

## Parable of the compassionate Church leader

Parkinson, P 'What Does the Lord Require of Us? Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches' (2002) in *Journal of Religion and Abuse*, pp 3-31

There was a woman who was on a journey to Jericho when she fell among clergy. They robbed her, and they left her wounded in a ditch beside the road. They did not rob her of her money; they robbed her of her innocence. They did not only violate her body, they violated her trust. And they did not leave her covered in blood; they left her covered in shame.

Along came a Church leader, and saw the woman in the ditch. Standing on the roadside, he called down to her and said, "Who did this to you?" She replied, "Sir, one of them wore your emblem. I trusted him because he represented you." The Church leader listened carefully to her story. He did his best to respond with compassion, but as a Church leader he also had to be objective. These were only alleged wrongs. He promised her that he would take the matter further. He would establish a Tribunal, and she would be able to testify and be cross-examined on her story. If the Tribunal believed her, then the man would be punished. The Church leader went on: "As a consequence of your complaint, he might be reprimanded, or suspended for a year or required to undergo counselling. He might even lose the right to wear my emblem." And then the Church leader walked away and left her in the ditch.

Along came another Church leader, and saw the woman in the ditch. Standing on the roadside, he called down to her and said, "Who did this to you?" She said, "Sir, one of them wore your emblem. I trusted him because he represented you." The Church leader listened attentively. He did his best to respond with compassion and then said: "We have procedures for dealing with this in our Church. Make a complaint in writing and we will appoint a mediator between you and this minister. You can tell your story and he will tell his, and if he acknowledges his wrongdoing, then you will be able to say what you think is the appropriate penalty. If he does not accept your account, then we will refer the matter to the disciplinary committee of the Church. As a consequence of your complaint, he might be reprimanded, or suspended for a year or required to undergo counselling. He may even lose the right to wear my emblem." And after he said this, he walked away and left her in the ditch.

A third Church leader came along and saw the woman in the ditch, and went over to help her. "Who did this to you?" he said. "Sir, one of them was wearing your emblem. I trusted him because he represented you." The Church leader knelt down in the ditch with her and listened to her story. He told her that he deeply regretted the suffering that she had experienced. He explained to her that in order to address her complaint properly on behalf of the Church, he would need to ask some people to investigate the matter and to give the clergyman concerned an opportunity to give his account. In the meantime, he organised an ambulance for her and asked her whether he could help her with counselling to deal with her trauma. He said that if she wanted this, he would ask a woman to help her in making her complaint to the Church and to walk with her through the process. After doing this, he helped her out of the ditch, gave her his coat to keep warm, and stayed with her until medical help arrived. The next day he phoned to see how she was, and to ask whether there was any other way he could help her."