

Studies and research



Psicologia della Religione e-journal

Società Italiana di Psicologia della Religione  
<http://www.PsyRel-journal.it>

## Critical yet loyal: An exploratory study of Roman Catholics' commitment to their Church after the sexual abuse scandal

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### Riassunto

#### Critico ma leale: uno studio esplorativo della fiducia dei cattolici romani alla loro Chiesa dopo lo scandalo degli abusi sessuali

Questo studio affronta la questione della fiducia dei cattolici romani nella loro Chiesa dopo la crisi degli abusi sessuali. A questa domanda si risponde attraverso un sondaggio tra 131 cattolici. Si possono distinguere diverse dimensioni di fiducia: essere sconvolti dall'abuso, accusare la Chiesa di lassismo e di negligenza, aver fiducia nei media, perdere la fiducia nella Chiesa cattolica, dubitare della propria fede e prendere le distanze dalla Chiesa. Gli intervistati esprimono critiche alla Chiesa, ma anche fedeltà. Descriviamo un modello a quattro stadi della perdita di coinvolgimento: 1) conoscenza dell'abuso; 2) critiche alla Chiesa; 3) perdita della fede e 4) erosione dei legami con la Chiesa. Nelle donne e negli intervistati che conoscono vittime di abusi, l'erosione della fiducia si verifica più frequentemente. Negli intervistati con una preparazione teologica, la perdita della fiducia è relativamente minore.

**Parole chiave:** Cattolici romani, Impegno, Abuso sessuale

### Abstract

This study deals with the question of Roman Catholics' commitment to their Church after the sexual abuse crisis. This question is answered through a survey among 131 Roman Catholics. Several dimensions of commitment can be distinguished: feeling shocked by the abuse, accusing the Church of laxity and negligence, the trust that one has in the media, losing trust in the Catholic Church, doubting one's faith, and distancing oneself from the Church. The respondents express criticism of the Church, yet also loyalty to it. We describe a four-stage model of the loss of commitment: 1) learning about the abuse; 2) criticism of the Church; 3) loss of faith and 4) erosion of ties with the Church. In women and in respondents who know abuse victims, erosion of commitment occurs more frequently. In respondents with a theological background, loss of commitment is relatively minor.

**Keywords:** Roman Catholics, Commitment, Sexual abuse

## Introduction

### The Roman Catholic Church in a tight corner

In February 2010, the first news reports appeared about large-scale sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands. The abuse had taken place in Catholic boarding schools in particular. The reports shocked many people in the Netherlands. Up till then, abuse in the Catholic Church had not been unimaginable or unmentionable. After all, there had been attention to abuse in pastoral relationships before (Van Dam & Eitjes, 1994; Fortune, 1994; Hoenkamp-Bisschops, 1995). And people certainly did gossip about incidents in Catholic boarding schools, but until that time these had been seen as incidents and not as structural facts. Rapidly and unambiguously, the reports highlighted that abuse in the Catholic Church had not been something incidental. It had happened structurally as well as on a large scale. Likewise, it was rammed home that the Catholic Church had systematically covered up these excesses. After Canada, the United States and Ireland, among others, the Netherlands was the umpteenth country in which these malpractices came to the surface.

The exposure of the abuse in the Church resulted in the creation of a Commission of Inquiry, chaired by the former Education Secretary and Lord Mayor of The Hague, Wim Deetman. In March 2010, he was given a mandate for investigating sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands, a mandate given by the Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands and the Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen (Conference of Dutch Religious, the umbrella organization of the Dutch Catholic religious orders and congregations).

In December 2011, the Commission published its final report (Deetman, Draijer, Kalbfleisch, Merckelbach, Monteiro, & De Vries 2011a; 2011b). They estimated that between 0.9 and 0.3 percent of Dutch people aged 40 years and older had experienced unwanted sexual advances prior to the age of 18, from someone active within the Catholic Church. 'Sexual abuse' has to be understood here in the wide-ranging meaning of the phrase. It varied from light to very severe, from once-only and isolated touches, voyeurism and exhibitionism to repeated and prolonged, wide-ranging sexual acts, penetration, coercion and physical violence. In institutes like boarding

schools, the risks of abuse had been twice as large as elsewhere. Regarding the incidence of abuse, the Commission did not find any differences between Catholic and non-Catholic institutes. The number of victims was estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000, of whom about 1,000 had been very severely abused. The abuse had been committed in the period 1945-1981.

In March 2013, the results were published of a follow-up inquiry specifically focused on violence against underage women (Deetman, 2013). The focus of this inquiry was on sexual, physical and psychological violence. The Commission stated that, in the main, the data from this follow-up inquiry did not differ from the findings of the earlier inquiry.

The Commission also concluded that the Catholic Church's leadership had failed grievously. In many cases it had not taken action. Perpetrators had repeated their offence on a large scale. In the Commission's subtle formulation, reporting to the police had not been part of the Catholic Church's governance repertoire. Even worse, in many cases victims and their parents had been actively discouraged from reporting to the police.

The exposure of the abuse in the Catholic Church launched a discussion about the nature of the abuse, the perpetrators' backgrounds, the consequences for the victims and the organization of a Church in which crimes were covered up. Reactions in the media made it obvious that the scandal was going to have consequences for the Catholic Church. Her credibility and integrity were at stake. Who would want to identify with an organization that presents itself as the keeper of morality, but in which abuse is taking place on such a large scale, the settlement of which is systematically kept out of the public eye? That would sorely try the loyalty of anyone who feels attached to the Church. However, little systematic research has been conducted into this issue, and in the Netherlands nothing at all.

The issue here is not the consequences for the abuse victims' attachment to the Catholic Church. These consequences have been described extensively (for instance: Terry et al., 2011; John Jay College, 2004; Rossetti, 1995; Rauch, 2009; Doyle, 2009; 2011; Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, Jensen, & Rowe, 2008; Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Mahoney 2008). No, it is about the consequences for people who feel

attached to the Catholic Church, who are not abuse victims, but who feel hurt by being confronted with this problematic issue in the Catholic Church. We are thinking here of the faithful and clergy who are not involved in it in any direct sense.

### Commitment

In the literature, attempts can be found to characterize the group of people who are not directly affected, and to describe what has happened to them. Kline, McMackin and Lezotte (2008) call them 'secondary victims', because not only the actual abuse victims feel hurt, but these bystanders too. They feel violated because they have received the sacraments from priests who have perpetrated abuse. In this context, bystanders hardly distinguish between the perpetrators of actual abuse and the Church leadership who knowingly has covered up such incidents. The Church leadership too has violated a 'sacred trust'. Practices like remaining silent about the abuse and transferring the perpetrators are experienced as a sign of contempt from the side of the Church leadership.

Rossetti (1997) too calls people not directly affected 'victims'. In his view, abuse corrodes trust in the Church in its totality. Rossetti refers to the traumatization of those not directly involved. This, to him, is a reason for calling parishes and indeed the Church itself victims of sexual abuse. Rossetti, then, takes a step further than Kline, McMackin and Lezotte (2008). He contends that the victim concept applies not only to those directly and indirectly affected, but he believes it to apply at an organizational level also. To him, the parish and the Church are victims too. In this way, Rossetti expands victimhood not only to a wider circle of people – those indirectly affected – but also to another dimension – an institutional or organizational one.

However understandable this may be (we are, after all, dealing with problems that have a heavy impact), we believe that in this way the concepts of 'victim' and 'trauma' are being stretched too far. In doing so, the distinctions could be lost between, on the one hand, those actually hurt by sexual abuse and, on the other hand, those indirectly involved as well as the organization associated with it. This in turn could result in victimhood being trivialized. In Withuis' (2002) words: if too many people

call themselves victims, the price is paid by those experiencing the worst suffering. If everyone is a victim, no one is a victim anymore. Concepts like '(indirect) victimhood' and 'traumatization' are unsuitable for describing the problems of people not directly affected. In order to understand the consequences for those who are not victims, but who are closely involved in the Catholic Church and who suffer the adverse effects of the abuse scandal, we have to look for an alternative concept. In the present context, we propose to use the concept of 'commitment'.

The concept of commitment originates from industrial and organizational psychology. Following Meyer and Allen (1997), we define commitment as a psychological condition that characterizes an individual's relationship with an organization and that has consequences for the individual's decision to continue counting themselves as part of that organization. As a rule, the concept is used to describe an employee's relationship with an industrial organization. Although people who see themselves as members of the Catholic Church do not have a relationship with an industrial organization, their involvement with the Church can very well be described using the concept of commitment.

Commitment is a psychological state characterizing an individual's attachment to an organization. The opposite of commitment is alienation. Commitment refers to the individual's emotional ties, identification and involvement with an organization. People who identify with an organization tell themselves and others, "I am proud of this organization". They respect the organization's values, put their trust in them and want to act in accordance with them. They accept that the organization influences their lives (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). People with a strong commitment to the Church stay in it, because they value this organization and do not want anything else. They say, "I belong to this organization". They feel involved, they don't think about their membership nor do they doubt it. They have no intention to turn their backs on the Catholic Church or to otherwise distance themselves from it.

It is this commitment that is at stake when an organization is discredited, like in the present case, where the Catholic Church suffers reputation damage because of reports about abuse that has been

covered up by that same Church. Do reports about sexual abuse, and about the ways that the abuse has been dealt with in the Catholic Church, have consequences for the commitment of the faithful? Does it make them feel less attached to the Church, do they consider turning their backs on her, do they lose respect for this organization? These are the questions that we want to answer. We want to provide insight into the process of the reduction of commitment. Previous research (e.g. Rossetti, 1995; 1997) drew attention to the role of loss of confidence in commitment reduction. However, those studies did not help to understand the process of reduction of commitment. We want to contribute to filling this gap.

### **In the United States**

The literature about the consequences of abuse by Catholic clergy for the Church's faithful and co-workers is scarce. Some research has been carried out in the United States. Elsewhere, including in the Netherlands, it's better to speak about research fragments. What are the main findings?

Sexual abuse in the Church shocked the American Catholics. 78 percent of them called themselves 'ashamed and embarrassed for my church' (Davidson & Hoge, 2004, 15). There was also mistrust towards the Catholic Church. For instance, between 62 and 73 percent of Catholics thought that only the tip of the iceberg was visible and that much more was happening than was publicly known. Furthermore, two thirds thought that the Church was doing little to solve the problems. The Church was seen as mainly centering on her own image and as turned in upon herself. 72 percent even asserted that the bishops' failure to curb the abuse was a bigger problem than the abuse itself (Davidson & Hoge, 2004; Isely, 1997).

What were the consequences of all this for personal faith and for the attitudes towards the Church? For 11 percent of American Catholics, the abuse was reason for attending Mass less often, in 78 percent it did not affect the frequency of attending Mass and 7 percent attended Mass even more often. A roughly similar numerical distribution was found in response to the question about the consequences for financial contributions to the Church: 12 percent donated less, 81 percent donated the same and 7 percent donated more (Davidson & Hoge, 2004).

Davidson and Hoge (2004) also asked about the consequences for involvement in the parish. This involvement had decreased in 10 percent of parishioners, in 7 percent it had increased and in 81 percent nothing had changed. Earlier, Fox (1993) had found a considerably stronger decrease of involvement following reports of abuse by Catholic clergy. He found that involvement in the Church had decreased in 50 percent of Catholics, in particular among young people and those who were not much involved anyway. Fox's phrasing centered on involvement in the Church. 'Church' is a more abstract and wider concept than 'parish', the focus of Davidson and Hoge's (2004) research. Involvement in concrete parishes had suffered less from the abuse scandal than had the more abstract Church.

Trust in the Church and in priests had also suffered from the scandals. Rossetti (1997) investigated the consequences of sexual abuse for trust in the Church, in priests and in God. He distinguished between three types of Catholics. Catholics belonging to a parish or diocese where no perpetrators of abuse had been working (1); those who knew that in a nearby diocese or parish, but not in their own parish, an abuser priest had been working (2); and respondents who had known a perpetrator of abuse in their own parish (3). In respondents with perpetrators in their own or nearby parishes, trust in the Catholic Church and in the priesthood had decreased most. It is remarkable that trust in God had not decreased, not even when there had been perpetrators of abuse in one's own parish. The Church and her personnel were the targets of the decrease in trust.

### **In the Netherlands**

What are the consequences in the Netherlands? One year after the first news coverage in the media – still before the release of the Deetman Commission's report – more people appeared to have deregistered than in the previous years (Kregting, 2011). In 2010, there were 25 percent more deregistrations than in the preceding year. In 2010, 23,000 Catholics deregistered, in particular young people between the ages of 20 and 40 who could have been characterized as marginal members anyway. This was 0.6 percent of the total administrative membership figure. In 2009, this was 0.5 percent. In 2012, deregistrations were

back at the level prior to the exposure of abuse (Limburger, 2013).

A day before the release of the Deetman Commission's final report – 16 December 2012 – a survey was conducted among nearly 4000 residents of the province of Noord-Brabant (Trouw, 2011a). 86 percent of all respondents had lost trust in the Catholic Church. Of the 700 Catholics who participated in the survey, 60 percent had lost trust. 88 percent of all respondents thought that the Church had not reacted in a right way, whilst 67 percent of the Catholic respondents thought so. 23 percent of them were considering deregistration and 3 percent had actually deregistered.

Shortly after the release of the Deetman Commission's report, it was found that 80 percent of Dutch people maintained their belief that abuse in the Catholic Church is continuing (Trouw, 2011b). Of Dutch Catholics, fewer believed this: 50 percent. 38 percent of Catholics were surprised at the magnitude of the scandal.

## Method

### Instruments

In order to find out about commitment, we presented respondents with a questionnaire containing items about the following topics.

1. *Their appreciation of the media in respect of their news coverage regarding sexual abuse in the Church.* This topic (5 items) entailed issues like: did they (respondents) approve of the media paying so much attention to the abuse in the Catholic Church and did they think that the media were prejudiced in their coverage? Examples of items are, 'I think it is right that the media are paying attention to sexual abuse' and, 'The media are anti-Catholic'. The response possibilities to these items were: '1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither disagree nor agree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree'.
2. *The Catholic Church's reactions to the reports about abuse.* The 12 items regarding this topic covered the respondents' opinions about the ways in which the Catholic Church had reacted to the media reports about sexual abuse. Did they think that these reactions had been adequate, had the Church sufficiently accepted responsibility? Some examples of items regarding this topic are, 'The

representatives of the Church tell the truth in the media' and 'The Church is still denying what has happened'. Respondents could answer with: '1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither disagree nor agree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree'.

3. *How did respondents cope with the reports about abuse and with the consequences for their personal faith and for their attitudes towards the Catholic Church?* The 52 items regarding this topic were about the impact that the coverage about abuse has had on the respondents. How did they get to grips with it? Have they started to doubt their faith, did they distance themselves from the Church, did they still have trust in the Church? Some examples of items are, 'I feel betrayed by the Church leadership', 'I am attending church services less frequently than in the past' and 'I have less trust in priests and in other representatives of the Roman Catholic Church than in the past'. The response possibilities to these items were, '1 = Absolutely not true; 2 = Not true; 3 = Neither not true or true; 4 = True; 5 = Absolutely true'.
4. *The respondents' backgrounds.* Respondents were also asked about their demographic backgrounds: age, gender, marital status, educational level and profession. In addition, we also inquired about their religious backgrounds. Had they been baptized, married in church, did they pray, did they attend church services, did they feel attached to the Church? Finally, we also asked them if they knew victims and/or perpetrators of abuse in the Church.

### Fieldwork and respondents

The research was carried out in the spring of 2011. This was after the release of the Deetman Commission's first interim report (December 2010) and prior to the presentation of its final report (December 2011). Hence, it was long before the Commission published its report about abuse of underage women (March 2013).

The questionnaires have been answered by parishioners who were known to be strongly involved in the Catholic Church and to frequently attend services in Catholic churches. In addition, students of a Catholic theological faculty had been asked to participate.



131 respondents participated in the research. 45 percent of them were male and 55 percent female. 34 percent of participants were 45 years old or younger, 66 percent were older. 98 percent of respondents were baptized, 97 percent had made their First Holy Communion, 96 percent had made their Confirmation and 92 percent had attended church regularly in their youth. 49 percent of respondents attended church weekly and 27 percent attended about once a month. 51 percent prayed daily, in addition to attending church. For 73 percent, faith had always played – and continued to do so – an important role, and for 70 percent of respondents their faith was connected with the Catholic Church.

Let us compare our research data with data obtained from nationwide research in the Netherlands. 76 percent of Catholics in our sample attended church at least once a month. Nationally, between 9 and 10 percent of Catholics did so (Kregting & Massaar-Remmerswaal, 2012). 70% of our respondents felt attached to the Roman Catholic Church; nationally, 41 percent of Catholics felt closely attached to the Church (Bernts, Dekker, & De Hart, 2007). Furthermore, relatively many of our respondents married within the Catholic Church: 91 percent. In 2011, 4 percent of all weddings had taken place in a Catholic church (Kregting & Massaar-Remmerswaal, 2012). Hence, the percentage of church weddings in our sample was more than a twentyfold of the corresponding percentage in the national sample.

33 percent of respondents were studying theology or had done so in the past. 5 percent were working in a theology-related profession, for example as a pastor. Both groups together covered 34 percent of respondents. For convenience's sake, we will call this group 'theologians'. We will call the remaining respondents 'non-theologians'.

## Analysis and results

Three Principal Component Analyses (PCA) were carried out on the questionnaire's items. Here we present the main findings. A specification of the data per component can be found in the Appendix. Based on the PCA, we have constructed seven scales. 1. 'Feeling shocked' by the events in the Church: being sad; feeling deeply shocked; getting angry. 2. 'Accusing the Church of laxity': the Church should have intervened sooner, since that would have prevented

much evil; the Church has protected herself, and has hardly thought of the victims. 3. 'Accusing the Church of negligence': the Church has sufficiently accepted responsibility; the Church informs in a right way (both items had a negative loading); the Church denies what has happened. The distinction between laxity and negligence calls for some clarification. The accusation of negligence refers to the respondents' beliefs regarding the ways in which the Catholic Church and her representatives have acted following the reports about abuse: did the Church give adequate information; did she trivialize what has happened; did her representatives tell the truth? Laxity refers to (lack of) action taken against abuse as such: should the Church have taken action earlier; should the pope have reacted with more severity? 4. 'Trusting the media': the media are anti-Catholic; the media present a distorted picture (both items had a negative loading). 5. 'Loss of trust': decreased trust in the Church, in priests and in other representatives of the Church; feeling more attached to the Church (the last item had a negative loading). 6. 'Doubting one's faith': respondents have started to doubt their faith; they attended fewer services. 7. 'Distancing oneself from the Church': respondents considered deregistering from the Church or their parish. We will further discuss the results on the basis of Table 1. The reliability estimates (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of the research instruments are also included in Table 1. These range from .75 to .91, which is good (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

**Table 1: Commitment to the Catholic Church. Reliabilities, averages, standard deviations, percentages of low and high scores.**

	$\alpha$	A	SD	L	H
Shocked	.80	3.7	0.5	9	91
Church's Laxity	.75	3.8	0.8	11	89
Church's Negligence	.88	3.3	0.7	28	72
Trust in media	.76	3.3	0.8	27	73
Loss of trust	.91	3.0	0.7	53	47
Doubting faith	.84	2.0	0.6	93	7
Distancing from Church	.80	2.0	0.7	92	8

$\alpha$  = reliability; A = average score (1 minimal – 5 maximal); SD = standard deviation; L = percentage low score (< 3.00); H = percentage high score ( $\geq$  3.00).

The majority of respondents felt shocked, and almost as many of them accused the Church of laxity. They believed that the Church should have done more to prevent the abuse. A smaller number of respondents, but still almost three quarters of them, believed the Church's behavior to be negligent. About the same number of respondents trusted the media, the most important messengers regarding the abuse. There was a loss of trust in almost half of the respondents. Relatively few respondents distanced themselves from the Church (or are considering it) or were doubting their faith.

Did people's theological status, their gender, age, or knowing victims or perpetrators make a difference? We will discuss this on the basis of Table 2.

Theologians had a relatively strong commitment to the Catholic Church. We defined 'theologians' as respondents who were studying theology at a Catholic theological training institute, or who had completed these studies and/or were working within the Catholic Church. Theologians more often indicated feeling shocked by the reports about abuse, having less trust in the media, and less often deeming the Church to have been lax in her reactions than others. Furthermore, theologians less often had lost trust in the Church, they experienced less doubt of faith and they distanced themselves less from the Church.

Gender was an issue also. Women reported less commitment to the Church. More than men, they trusted the media, they more often believed the Church to have been negligent, they lost trust more and distanced themselves more.

Respondents who knew victims had less commitment than those who did not. In those who knew victims, we more often found the accusation that the Church had been negligent. They also showed more loss of trust, and they distanced themselves more.

Finally, we note that age was hardly a distinguishing factor. Commitment to the Church changed in young and old to the same degree. There was one exception. Older respondents (older than 45 years) more often judged the Church's reactions as being lax.

Knowing perpetrators had no correlation with any of the components of commitment.

What were the correlations between the various dimensions of commitment to the Church? We will discuss this on the basis of Table 3.

Feeling shocked by sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church was an independent category – see the correlations in the top row. It did not correlate with any other issue. In respondents who felt shocked by the abuse we did not find more accusations of laxity, negligence and so on, than in those who did not feel shocked or who felt shocked to a lesser degree.

Looking at the correlations higher than .40 in Table 3, we see two clusters, which we have marked in bold. The left hand cluster of correlations is about trusting the media and about accusing the Church of negligent and lax reactions. Respondents who trusted the media showed a higher frequency of accusing the Church of negligence and laxity.

The right hand cluster of correlations is about doubting one's faith and distancing oneself from the Church, about personal faith being in jeopardy and the weakening of institutional ties. Respondents who doubted their faith, also distanced themselves from the Church (or were considering this) and vice versa.

Furthermore, the role of loss of trust in the Church is interesting – see the column of italicized correlations in the middle of Table 3. Loss of trust in the Church correlated with accusations of laxity and negligence, and with trust in the media. Respondents who lost their trust in the Church trusted the media and accused the Church of negligence and laxity. Loss of trust also correlated with doubting one's faith and distancing oneself from the Church. The greater the loss of trust, the stronger the inclination to distance oneself and to doubt one's faith.

Finally, we see that some issues had hardly anything to do with each other. For instance, there was hardly a correlation between doubting one's faith and accusing the Church of laxity. Respondents who deemed the Church to be lax showed hardly more or less doubt of their faith than those who did not deem her to be lax. This is shown by the low correlation of .18.

## Conclusions and discussion

Commitment to the Catholic Church is under pressure. But not to the same degree in everyone and not equally strongly in the various components of commitment.

Three groups are standing out: the so-called 'theologians', women, and those who knew victims. The 'theologians' were a group that was most loyal and

Table 2: **Commitment to the Catholic Church. Average scores according to theological status, gender, knowing victims and age.**

	Theological Status		Gender		Knowing Victims		Age	
	Nt	T	M	F	No	Yes	Yng	Old
Shocked	3.5	3.9***	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.7
Church's Laxity	4.0	3.5***	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.9*
Church's Negligence	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.5*	3.3	3.6*	3.3	3.3
Trust in media	3.5	2.9***	3.0	3.5**	3.2	3.5	3.1	3.4
Loss of trust	3.1	2.7**	2.7	3.1**	2.9	3.4**	2.9	3.0
Doubting faith	2.1	1.7***	1.9	2.0	1.9	2.1	2.0	2.0
Distancing from Church	2.1	1.8*	1.8	2.1*	1.9	2.5***	1.9	2.0

Nt = non-theologian; T = theologian; M = male; F = female; Yng = young; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ .

Table 3: **Pearson correlations between dimensions of commitment to the Roman Catholic Church.**

	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Shocked	.12	.06	-.11	-.03	-.11	-.11
2. Church's Laxity	-	<b>.62**</b>	<b>.42**</b>	<b>.62**</b>	<b>.18*</b>	.15
3. Church's Negligence		-	<b>.51**</b>	<b>.79**</b>	<b>.31**</b>	<b>.35**</b>
4. Trust in media			-	<b>.59**</b>	<b>.32**</b>	<b>.33**</b>
5. Loss of trust				-	<b>.45**</b>	<b>.52**</b>
6. Doubting faith					-	<b>.54**</b>
7. Distancing from Church						-

\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .001$

faithful to the Catholic Church. We see larger differences in commitment between these 'theologians' and the other respondents (the 'non-theologians'), than between men and women and between those who did and those who did not know victims of abuse. When making these comparisons, we have to realize that among the theologians there were men and women, as well as respondents who did and who did not know victims of abuse. The partitions between the groups were anything but watertight.

Gender too was important in respect of commitment to the Church. Women's commitment was under heavier pressure than men's. In general, women are real or potential victims of sexual abuse more often than men (Gorey & Leslie, 1997). This may make women more receptive to reports about abuse and to the victims' predicament. Women are more likely to empathize with the victims, as well as more likely to stick up for them. They are also more likely to criticize perpetrators and agencies

that stick up for perpetrators or that offer them protection.

Furthermore, in respondents who knew victims of abuse in the Church, commitment decreased more strongly than in those who did not know victims. Abuse had more consequences when one personally knew victims than when one only had heard about it through the media.

In contrast to the United States, knowing perpetrators of abuse had no consequences for commitment to the Church in the Netherlands.

How does commitment develop in loyal Catholics after it had become public knowledge that sexual abuse had taken place? We will describe this using a tentative model. This model has a heuristic function. This means that it can be useful in further research into the development of loyal Catholics' commitment. We have drafted this model on the basis of the data from the correlation matrix (Table 3). In this model, four stages can be distinguished: 1. Learning about abuse within the Church, 2. Criticism of the Church,



3. Loss of trust in the Church, and 4. Erosion of ties with the Church.

The first stage involves learning about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and the primary reaction of feeling shocked. This shock stands on its own, as was clear from Table 3. It is not connected to one of the subsequent stages in the process of loss of commitment: criticism, loss of trust and erosion of ties. The second stage is that of criticism of the Church. The Church's reactions are deemed to be lax and negligent. She should have acted sooner in order to prevent abuse, and should have taken more adequate action after the abuse had been uncovered. In this stage, identification with the Church is at stake. The third stage is that of losing trust in the Church. The credibility of priests and other Church representatives, of the pope as head of the Church and of the Church as an institution has got damaged. Finally, the fourth stage is that of the erosion of ties. By this we mean that people begin to doubt their faith and to distance themselves from the Church, or will consider doing so. In this stage, Church membership is at stake.

We see that most respondents were shocked by the abuse. Many of them were critical. In a number of them, criticism of the Church was the overture to loss of trust. And in some of these, loss of trust would subsequently result in erosion of their ties with the Church. Loss of trust is the link between criticism and erosion. Criticism is a prerequisite for loss of trust, and loss of trust is a prerequisite for erosion of the ties with the Church.

It is not the shock, caused by learning about sexual abuse, that starts the process of commitment crumbling away. Being shocked by the abuse has no correlation with criticism (of laxity and negligence), or with loss of trust, and neither with erosion (doubting faith and distancing). Loss of commitment is driven by the Church's lax and negligent reactions with regard to sexual abuse. It is the way in which the Church handles this problem that causes commitment to collapse. She has done too little in order to prevent the abuse, and she has acted unsatisfactorily after learning about it. To a number of people, an institution that discredits itself in such a way does no longer deserve their trust. And for some of them, it ends in turning their backs on the Church. For American Catholics too, the reactions of the Church

were found to be a big problem apropos determining their attitudes towards the Church (Davidson & Hoge, 2004).

Earlier publications drew attention to the importance of loss of confidence in the decline of commitment to the Church (e.g. Rossetti, 1995; 1997). Our process model shows that loss of confidence is a phase in a larger process of commitment loss. Loss of confidence occurs after criticizing the Church and can be seen as a harbinger of erosion of ties with the Church.

There was much criticism of the Church. But the erosion of ties with the Church was lagging far behind the criticism. A skeptical reader may ask what more should happen for loyal Church members to definitively cut the ties. However, it is also possible to conclude that our respondents remained loyal to the Church in times of crisis. This loyalty does not imply that they were uncritical. On the contrary. Our respondents were very critical, but that was no reason for them to turn their backs on the Church. This was also the case in many of their co-religionists in the United States. In the introduction to the present study we also noted that the number of people turning their backs on the Church or considering doing so was small in proportion to the numbers distrusting her. Moreover, it seems that those who parted with the Church probably were marginal members already (Kregting, 2011). Our group of respondents can best be characterized as core members.

How representative are the findings reported here? We have carried out a research among a selective group of Catholics, a group strongly orientated towards the Catholic Church. Hence, what do the research data mean, seeing that we are dealing with a specific group: loyal Catholics?

The safest approach is to view the data for this group as a lower limit. If, in this group, their commitment to the Church is put under pressure in the form of criticism, this criticism probably will be stronger in others. By 'others' we mean less loyal Catholics, members of other denominations, non-denominational believers and people without affinity with a church or religion. The odds are that these others will trust the media more and will be more fiercely convinced that the Church has acted with negligence and laxity. They probably will also lose more trust in the Church. In addition, there is a considerable prob-

ability that these others will experience more doubt of faith, and will distance themselves more from the Church. That is, in as far as they were having any trust at all in the Church and in faith.

We conducted a small-scale study that provides insight into the factors that play a role in the commitment of Catholics to their church after the sexual abuse scandal. We also constructed a model for the loss of commitment to the Catholic Church. The logical next step for research is repeating the study with a larger sample, in international comparative perspective. Part of such an investigation is to test the proposed model for loss of commitment.

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## Appendix: Principal Component Analyses

**Trust in media.** Items, loadings, percentages, averages and standard deviations

Brief description	L	%	A	SD
Attention in media is good	.72	87	4.21	0.81
Media are anti-Catholic	-.88	38	3.12	1.10
Media present distorted picture	-.86	37	3.22	1.08

Explained variance 67%. L = loading (PCA); % = percentage of questions answered with: agree, strongly agree; A = average score; SD = standard deviation.

**Beliefs about Catholic Church's reactions to reports of abuse.** Components, items, loadings, percentages, averages and standard deviations

Brief description	L	%	A	SD
<b>Church's Negligence</b>				
Tip of iceberg	.73	45	3.31	0.98
Church covers up	.60	37	3.02	1.10
Church denies	.74	28	2.73	1.01
Church accepts sufficient responsibility	-.84	23	2.68	1.01
Church informs me in right way	-.76	17	2.57	1.05
Church representatives' reactions in media are adequate	-.70	15	2.34	0.94
Church representatives tell truth in media	-.65	15	2.70	0.93
Church reacts in adequate ways	-.63	13	2.24	0.96
<b>Church's Laxity</b>				
If Church had acted sooner, much evil prevented	.83	83	4.15	0.95
Church protected herself, no attention for victims	.68	74	3.79	0.99
Pope should have acted with more severity	.66	67	3.74	1.09
Church did what was best	-.59	16	2.38	1.04

Explained variance 57% (first component 47%; second 10%). L = rotated loading (PCA with varimax rotation); % = percentage of questions answered with: agree, strongly agree; A = average score; SD = standard deviation.

**Coping with and consequences of reports of abuse in Catholic Church.** Dimensions, items, factor loadings, percentages, averages and standard deviations.

Brief description	L	%	A	SD
<b>Loss of trust</b>				
Hurts that Church is in news in negative ways	-.62	69	3.70	1.01
Power imbalance in Church facilitates abuse	.52	68	3.77	1.07
Would allow my children to be altar servers	-.49	66	3.75	1.05
Am proud of my faith	-.57	65	3.82	1.01
Trust that RC Church will be all right	-.77	51	3.45	1.00
Church leadership is hypocritical	.63	47	3.23	1.19
Pray to God for solution	-.62	37	3.02	1.18
Less trust in pope	.69	37	2.98	1.19
Less trust in RC Church	.78	35	2.91	1.23
Less trust in priests and other representatives of RC Church	.78	30	2.79	1.16
Church loses credibility and integrity	.64	25	2.69	1.18
Feel betrayed by Church leadership	.60	24	2.64	1.14
Am able to forgive priests and other representatives	-.58	21	2.75	0.96
Abuse is exaggerated	-.59	15	2.37	0.99
More attached to RC Church	-.70	15	2.53	1.03
Pray more to God	-.48	9	2.44	0.90
<b>Feeling shocked</b>				
Priest or Church's representative should set example	.57	92	4.40	0.66
Much time needed to heal sorrow caused by abuse	.58	79	4.02	0.75
Talk with other people	.45	73	3.77	0.85
Am sad	.73	72	3.84	0.89
Have started to reflect upon causes	.67	66	3.74	0.84
Have been deeply shocked	.65	59	3.58	1.01
Am angry	.56	56	3.53	0.96
Have to justify being Catholic	.49	46	3.15	1.19
Wouldn't feel shocked if any more serious facts would emerge	-.35	36	2.95	1.07
Have disregarded the news	-.57	16	2.48	0.94
<b>Doubting faith</b>				
Enough good priests	-.41	87	4.30	0.82
Faith has not changed	-.60	71	3.79	1.00
Has made me doubt my faith	.74	13	2.15	1.04
More doubts than previously	.75	12	2.05	0.99
Attend fewer church services	.66	8	2.00	0.91
Abandoned by God	.55	5	1.75	0.92
Doubts about sacraments received	.58	5	1.94	0.88
Feel more distant from God	.61	3	1.92	0.80
<b>Distancing from Church</b>				
See Holy Communion as separate from situation in Church	-.46	80	4.03	0.94
Other ways of being close to God	.39	20	2.51	1.13
Have taken action regarding the abuse	.56	6	2.00	0.85
(Consider) discontinuing donations to Church	.62	6	1.89	0.93
(Consider) deregistration from parish	.72	5	1.69	0.87
(Consider) deregistration from Church	.71	5	1.69	0.87

Explained variance 48% (first component 23%; second 12%; third 8%; fourth 5%). L = rotated loading (PCA with varimax rotation); % = percentage of questions answered with: true and absolutely true; A = average score; SD = standard deviation.

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Citazione (APA) / APA citation: Zondag, H. J., & van Uden, M. H. F. (2015). Critical yet loyal: An exploratory study of Roman Catholics' commitment to their Church after the sexual abuse scandal. *Psicologia della Religione e-journal*, 2 (1-2), 1-13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15163/2421-2520/2015A10>.

Online: <http://www.PsyRel-journal.it>

