



FROM SILENCE TO SOLIDARITY

A Theology of Healing, Justice and Hope for the Survivors

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The widespread coverage of the Epstein files controversy captured global attention. News channels and digital platforms largely concentrated on debates surrounding the connections of prominent politicians and business leaders with Jeffrey Epstein, often driven by the pursuit of visibility and public intrigue. Far less attention, however, was given to the survivors and the profound trauma they endured. Yet this imbalance itself reveals something deeply troubling.

The case stands as a stark illustration of systemic failure, exposing how vulnerable persons can be sacrificed when institutions prioritize influence, secrecy, or self-protection over justice and human dignity. Although the Epstein case unfolded outside an explicitly religious context, its patterns—

grooming, intimidation, silencing, delayed justice, and institutional negligence echo dynamics painfully familiar within cases of abuse in the Church context.

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to move from silence to solidarity by offering a theological reflection grounded in healing, justice, and hope for survivors of abuse. It explores how Christian faith, when rightly understood and courageously practiced, calls communities not to conceal suffering but to confront it with truth, compassion, and accountability. Drawing upon Scripture, theological insight, and contemporary experiences of abuse and safeguarding failures, this reflection aims to reclaim the Church's moral and pastoral mission: to become a place where survivors are believed, protected, accompanied, and empowered—and where justice is pursued not as vengeance, but as an essential pathway toward healing and communal conversion.

The impact of abuse on survivors is profound, wounding them in body, mind, and spirit. Too often, perpetrators are shielded by power, while survivors remain exposed, threatened, and silenced. When those victims who dare to resist are disgraced, fear deepens, driving others into isolation and quiet despair. Within such suffering, painful questions inevitably arise: **“What did I do to deserve this? Why has God allowed this? Why me?”** These questions do not emerge from guilt, but from the crushing weight of internalized shame—a shame that abuse unjustly imposes upon the innocent.

In this vulnerable space, survivors are frequently urged to forgive, as though forgiveness were an immediate Christian duty. Scriptural images of mercy—the lost sheep, the prodigal son, the forgiven sinner—beautifully reveal God's compassion for the repentant.

But what do these images mean to one who suffers not from personal fault, but from violation? Well-meaning counsel often encourages survivors to “let go” or “move on,” subtly portraying anger as harmful and forgiveness as the only acceptable path to healing. For believers, this can create an additional burden: guilt for not being ready to forgive. **If forgiveness alone defines authentic Christian life, an urgent question remains: What, then, is the place of justice?**

Scripture itself offers a vital corrective. It affirms that every human person is created “in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:27) and therefore possesses an indelible dignity. Moreover, the God revealed in the Scriptures draws near to the wounded: “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted” (Psalm 34:18). This divine nearness discloses not indifference, but God’s enduring solidarity with those who suffer.

For many survivors, the crucifix becomes a profound sign of hope. In Jesus Christ, unjustly crucified, they encounter a God who is not distant from their pain but intimately present within it. Yet paradoxically, this same symbol can become a source of tension when survivors are urged to imitate Christ’s forgiveness by extending forgiveness to perpetrators prematurely.

When forgiveness is presented as an expectation rather than a freely discerned response, it can intensify guilt, shame, and self-condemnation, especially for those still wrestling with anger and the unresolved reality of injustice.

In such circumstances, survivors may carry a double burden: first, the trauma of abuse, and second, the spiritual pressure of being perceived as lacking Christian virtue if forgiveness does not come easily. Consequently, the pursuit of justice may appear incompatible with faith.

However, the Scriptures resist this false opposition. Mary’s Magnificat proclaims the character of divine justice: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52). Likewise, the vision of the Last Judgment underscores moral responsibility and accountability (Matthew 25:31–46). Is this not also the justice of God?

Seen in this light, survivors of abuse have the right to express anger and to seek justice. Such responses are not spiritual failures but deeply human and moral realities. **The journey toward healing, justice, and forgiveness belongs to the survivor alone, whose suffering cannot be measured, hurried, or generalized.**

Each story unfolds with its own wounds and its own pace of restoration. Justice and forgiveness are often portrayed as opposites—justice as harshness, forgiveness as holiness. Yet if the Kingdom of God is “justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), justice cannot stand against forgiveness.

While forgiveness is rightly praised as healing, justice must not be misjudged as resentment. Indeed, survivors’ experiences reveal another truth: healing often deepens when perpetrators are held accountable. Accountability affirms truth, restores dignity, and lifts the burden of imposed shame. In this sense, justice becomes restorative, enabling survivors to rebuild trust in themselves, others, and the world. Forgiveness, then, is not a precondition for healing nor a demand placed upon survivors. When it emerges, it is the fruit of healing and reclaimed strength. **Forgiveness is not passive resignation but an active, freely chosen response born of resilience and inner freedom.**

Such forgiveness does not deny harm. Rather, it arises from a transformed awareness in which the survivors recognize their own resilience and moral strength, while perceiving the perpetrator’s actions as rooted in distortion, brokenness, and a tragic diminishment of humanity.

In this light, forgiveness becomes an expression of freedom rather than submission.

It echoes Christ's prayer on the Cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Here, forgiveness is revealed not as weakness, but as the expression of a heart no longer captive to violence, shame, or despair.

This understanding carries profound implications for pastoral care. In accompanying survivors of abuse, we are called to walk with deep reverence and compassion. Our first vocation is not to instruct, but to accompany; to help survivors rediscover their strength, rebuild trust in themselves, and gently nurture resilience.

Pastoral care must become a sacred space where silence can be broken without pressure, shame released without judgment, and wounded hearts allowed to heal at their own pace. Healing is rarely immediate. It unfolds slowly, often through tears, courage, setbacks, and fragile hope. Within this tender journey, forgiveness must never be demanded or hurried. When it arises, it does so as grace—a quiet fruit of healing rather than an obligation imposed by others. True forgiveness, if and when chosen, grows from restored dignity, reclaimed voice, and inner freedom.

The Church, called to be mother and companion, is entrusted with this ministry of presence: to listen without defensiveness, to stand in solidarity without conditions, and to affirm the survivor's right to truth, justice, and healing.

In such solidarity, survivors may begin to experience that they are not alone, not forgotten, and not defined by the harm they endured.

Justice, healing, and forgiveness are not opposing paths. In God's mysterious work of restoration, they may gradually intertwine—each supporting and deepening the other.

Where there is compassionate presence, patient listening, and courageous truth, the seeds of hope can take root again. This is the hope carried within the Christian vision of resurrection. For survivors, resurrection is not merely a distant promise but can become an experience here and now: the slow reawakening of dignity, voice, trust, and meaning. Such lived resurrection, emerging through the long process of healing, strengthens faith in the resurrection of Christ.

We are, indeed, an Easter people. Healing may be a journey, often marked by struggle and endurance, yet its horizon remains glory.

From silence to solidarity, from wounding to restoration, God's grace continues its quiet, transformative work, bringing forth hope where suffering once reigned. Justice, healing, and hope belong together. Justice tells survivors that what happened to them was wrong and that their lives matter. Healing helps them slowly rediscover their strength, their voice, and their dignity. Hope assures them that their story is not finished. When the Church listens with humility, acts with courage, and protects the vulnerable, it becomes a place of safety rather than fear. In this faithful presence, God's quiet grace can bring new life, turning deep wounds into paths toward renewed trust and living hope.



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