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A FEMINIST READING OF *DOUBT* AND *CALVARY*

UMA LEITURA FEMINISTA DE *DOUBT* E *CALVARY*

Deborah Mondadori Simionato¹

ABSTRACT: Religion plays an important role in the lives of Western people, in particular Christianity and the Catholic Church. The arts are constantly trying to represent religion's relevance and significance through works such as the film *Doubt* (2008), written by John Patrick Shanley, and the film *Calvary* (2014), written and directed by John Michael McDonagh. These two stories deal with sexual abuse and power relations within the Catholic Church. For that reason, this work proposes to analyze these two works in order to establish a connection between the patriarchal society and its abuse towards women, and the Church and its abuse towards children, mainly boys, proving that these children are as oppressed as women are by the same system.

KEYWORDS: *Doubt*, *Calvary*, Feminism, Catholic Church

RESUMO: A Religião tem um papel importante na vida ocidental, em particular o Cristianismo e a Igreja Católica. As artes estão constantemente tentando representar a relevância e o significado da religião através de trabalhos como o filme *Doubt* (2008), escrito por John Patrick Shanley, e o filme *Calvary* (2014), escrito e dirigido por John Michael McDonagh. Essas duas histórias lidam com abuso sexual e relações de poder dentro da Igreja Católica. Por essa razão, este trabalho propõe uma análise dessas duas obras afim de estabelecer um paralelo entre a sociedade patriarcal e o abuso de mulheres, assim como a Igreja Católica e o abuso de crianças, principalmente meninos, provando que essas crianças são tão oprimidas quanto as mulheres pelo mesmo sistema.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Doubt*, *Calvary*, Feminismo, Igreja Católica

“Now, should we treat women as independent agents, responsible for themselves? Of course. But being responsible has nothing to do with being raped. Women don't get raped because they were drinking or took drugs. Women do not get raped because they weren't careful enough. Women get raped because someone raped them.”

Jessica Valenti, *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women*

Religion, particularly Christianity in the western world, plays an important part in our daily existence, and it is represented in the arts – especially in literature for the purpose of this essay – to a great extent. Examples of such representations are found in the 2008 film *Doubt*, which was written and directed by John Patrick Shanley, American playwright of Irish descent. The film, adapted from the play by the same author, *Doubt: A Parable*, brings about not only the discussion of religion and faith, but also one of the main problems associated with it: the numerous cases of paedophilia amongst priests. On the same lines of the afore mentioned play and film, it is worth bringing a recent Irish production to the foreground, and that is the film *Calvary* (2014),

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written and directed by John Michael McDonagh, English-born screenwriter also of Irish descent. It could be said that *Calvary* deals with the aftermath of the events in *Doubt*, as the last deals with the (potential) abuses committed by Catholic Church priests and the first explores the consequences of these abuses.

Sandra Marie Schneiders, in her book *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (2004), draws a fascinating parallel between children and women insofar as they are both victims of a patriarchal society. More specifically, she points out that boys – and girls, less frequently – who are raped by priests occupy the same place as women do in relation to the patriarchy, for they are also targets of men who hold powerful positions, to whom these boys are helpless objects. In fact, boys' struggles are perhaps more painful as their lack of voice and relevance in society is greater.

Many people do not yet see the intimate connection between the sexually-based oppression of women by powerful males and the sexual domination and exploitation of children by powerful males. Feminists, however, see the connection. Patriarchy is the system of domination, which legitimates the oppression of the weak by the powerful, and it is rooted in the primordial and prototypical hierarchical dualism of male over female. Children share women's vulnerability to the powerful, and in both cases male-controlled religion is used to legitimate abuse of the vulnerable. People who subscribe to the ideology of the patriarchy, especially its sacralised form as hierarchy, regard what men, especially men with sacralised identities and roles, do to women and children as their right. (SCHNEIDERS, 2004, p. vii)

This article, therefore, aims to use the films *Doubt* (2008) and *Calvary* (2014), both relevant for the discussion of paedophilia, as corpus for an analysis that means to verify Schneiders' ideas, establishing a direct parallel between the oppression of women by the patriarchal society and that of young children by the Catholic Church. In order to perform said verification, I will look at the characters dynamics in both works through the feminist critical approach: focusing on the women as opposed to the men, and paying particular attention to the children involved in both stories, who turn out to be victims of a system against which they have no weapons to fight, consequently suffering repercussions that will last for as long as they live.

Due to the Catholic Church's patriarchal nature and its historical role in the oppression of women, feminism is a possible critical lens with which to analyse the behaviour of the Church and its implications for society, especially regarding the treatment of young children, more specifically young boys. There is very little room for women in the Catholic Church: women can become nuns and not much else, and even the hierarchically most important nun still answers, eventually, to a man. The positions of power are all occupied by men, the Pope being the head of the Church and necessarily male. The contemporary Church allows for the existence of altar girls, but in the sixties and seventies, girls were not permitted to take on that role, seen as they should be kept away from the altar and its sacred things; boys, on the other hand, were encouraged to take part, it was a privileged position in which to be – especially for those who did not come from wealthy backgrounds, as being a priest's chosen one brought about a manner of social status and respect.

In the films dealt with in this work, it is interesting to observe that whereas one of them is tense because we know something is wrong, and disaster is about to strike,

the other is equally so because the audience is never certain – nor are the some of the characters – that something has in fact happened. In *Doubt*, we go through the story, much like its characters, with a great level of uncertainty, of *doubt* really, for not knowing what is going to happen, or indeed what has already come to pass. The opposite – with the same effect – happens in *Calvary*: from the start, we know there is something wrong, that there is a killer who wants to kill the main character in search for revenge, and that knowledge puts us on edge throughout the film, seen as we, as the audience, keep looking for clues on who is this potential killer.

Calvary could almost be seen as a sequel to *Doubt* in many ways – in *Doubt*, the story takes place in 1964, and we have a priest who may or may not have abused one of his altar boys. The story revolves around the attempt of one of the sisters (Sister Aloysius, played by Meryl Streep) to prove to herself and the world around her that Father Flynn (played by Phillip Seymour Hoffman) has abused one of his altar boys – a black boy who is also the most vulnerable figure in the story. We never realise what really happened, if Father Flynn abused the boy or not – much as the characters in the story, the audience is left with nothing but doubt. Regardless of the outcome, however, the story deals with the scandal uncovered in the early 2000s, as well as putting in check the many privileges enjoyed by Catholic Church priests. *Calvary*, on the other hand, is set in contemporary Ireland, and it follows Father James (portrayed by Brendan Gleeson), who is a ‘good priest’ and has been threatened with murder by one of his parishioners who was abused by, what he calls, a ‘bad priest’ during his childhood days as an altar boy. As well as *Doubt*, *Calvary* explores religion and one of its most famous scandals, but it also questions our morality when it faces the audience with a man who is more than just a victim for whom we should feel sorry.

Very differently from *Doubt*, *Calvary* states from the start that something is about to happen with a striking opening scene, in which Father James is in his confessionary and a man approaches on the other side and says “I first tasted semen when I was seven years old” and moving on to promise he will kill the priest “Sunday week”, for, he reasons, what good is it to get rid of a bad priest, when getting rid of a good one will attract far more attention, because as he says “That would be a shock, they wouldn’t know what to make of that”. Father James, as a “good priest” should, knows who the man is for he knows his parishioners; the audience, on the other hand, as well as the people who surround him are kept in the dark. This situation works well considering that the remainder of the film is spent following Father James in his daily routine, which consists, amongst other activities, of him interacting with his parishioners. We know, as the audience, that the potential killer is one of those people with whom he relates, which means that we are constantly watching out for clues. The only person who knows the killer’s identity is Father James, and being the “good priest” that he is, he does not tell anyone about it.

What happens in *Doubt* is almost the polar opposite: we never know if something is really happening, we are in doubt, much like the characters – there is no clear sign that Father Flynn is abusing the boy, and even though there are hints pointing to it, we can never be sure. *Doubt*’s Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep) is the principal at St Nicholas school, she is stern and does not tolerate weakness. It could be said that she is very hard to relate to, for she seems to be going against Father Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman) in some sort of personal vendetta, whilst keeping a stiff upper lip; she is so tough she seems inhuman, as if she lacks a sense of empathy – even her defence of Donald Miller (Father Flynn’s alleged victim) could be considered a mean to an end: to

get Father Flynn out of her school. Sister Aloysius seems to always find fault, to always suspect one of the students is doing something wrong – this suspicious nature is key to interpret her character, even if it might not give us any certainties. She is also a very practical woman, for whom the order of the world makes sense – she knows her place, and she knows the difference between right and wrong. She senses something is wrong regarding the relationship between Donald and Father Flynn, but she has no proof of it. Her suspicions develop into what seems like blind belief (or blind faith): she does not require proof to know Father Flynn is doing something wrong, and she will use all the tools available to her to make him pay for it. She manages to bring Father Flynn down – she forces him to leave the school by pretending she has compromising information about his last post. She might act as if she were certain, but the end of the film makes it very clear that, much like everyone else, she also has doubts. Whether she has done the right thing or not is up to the audience to decide. What is interesting to notice is that it is in her moment of *doubt* that she is most human – the fact that she finally shows weakness makes her relatable, we identify with her because we, too, are uncertain about the events that took place involving Father Flynn and Donald Miller.

What is interesting to observe about Sister Aloysius is her façade, or how she comes across – and how she influences the story. She is the only female character in both films who holds a position of relative power, being the school principal and having authority amongst the nuns with whom she lives, and yet she is the female character with the most traits usually attributed to men, such as severity and stoicism, both praised in man and frowned upon in women. Her characterisation makes one wonder if that is how she got where she did, since male characteristics seem to historically overpower female ones, and women who are commonly known as powerful, both in life and in fiction, tend to be those who share male qualities. Not only that, it cannot go unobserved that her religious name is that of a man (the same happens in the case of Sister *James*), which leads one to believe that was the practice, once again suppressing women's identities in detriment of men.

At the same time that Sister Aloysius is tough and perhaps even cold, she is the first to come forward in Donald's defence. Whatever her reason is to do so, and, as Fritsch (2004) remarks on his master's thesis, Sister Aloysius shows, if briefly, moments of kindness and concern for her peers, as seen when she advises Sister James to help Sister Veronica whenever possible, as the latter is going blind:

This scene introduces the character of Sister Aloysius as someone severe and on the guard, but also capable of being kind and good-hearted, according to circumstances. And also that the principal of this school pays dedicated attention to the smallest details of school life. (FRITSCH, 2004, p. 33).

It is as if her façade were a means to make people respect her, because in those days – and I dare say today – male characteristics were the ones worth having, and if women wanted respect, they could not be sweet and delicate (characteristics usually attributed to females), they had to be tough and mimic men. Sister Aloysius, therefore, is a product and victim of her society, a patriarchal society to its core: if she wants to hold a position of power, particularly in an institution like the Catholic Church, she must act like a man, and hide the side that identifies with women.

Sister Aloysius's polar opposite is the enthusiastic Sister James (played by Amy Adams), who loves teaching and the students – she is just plain good. She is very

likeable from the start, very different from Sister Aloysius, who does not seem to like the fact that Sister James is passionate about what she does. Sister James wants to believe people are good, and she wants to believe Father Flynn is innocent. She is the one, however, who comes to Sister Aloysius talking about her suspicion regarding Father Flynn and Donald Miller in the first place. It could be argued that she feels guilty about having speculated, as she seems to suffer a change of heart and from then on starts defending Father Flynn. It is in her that we see most doubt in the film. Because she believes (or wants to) that everybody is good at heart, she suffers when she doubts Father Flynn, and she immediately tries to cover her doubt. Sister Aloysius recruits Sister James on her quest to unmask Father Flynn, but Sister James is reluctant to help, and it all becomes too much for her – so much so that she ends up in need of some time off: she goes to visit her ill brother, but more than anything, she goes to escape. When she comes back, she admits to not being able to sleep anymore, to which Sister Aloysius replies that maybe we are not supposed to sleep well. Sister James's doubts finally "break" Sister Aloysius, who, right at the end of the film, admits she has doubts as well.

A parallel to Sister James in *Calvary* (2014) is Fiona (Kelly Reilly), Father James's daughter. Fiona's introduction comes along with the revelation that Father James was married, and that only after the death of his wife did he consider becoming a priest, at the expense of being with daughter. We also learn that he is a recovering alcoholic – and we see the distressing effects of that later on in the film. Fiona appears as fragile at first, even troubled: she is recovering from a suicide attempt and comes to visit her father to help the healing process – hers, and perhaps, his. It is through her that we learn that although he is a "good priest", he was not the best of fathers, even if judging just by the fact he was rarely there for his daughter after her mother passed away. The audience is never told about what made Fiona attempt to commit suicide, and interestingly enough, it does not seem necessary. Fiona seems to come into the story to forgive her father and herself, consequently making an impact on Father James and his take on the world around him, as he is not only father to her, but also Father to many others. Fiona was an only child, and one cannot help but think that it must have been tough on Fiona losing one parent to death and losing the other to the Church. *Calvary*, as most films, is not about a family saga, it is about certain people at a certain time, and not knowing their background with detail does not compromise the story; what the story tells us is enough for us to comprehend its characters' motivations and have a glimpse at their psychologies.

Both Fiona and Sister James seem to work as a link between the outside world and Father James (*Calvary*) and Sister Aloysius respectively. They are very different from what both main characters are used to: Fiona comes to visit from London, from outside the small Irish village where her father lives; more than that, she represents a time of his life during which religion was not the centre of his universe. Sister James is passionate and clearly loves what she does, as opposed to seeing it only as a duty – as Sister Aloysius seems to do. They are very relatable characters, as if they were outsiders looking in – much like we are as the audience. It is through Fiona that Father James is able to forgive himself; and we only get to witness Sister Aloysius's weakness (her many doubts) when she talks to Sister James and finally admits to it. It is worth mentioning that Sister James and Fiona possess characteristics usually associated with women, such as kindness and sensibility, therefore, they are relegated to being supporting characters merely acting as plot devices. Even in these films examining the victimisation of the weak by a patriarchal institution, female characters such as Fiona

and Sister James exist largely, but not only, for the purpose of developing other characters. The young boys are blatantly victims of patriarchy (even Donald whose sexual abuse is in question) but the women in these films such as Fiona and Sister James are as much victims in their relegation to the background of the lives of other “more important” characters.

Donald is an altar boy, and consequently, he is closely connected to Father Flynn, which plants the idea that something is happening on Sister Aloysius’s mind. The scene between Donald’s mother, Mrs Miller (Viola Davis) and Sister Aloysius makes for one of the most interesting moments in the film: Mrs Miller is called for a meeting with Sister Aloysius, who believes her son has been abused somehow by Father Flynn. His mother, conscious of the delicate place her son (and her whole family) occupies in society seems more than willing to ignore whatever it is happening. Mrs Miller wants her son to have a chance at going to a good high school, which will only be possible if Donald graduates from St Nicholas, and given the situation, her only solution is to pay no heed to what Sister Aloysius is telling her. Her son has already been expelled from the altar boys for getting caught drinking wine – wine that was possibly given to him by none other than Father Flynn himself – and Mrs Miller does not want any more trouble. She briefly seems to be indignant due to her son getting in trouble for something Father Flynn – a powerful man in the school hierarchy – did, to which Sister Aloysius replies that the boy got caught, but the man did not. Throughout the film we do see Donald interacting with Father Flynn, but we never hear his voice. The “Black boy” is a victim of something that may not even have happened, and he is also the first black child in St Nicholas, which makes a target out of him, and it also silences him.

The character of Donald Muller, the Black boy, is not given a voice in the written text of the play, or material existence, through the performance of an actor, on the stage. He reaches the reader indirectly, through the speech of four other characters, Sister James, Sister Aloysius, Father Flynn and his own mother. Thematically, Donald Muller is the repository of a number of ethical, moral, legal and political subjects, involving corruption in the Church, ethnical intolerance in the U.S., racism, sexual abuse, harassment of several sorts. But the reader is never directly affected by this character. Donald can only be assessed through the way he is perceived by each of the other characters. The result of this movement is that the reader is prevented from the possibility of coming to their own perception of the facts. He can only take Donald as an idea, as the personification of the weak side in the social clash of power, as the embodiment of the notion of the victim. He is an outsider, he is in danger in that community, and he is a fragile piece in an intricate puzzle. Donald is vulnerable and in a position where he can be let alone, verbally abused and even physically attacked. (FRITSCH, 2004, p. 36)

As Fritsch highlights, Donald is in a vulnerable position, firstly because we, as the audience, never get a chance to know him, we only know about him through others, as if he were not the protagonist of his own story. Secondly, for being a child and black on top of that. His situation can easily be compared to that of women, who for centuries seem to have no right of a voice of their own, being constantly talked about, but rarely talking. In *Doubt* (2004), Donald has a woman, one with a voice and relative power, by his side, but unfortunately the other woman in his life, his mother, is too afraid to come

forward with any type of accusation that may lead to her son's being expelled from school and losing his chance at having a good education. Because her and her son's positions are so fragile, Mrs Miller turns a blind eye to the whole supposed incident, and goes as far as to say that the Father can have her son if it means that Donald will graduate – "it is only until June anyway," as she puts it.

Mrs Miller's attitude, easily frowned upon when considered by itself, is more common than we would like to believe, even to this day. Many people are silenced every day for fear of the oppressor, distressed with the possibility of more trouble if they talk. Mrs Miller is not blameless, but one cannot accuse her of indifference either: she wants what is best for her son, a boy who is being pressure from all fronts. She believes that as long as she can see him through these next couple of years, he will be fine, and that seems to be the task she sets herself. Furthermore, Mrs Miller is afraid for her son and afraid of her husband, for it is implied that the boy has feminine traits. It may be the reason for which he has on several occasions been beaten up by his father: considering the possibility that her son is involved in a case of paedophilia is, for Mrs Miller, giving her husband (the boy's biological father) yet another reason to abuse him. Mrs Miller knows her son has a good relationship with Father Flynn – the boy loves and looks up to him, and she seems to believe that the possibility of being beaten to death, that the boy will face at home if Sister Aloysius's suspicions come to light, is far worse than him receiving any sort of "special treatment" from Father Flynn, whatever it may entail. It is extremely frustrating to watch, as it must have been frustrating to Sister Aloysius, for she thought she was going to have support to bring Father Flynn down, but we forget that social pressures can be as violent as sexual abuse.

Regardless of what was actually happening between Father Flynn and the boy Donald, the second is a victim of his circumstances. Firstly, he is a victim because black people were not respected at the time (if ever), and as school children have a reputation for being mean, Donald certainly suffered because of it – what with being "different" and the new boy; moreover, he comes from a poor background, putting him at disadvantage from the start. Secondly, and this one we will never know for sure, to what extent a priest was accused of having abused him. It is impossible to know if Father Flynn was innocent, or a victim of Sister Aloysius suspicions, although his behaviour when she claims to have something against him is telling of some transgression, even if not the one of which he is being accused. Thirdly, and most importantly, Donald is pawn in the hands of the powerful people who surround him: Donald ends up being caught in the fight for authority and power between Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius; the boy is not given opportunity to tell his side of the story, lowly and unimportant as he is in the grand scheme of things. Donald is in need of a voice, and even Sister Aloysius, who is apparently on a crusade to defend him, ends up in a power struggle, relegating the boy to a corner, instead of offering space to talk and express himself.

What happens in *Calvary*, on the other hand, is different because we know for certain that there was a case of abuse, and we know that something bad (the murder of a "good priest") is about to happen because of it. It is only at the end of *Calvary* that the audience is acquainted with the potential murderer – Jack Brennan (Chris O'Dowd) is the man who, at the beginning of the film, threatens Father James; he wants to kill a "good priest", and that is what he eventually does, in the second to last scene. Not only does the film make us like Father James (Brandan Gleeson), as we follow his footsteps for a week of his life in order to learn for ourselves that he is indeed a good man; *Calvary* also makes us care and sympathise with his murderer, a man who shoots our

“good priest” in cold blood. On the one hand, we care about Father James because he is righteous, because amongst so many religious scandals, we know he is one of the priests trying to make the world a better place. On the other hand, we care about Jack Brennan because he is a victim, first and foremost. Morality dictates that it is not right to kill someone, but how is it possible to live having been through what Jack went through? And that is what Chris O’Dowd’s character makes us see: from the start he tells Father James that he does not want to “learn to live with it”, he has had enough of that and it is time he did something about it.

It is implied in *Calvary* that Jack never tells anyone about what happened to him, apart from perhaps having unsuccessfully tried some sort of therapy, and at the end, he does not care about coping, for he cannot cope any longer. What happened to him lasted years, consumed his childhood and adult life, and he has lived with it for more than he can bear. Anderson and Doherty in their book *Accounting for Rape: Psychology, Feminism and Discourse Analysis in the Study of Sexual Violence*(2007) shed some light on why it is so very difficult for abuse victims, and in this case, male victims, to report what has happened to them.

According to literature, there are several powerful ‘report defence elements’ (McMullen, 1990) that prohibit the reporting of a male rape experience, most of which have to do with actual or perceived societal responses. Survivors’ accounts indicate that normative expectations about masculinity discourage men from reporting sexual victimisation for fear of being ridiculed as weak or inadequate. Some survivors remain silent rather than risk being labelled as ‘closet homosexual’, bisexual or as promiscuous and thus somehow ‘deserving’ of rape (Scarce, 1997; Ussher, 1997; West, 2000). Social stigmatisation of victims in the aftermath of rape has been identified as a form of ‘secondary victimisation’ (Williams, 1984), and it has been directly linked to the under-reporting of rape and post-rape trauma. (ANDERSON & DOHERTY, 2007, p. 84)

In her book *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (2007), Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea deals with the repercussion of the situations narrated both in *Doubt* and in *Calvary*, exploring what happened when the events of the sixties and seventies came to light in 2002. For the purposes of this essay, her discussion about the effects of abuse in young children are relevant, seen as the adult Jack in *Calvary* seems to be still trapped in his child self, as if imprisoned in those couple of years when he was constantly abused by a priest. He has difficulties dealing with the aftermath of what was done to him as a child, which is not surprising.

(...) sexual abuse survivors often display a wide array of self-destructive behaviours. They may slice their arms, thighs, and genitalia with knives, razors, or shards of broken glass. Johnathan Norton, Father James Hopkins alleged victim, bloodied his arms with a box cutter and attempted suicide more than once before the age of seventeen.(...)

Survivors burn themselves with cigarettes, pull hair from their heads and pubic areas, walk through deserted areas alone at night, play chicken with trains at railroad crossings, pick up strangers in bars to have unprotected and anonymous sex, drive recklessly at high speeds, gamble compulsively, or further destroy their minds and bodies with alcohol and the whole range of street drugs. (...)

Survivor self-abuse performs a myriad of functions. A quick inventory of survivors' motivations to act self-destructively includes punishment for the abuse they blame themselves for; mastering victimisation by taking charge of the timing and execution of the harm; attacking the internalised abusers by whom they are "possessed"; and self-medicating turbulent affective storms. Engaging in dangerous self-destructive acts also represents an unconscious attempt to reach states of hyper arousal that then trigger the release of brain opioids, providing a temporary sense of calm. (FRAWLEY-O'DEA, 2007, p. 34)

The Calvary we are watching is Father James', for he sacrifices himself so that Jack can have some peace, or, as Frawley-O'Dea phrases it, so he can finally have some control over his life. It is also, and possibly more importantly, Jack's Calvary, and that makes the film all the more powerful. If anything, Jack shows us that nothing is black and white, a killer is not necessarily just a killer - and the question we have to ask is *why*. Jack is a victim as much as Father James is, perhaps more, for Jack never had a choice about what happened to him, whereas Father James does, to a certain extent, insofar as he knows who the person threatening him is from the start, and he willingly goes to Jack at the end. Thankfully the film does not ask us to choose a side: we can support both, we can understand both. For Jack, Father James represents the oppressor, that man of the Church who for so long abused him, and unfortunately, Jack is too far gone to be able to cope with what happened to him without relying on drastic measures. When we think of paedophilia, we usually think in terms of preventing it, which is good, but few of us actually think of the coping with its effects – we think about the guilty, but what about the innocent, how are they dealing with it? The film haunts us in many ways, especially because we know there are no other solutions other than the one presented by the film.

In many ways, *Calvary*, its title alluding to the Christ-like position occupied by Father James, makes us doubtful, it makes us question what we believe in – and if not question, at least take a good look at it. We cannot blame Jack Brennan, even though he has killed a man, a good one at that. The scene in which he shoots Father Flynn is nothing short of poignant: Jack is struggling from the start – I would go as far as to say he does not want to kill Father James, but whatever is plaguing him is stronger than his rational will –, but when he sees a young altar boy on the beach he collapses a little further, as he tells Father James that the boy reminds him of himself; it is clear that what he is about to do is difficult for him, that there is a part of him that does not want to do it, while the other part just cannot live with it anymore and has to do something about it. As he shoots to kill, we see regret in his face, as if he suddenly realised that what happened to him will not go away, no matter what he does, to what extremes he appeals.

The film ending is slightly open, as we see Fiona going to visit Jack in prison, but never learn the reason why she is there. I choose to read it as an act of support and forgiveness; perhaps, even, an act of recognition: she is, as well as him, a victim of society, and to a certain extent, a victim of the Catholic Church, for her father spends most of her lifetime dedicating himself to being a Father to others, and ignoring the person who needed him the most.

Calvary (2014) and *Doubt* (2008) are very different and yet very similar works of art. The main difference, insofar as this essay is concerned, is the existence or not of abuse in the second. It is the matter of the victims that I am analysing here, however, and both films are excellent for that purpose. Donald and Jack are products of their

society, as young boys, that have no voice or power to fight against the powerful men who surround them. Donald may not have been abused by Father Flynn, but he was certainly abused, in a different form, by his father, for being effeminate. If we consider that the Church does not approve of homosexuality, we could say that Donald's father was, to some extent, abusing him because of the intricate religious principles by which society abides.

Doubt is ambiguous and symbolic throughout, but despite its ambiguities, despite our own doubts concerning the attitudes of Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius, of one thing we may be sure: the boy is the one who will suffer the most, even if nothing actually happened between Father Flynn and him. Donald is the weakest link, and will have to deal with the consequences, even if he is innocent. And then again, history repeats itself with *Jack* in *Calvary*: the priest who abused him never suffered the repercussions of his perversity, but Jack was left trapped inside his mind and body, both of which were abused when he was a child. It is impossible not to feel sorry for Jack, even though he ultimately resorts to ending Father James's life, we know he is trying to fix what happen to him – it is a failed attempt at avenging his childhood self.

That Jack Brennan is a victim we have already established, and we know that to some extent he is fighting back, even if that requires extreme actions; what has not yet been mentioned is the sad fact that Jack has become an oppressor as well: during the film his wife appears bearing a black eye, and Jack, at a later moment, admits to having beaten her. Oppression generates even more oppression. *Calvary* does not allow us to feel completely sorry for this man who abuses his wife, even if he was abused as child. The film gives the audience a character full of humanity, and it shows us the reality of the consequences of childhood abuse, as shows this 2001 study:

Among 747 males the risk of being a perpetrator was positively correlated with reported sexual abuse victim experiences. The overall rate of having been a victim was 35% for perpetrators and 11% for non-perpetrators. Of the 96 females, 43% had been victims but only one was a perpetrator. A high percentage of male subjects abused in childhood by a female relative became perpetrators. Having been a victim was a strong predictor of becoming a perpetrator, as was an index of parental loss in childhood. (GLASSER et al., 2001, p. 482)

In the beginning of this essay, I brought Sandra M Schneiders' parallel between young boys abused by the Church (a patriarchal institution if ever there was one) and women abused by the patriarchal society. According to her,

Not only were women excluded, marginalised, and degraded in the church, but they were also directly oppressed by the church authorities, and the church legitimated and supported their oppression by men in family and society. Religious women realised that they could not exercise even minimal self-determination within their own congregations while married women had no leverage whatever in the decision made by the male celibates about even the most intimate details of their lives as both wives and mothers. The church's pastoral practice discouraged women from seeking divorce from abusive husbands, forbade the divorced to remarry under any circumstances, counselled them to accept spouse abuse as God's will, commanded them to yield to marital rape, and forbade them to use contraceptives to control the results of such abuse or to have recourse to abortion in cases of rape or incest.

In short, the church was a prime legitimator of patriarchal marriage and its attendant abuses. By its romantic reduction of women's identity and role to motherhood and its definition of the family in the patriarchal terms of the male headship, church authorities constricted women's self-image, loaded women's emergence into the public sphere with guilt, and legitimated patriarchal structures of economic discrimination designed to keep women out of the work force and dependent on the male head of the household. (SCHNEIDERS, 2004, p. 28)

Feminism is not only concerned about women's rights; feminism is an attempt to fight a form of oppression known as the patriarchy, a system that relegates women to being submissive and quiet beings – and does the same to children. It is virtually impossible to fight an army with no weapons – and it could be argued that not even weapons will end the pain. As soon as Jack shoots Father James, he shoots himself, which speaks of a type of suffering that cannot be dissipated through revenge – and perhaps not at all. In *Doubt* the attempt to fight seems to come from Sister Aloysius, even though we are not acquainted with her reasons and always in doubt of her motives. On the other hand, a silent fight also comes from the fascinating Mrs Miller, Donald's mother: she knows her son might be in danger, and she refuses to side with Sister Aloysius, because in doing that, she would be putting her child in an even more complicated situation. Mrs Miller chooses what she decides is the lesser of two evils, and all she has to hope for is that her son manages to get a good education, in order to, perhaps, be able to speak for himself, as opposed to being spoken *of* and *for*.

All in all, it is possible to say that both films discussed here serve as example to parallels that can be drawn between women's experiences and children's experiences, especially regarding the Church's patriarchal views of both and how they handle (sometimes physically) these two groups of victims, serving as examples to Schneiders's ideas. As Schneiders affirms, "women and children have been victimised by male celibates for centuries" (2004, p. xx), but most of it has been hidden from the public eye. In the case of children, it has only been slightly over a decade since the reports of abuse have come to light – a subject on which the film *Spotlight* (2015) dwells, exploring the investigation lead by a group of journalists from the Boston Globe in the early 2000s.

What is left for us, the audience of both films, is the hope that the helpless gain a voice, and that the guilty face the consequences due to them, even if both endings are not far from bleak. Ideally, Jack's experience as an altar boy would be part of fond childhood memories; Donald's relationship with Father Flynn would be no more than a mere friendship, and the second would help and guide the first; Mrs Miller would leave Donald's father, have a life of her own and not be afraid anymore; Sister Aloysius would have no need to be suspicious, for there would be nothing about which to have doubt; Sister James would be allowed her enthusiasm, and be appreciated for it; Father James would be alive, on friendly terms with Jack, and having a good relationship with his daughter. There is nothing ideal about the world however, and certainly not as long as women and children are held down by the oppression of the patriarchy.

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