final.pdf](https://cod.ignatianum.edu.pl/images/Dokumenty_w_PDF/ISKK_Wyniki_Kwerendy_opracowanie_final.pdf)) and the number of only diocesan priests is 25 thousand, which gives a number lower than 1,5% of abusive clergy.
4. Please allow me to tell a personal story. In the 80s, when I was a child, I had to be hospitalized fighting a serious blood sickness, and my father received a package from the
Church with “western” medicines. Most likely, I am still alive because of that package. This is what Church-distributed help meant at the time for many families. Packages included diapers, milk formula and many other products missing at Polish stores that welcomed the customers with shelves either empty or with only vinegar on them.

5. See document here (in Polish): https://episkopat.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Dzia%5E82ania-Ko%5E9cio%5E82a-w-celu-ochrony-dzieci-i-m%5E82odzie%C5%BCy.pdf

6. Historically, the Primate has been the natural leader of the Church in Poland, and many times more influential than the President of the Episcopal Conference. This is the case, for instance, of soon-to-be Blessed Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński.

7. https://wpolicyce.pl/kultura/446179-tylko-nie-mow-nikomu-wstrzasa-bo-oddaje-glos-ofiarom, Retrieved 23.07.2020.

8. https://stacja7.pl/wydania/tylko-nie-mow-nikomu/ Retrieved 30-5-2020.

9. https://deon.pl/kosciol/jacek-prusak-sj-jak-wierzyc-po-filmie-sekielskich-trzeba-przejsc-przez-zalobe,521001 Retrieved, 30-5-2020.

10. https://deon.pl/wiara/wiara-i-społeczeństwo/adam-zak-sj-pasterze-zrozumieli-ze-musza-zobaczy-c jakie-trupy-maja-w-szafie,521340 Retrieved 30-5-2020.

11. Graph source: http://wiez.com.pl/2020/02/14/kosciol-traci-zaufanie-najwierniejszych-z-wiernych/ Retrieved 30-5-2020.

12. https://deon.pl/swiat/wiadomosci-z-polski/wiekszosc-polakow-jest-niezadowolona-z-reakcji-kosciola-po-tylko-nie-mow-nikomu,528269 Retrieved 30-5-2020.

13. The speech of Msgr. Scicluna to the Polish Bishops has not been made public—citations come from the conversations of the author with the Bishops.

14. The link to view it on Youtube is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0ym5kPf3Vc (on May 24, a week after the premier watched it, the documentary had 6 million viewers on YouTube).

15. The statement can be viewed on Youtube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXyfjaPlLeA

16. The statement can be viewed on the site here: https://vod.tvp.pl/video/miedzy-ziemia-i-aniebem,21062020,48320285

17. https://episkopat.pl/komunikat-nuncjatury-2-2/

18. https://episkopat.pl/komunikat-nuncjatury-aposolskiej-w-polsce/

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