By Mark Joseph Williams

The Child Abuse Pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis is raging in many areas, testing our resilience and ability to navigate a vastly altered reality. In the aftermath of the epidemic, we are being called to revere the memory of the innocent victims of the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the many challenges we face in our society, including the issue of child abuse.

The failure of our society to respond to the pandemic, and the persistent evidence of systemic racism, have prompted me to reflect on the events of my own life. As I have experienced the pain and suffering of others, I have also felt the grace and healing that come from forgiveness.

For years, I have been trying to come to terms with the trauma of my past. When I was a child, I was raped by a male teacher. Later, I was molested by a Roman Catholic priest. I was also abused by other religious figures in the community. These experiences left me with a deep sense of shame and guilt.

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It has taken decades. As COVID-19 continues to upset so many lives, I do find some comfort in reflecting upon the lessons I have learned in my life. For me, the church that was an arena of my abuse also offered the faith that became my lifeline back to health. In the second half of my life, my interior captivity has indeed been freed. For me, forgiveness calms the storm.

But as we continue to navigate the challenges of the pandemic, we must not forget the pain and suffering of others. As the visitors to the National Sexual Assault Hotline were minors. As Scott Berkowitz, president of RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), has put it, “Sadly, it is likely that the risk of children being sexually abused will increase as shelter-in-place orders continue – one more tragic consequence of the public health crisis the country currently faces.”

But as fault lines begin to appear, and people seek to return to normalcy after a year of unprecedented strain, we must act. As a Christian, and as a human being, we must speak up. This is the very least we can do.

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Time takes time. By putting in prayer, you will receive, if your faith is strong. In the aftermath of the pandemic, we must not ignore the blaring warnings about child abuse. We must speak up, as Christians, and as human beings.

I hope that all of humanity emerges from this pandemic with a new understanding of the importance of forgiveness. By putting faith in God, we can find grace and healing, and we can move forward.

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