

REVIEW OF BOOKS:

YA NO TE LLAMARÁN “ABANDONADA”. ACOMPAÑAMIENTO PSICO-ESPIRITUAL A SUPERVIVIENTES DE ABUSO SEXUAL

EDITOR: Luis Alfonso Zamorano

PPC

Year of publication: 2019

ISBN: 978-84-2883-344-8



Carlos Alberto Rosas Jiménez

Universidad de la Sabana, Colombia

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1529-3785>

Most of the time, when sexual abuse is discussed or studied, only the victims and perpetrators are mentioned. However, little is said about third parties, those who covered up, did not say anything when they saw something suspicious or who were simply negligent and did not comply with their task of monitoring vulnerable people so that they were not abused. On the other hand, it is not usual to talk about secondary victims, which are the families, members of the parishes, religious communities, educational institutions, clubs or sport teams where victims were part of. Although the biggest wound is suffered by the victim of abuse, secondary victims can be seriously injured, psychologically, spiritually, and/or in trust towards other people or towards the institution where the abuse occurred. Definitely, secondary victims of sexual abuse are also survivors of the abuse. Thus,



this book comprehensively addresses the psycho-spiritual healing of survivors of sexual abuse. Luis Alfonso Zamorano includes third parties and secondary victims who may also need psycho-spiritual healing. The author provides a thorough look at what is sexual abuse of children and adolescents, with a particular focus on the situation of the Catholic Church.

In order to understand what is the direction of psycho-spiritual accompaniment of survivors of sexual abuse, it is necessary to unveil several elements that are behind the reality of abuse. We quote the following paragraph, which, although a bit long, clearly illustrates several problematic elements in the reality of sexual abuse, such as silence, minimization and complicity. Although mention is made of abuses within a specific religious community, these words can be applied to different religious communities, not only in the Catholic Church, but also to other creeds, families, sport teams, political parties and couple relationships where sexual abuse has occurred. The author says¹:

“From here I dare to affirm that many who defended Father Fernando Karadima tooth and nail, who risked it for his innocence and put their hand on fire for him, did so from their condition of being also victims (...) there is no doubt that they suffered a true brainwash in which they lost everything - or almost everything - critical judgment towards “the saint”. His attitudes and actions were unquestionable. In my opinion, they are also victims abused in their conscience and manipulated. For the same reason, although they see, they do not see. Or, if they see, it’s downplayed, minimized or justified. The phenomenon of vampirization, deep down, has similarities with what happens in pathological infatuation. The loved and admired person is idealized and so elevated that the defects are not seen, or if they are perceived, they are not given importance. If an eye opening occurs later, it is usually painful, and the person often recriminates himself for having been so foolish for having so blindly trusted and allowed himself or herself to be manipulated. Not only does he or she have to face possible forgiveness towards his or her abuser, but above all towards himself or herself for not having realized it before. Now, if over time and in the face of so much evidence you do not react, you end up going from victim to accomplice, which is what, in my opinion, and surely unwittingly, has happened to some of Karadima’s closest collaborators” (p 43).

In this way, the author collects key elements for understanding abuse, since many abuses are not reported, in churches, educational institutions and in families due to cover-up and that is why it is only in the last decade that the complexity of the reality of sexual abuse of children and adolescents has been understood.

The author of this book, Father Luis Alfonso Zamorano, a Spanish national, is a priest-missionary of the *Verbum Dei* Missionary Fraternity. He has developed his work as a missionary in Chile for almost 20 years. The father has a master’s degree in psycho-spiritual accompaniment from the *San Alberto Hurtado* University in Chile and is the author of some Christian pop-rock CDs. His vast experience in accompanying victims of sexual abuse is what makes this book fundamental to

find elements to help not only victims of sexual abuse, but also other victims who may have suffered other types of abuse.

The book is divided into 15 chapters divided into two parts: the first, aims to understand the generalities of child sexual abuse; and the second one focuses on giving keys for the psycho-spiritual accompaniment of the survivors of abuse. In the second part, Father Zamorano, exposes several textual sections of the stories of a particular victim of sexual abuse who has been nicknamed *Estrella*.

Given that much of the data that the author places in the first part is information found in many other books and research articles on the reality of sexual abuse of children and adolescents, we will limit ourselves to highlighting the aspects that seem to us that it is worth mentioning that are more the result of the author's experience as a counselor to survivors of sexual abuse.

Vampirization and spell syndrome. Within the problem of abuse, we highlight what the author calls the vampirization process and the spell syndrome, which are part of a process of almost completely nullifying the will of the person in order to leave them at the mercy of the leader, which is typical from sects, and also from abusive relationships, especially when the victims are adolescents or vulnerable adults (cf. p. 41). On the other hand, the author quotes the words of one of the victims of Father Karadima who says: "I am sure that those who surround Karadima and defend him are good people, but with brutal servility ... the psychological abuse is brutal" (p 43). This connects with the verbatim quote at the beginning of this review.

The imposition of secrecy. In order for the abuser to perform the entire ritual that leads to the sexual abuse of the victim, he uses silence as the main strategy. Unfortunately, children obey this imperative of silence and given the seriousness of the consequences of the abuse, the victims are left paralyzed, making very difficult for them to break that silence (Cf. p. 44-46).

The "Everest" of all traumas. This is a term coined by the author to describe the severity of sexual abuse. There is abundant research showing the dire consequences of sexual abuse for victims. We just mention a few factors: school activity disorders, anxiety manifestations associated with anger, traumatic and early sexualization, guilt and shame, decreased self-esteem, mood disorders - depression with a suicidal tendency, dissociative disorders, development of addictions and great difficulties to trust, among others (cf. chapter 5).

Victims of abuse and priestly or religious vocation. This is a novelty in the book, as the author comments on his experience of accompanying victims in priestly and religious life, as follows: "In my experience I have realized that taking charge of one's own history and integrating their experience trauma requires so much dedication, so much attention and psychic energies from the victims that they are exhausted to assume the demands of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, or of community life, with its challenges of interculturality, adaptation, conflicts, etc. (...) It is true that many of these wounds heal in helping others, but it is also true that contact with others generates new wounds, misunderstandings, empti-

ness, frustrations, etc. These unavoidable sufferings of the mission can sometimes virulently reopen the wounds of abuse” (p. 67). These words are very important when conducting psychotherapy or spiritual counseling to the victims. Given the complexity of sharing their lives with others in these particular vocations with vows and service, they definitely need specialized attention.

Abuse of authority or manipulation of conscience. The author mentions that due to levity, incredulity, lack of preparation, inexperience, spiritual and human superficiality, there was silence in the face of many cases of abuse within the Catholic Church, something that we have to deeply regret. However, in addition to these attitudes, some of which may have been with or without guilt, there are social contexts that lead to sexual abuse in families, religious communities or different institutions. Father Zamorano offers us a kind of examination of conscience to evaluate our own community environments with 24 points that will help your institution, religious community or family to identify if there are abuses of authority or manipulation of conscience within them (cf. pp. 103-107).

As we mentioned earlier, in the second part, Father Zamorano exposes several textual sections of the stories of a victim of sexual abuse whom he has given the nickname of *Estrella*. Below we highlight the main elements that we consider worth mentioning in the accompaniment of the victims:

What to do when a person tells that they have suffered abuse at some point in their life? The author mentions some points that we summarize as follows: Believe, accompany in the confirmation of the damage, understand that abuse is always responsibility of adults, inform yourself as best as possible about the characteristics of sexual abuse, do not sympathize with the aggressor, empathize with the pain and suffering of the victim, value and validate their feelings, encourage the person to seek help, respect confidentiality and validate them as a victim (cfr. 127-128).

First steps for inner healing. The author says that: “Many abuse survivors want to escape from the specter of abuse at all costs, and as a form of escape, they worry about having professional success. They forget it, they tend to become self-absorbed or they simply disconnect from their feelings and their inside world. It will not be easy for them to recognize that what helped them to get ahead, and in some cases with great success, it is today an impediment to heal and walk without “pending issues” that at any moment could explode” (p. 149). Added to this recognition of what the person has experienced before, there is the challenge of breaking silence, thus allowing crises to break out. The last of these first steps, is to elaborate duel, with all the complexities that it conveys (cf. chapter 7).

Fear, distrust, self-esteem, guilt and shame. A second stage of accompanying survivors of sexual abuse is working on fear, mistrust, low self-esteem, guilt and shame, all these aspects very difficult to work on, but fundamental in the process of healing. Here we find some important elements in the recovery of self-esteem: a) learn to love yourself, b) have a good understanding of self-acceptance, c) know how to recognize sufficient or deficient self-esteem, d) accompany the re-reading

of the affective biography, e) self-care, f) understand the importance of groups or communities as main tools to restore self-esteem, and g) the experience of being loved unconditionally (cf. Chapter 9).

Resignify the evil suffered. One of the great contributions of the author for the healing processes of sexual abuse is that we should understand that the wounds resulting from abuse will not necessarily heal completely. The author asks us to contemplate the side of Christ, who has an always open wound that continues to flow, and that it is precisely thanks to that wound that does not close, that his love and mercy reach us. Christ wounds are precisely the medicine, in them we find the healing power (cf. pp. 81-182). For this reason, the author suggests that we do not ask so much for God to heal us, “as long as he makes our wounds a spring, with the hope that they can be a source of blessing for others” (p. 182).

Take care of the language of the accompaniment. Father Zamorano affirms that even with good intention, if we do not develop a new sensitivity, we can be like Job’s friends in the Bible, who with their advice and interpretations the only thing they achieved was to deepen his suffering and loneliness. Father Zamorano exposes some examples of how our language and our way of interpreting the mysteries of faith and the word of God, instead of being a springboard for healing can be a deadly trap (cf. p. 185-186). Examples of complicated sentences for those difficult times are: a) seeing the hand of God behind everything lived, b) What sin did I commit so horrible that God would treat me like this? c) but wasn’t it necessary for the Messiah to suffer? d) Does everything happen for the good of those who love God? e) You as a victim have to hug this cross! f) If God loves me with an everlasting love, why didn’t He do anything to prevent the abuse? g) Is it to be done like children? g) Thinking about a great and strong God? h) being grains of wheat? j) Are the “martyrs of chastity” a stimulus? k) Should we forgive and forget?

In the second part of the book, the reader finds *Estrella*’s testimonies and only at the end it is possible to perceive how that psychospiritual accompaniment has borne fruit, so much so that the reader rests. At this point the reader can calm down when reading the words of *Estrella*’s texts. It is seen that although the healing of trauma and inner injuries may not be complete, a lot of inner peace is perceived. Definitely, the clarity of *Estrella*’s words is also striking, she expresses it regarding her past, her present and her future, and also in his relationship with God. All these testimonies lead the reader to discover how after a situation as tragic as the one suffered by *Estrella*, she feels already prepared, not without pain, to love and trust with profound freedom. She recovers her strength even to face other crises after being in psychospiritual counseling for some time.

This book written by Luis Alfonso Zamorano is undoubtedly a great contribution to psychotherapy that intertwines and works together with the spiritual dimension of the victims. Perhaps a criticism that can be done to the book is the not so up-to-date quotes from the reality of abuse that are mentioned in the first part. However, this part is to put the reader in context of the reality of the abuse and lead him or

her to fully understand what is said about the psycho-spiritual counseling of the survivors of the abuse described in the second part. We recommend this book to psychotherapists and spiritual counselors alike, and of course, to all victims of abuse.

We would like to end this review with a literal quote from *Estrella* at the end of the book that can illustrate the fruits that a good accompaniment of this type can give to a victim of any type of abuse, but especially sexual abuse. *Estrella* says: “But this year was different: the pain brought me fruits that I would not have known otherwise. It taught me to depend on others, to need them deeply, to feel that I could not stand without them. At first, I asked for favors; now, I realize that I learned to let myself be loved. I learned to show myself fragile, and although it scared me, I realized the greatness of hearts, I realized that I am loved, that I am worth it, that I am not a burden to anybody” (p. 219).

Nota:

1 Translations are made by the author of this book review.