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Kurt Bauer

Crime scene church

Escaping the torments



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Publishing and printing: tredition GmbH, Hamburg, Germany

ISBN

Paperback: 978-3-7439-9750-9

Hardcover: 978-3-7439-9751-6

e-Book: 978-3-7439-9752-3

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Foreword

I'm a church victim of abuse. I was a pupil in a Franciscan boarding school. My parents sent me there to give me a sound school education for my life. Everything was different. Unbelievably shockingly different. In this boarding school I was sexually abused, dejected and emotionally and physically degraded several times by two monks.

Then I had a crack in my consciousness, in my perception and in my thinking. For years I didn't know that and considered myself quite "normal" in my thinking and acting. Only when my life broke apart, when I was about to commit suicide, did I realize that there was an urgent need to find out who I really am.

From then on, I went on a searching for traces of my life and I tell you about it in this book.

All persons involved in the book have been alienated and are personally known to the author.

Kurt Bauer

A new beginning

It's a morning like any other. Yet on this day my life will change. In the kitchen, I turn on the coffee machine. The machine heats up, switches to green and is ready for production. I brew myself a coffee, froth up the milk and add a piece of sweetener to my cappuccino. Then I add 3 crispbreads, which I coat with cream cheese. Now the day can begin. I attack the daily newspaper and on the front page the headline jumps at me in large letters:

ABUSIVE SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH! CARDINAL ACTS!

Yesterday, Palm Sunday, in the ORF press hour, the Cardinal had appointed an independent victim commissioner who would work completely independently. The Cardinal invites sexual abuse victims to report to the independent Victim Protection Commission. Every church victim of abuse receives therapy hours and financial compensation.

No church crisis of the past years has left such deep traces as the cases of abuse that have become known.

My hand's shaking and I'm spilling coffee. Without looking away from the newspaper article, I call out to my wife: "Please come here and read this!" My wife hurries up and recognizes by my dismay that something important is at stake. She looks at the front page and records my condition. She says, "Now your story is getting very close."

From the Church's point of view, my sexual abuse has never interested anyone. All the conversations I had had with church dignitaries had gone astray.

Something new came into my life today. Reports about various sexual assaults in the Catholic Church have been spread in the media for quite some time and I have been following them

relatively calmly for a month now. In my experience, the Church sits out everything without lifting a finger when it comes to abuse within her own ranks. But today something really seems to be starting to move. Cardinal Ziskovits takes a stand on sexual abuse and sets up an ecclesiastical commission for the protection of victims in order to get to the bottom of what is happening. I'm curious to see what happens.

This I wasn't expecting: Suddenly I'm affected myself. I feel addressed directly. Yes, that call applies to me as well. I don't sleep well tonight. I start to get sweaty. I am troubled and resist memories that are pushed into my consciousness. A long time ago I was a pupil in a Franciscan boarding school and what happened cannot simply be shaken off.

In a way, I've come to terms with what happened. It feels like a standstill that never stops. Maybe that's resignation, too. It is clear to me: Cardinal Ziskovits has opened a door with his words: "People who have become victims of abuse and violence of the Catholic Church in Austria in their childhood or adolescence through representatives and institutions can report to the Commission for the Protection of Victims. It is available to all victims of abuse and violence in church and society in Austria and wants to help quickly and effectively". The question that comes to my mind is: How do you help a sexual abuse victim? How do you deal with the abuser? I know priests who were accused of sexual assault and then simply moved to another parish, or the accusation was simply ignored by the Church. So why would anything change now?

Never before had I been asked to comment on what had happened. I am filled with doubt and fear. My rapists died, so I have nothing to worry about. And then there are voices in my head that say: You can't point your finger at Father Aegidius and Father Franz now! I feel guilty about giving my experience a name. In addition, this sexual abuse is already statute-barred. So why not leave everything as it was? Conflicting thoughts are

chasing through my head and I don't know what to do. Cardinal Ziskovits suddenly opened up old wounds. I was already done with my past!

Several months have now passed. It has turned out that Cardinal Ziskovits is serious with his call to the victims of abuse: abuse does not expire in the church! The Commission for the Protection of Victims has started its work and repeatedly calls on victims of sexual abuse to report themselves. The cases are examined and the perpetrators held to account and even brought to justice. In serious cases, abuse victims are awarded financial damages and therapy hours.

In my mind there is still the thought that the dead cannot be held responsible. The dead should be left to rest. Besides, it's an outrage to get any money because of this story. Is it possible to make up for what has happened with money? I don't even really know what was done to me. What was done to me rests deep down in me under lock and key, sealed in wordlessness. And if you have no words for it, then there is nothing that can be done. Suddenly a loud voice appears in my head that knows what to do. "Now is the time to forgive." According to the motto, "Because they don't know what they're doing." It's the greatness of a man to be able to forgive! The do-gooder in me says: "There are certainly many other people who need help and support more urgently than I do". I'm in a test, everything seems to be against me. I experience myself helpless and paralyzed and don't know back and forth. My attempt to stop thinking about it does not succeed; I find myself in a maelstrom and feel close to madness.

I visit my friend and bring up my dilemma. He understands me and says, "Why don't you let your decision go? Report to the victim protection commission as a victim of abuse and ask for clarification of your situation. You need someone who listens to you and is competent enough to find out what happened to you back then. After that, one can say whether you will be

recognized as a victim of abuse. I'm sure you're not the only one who's in this situation." It takes a load off my mind. Yeah, it makes sense.

I follow the advice and write a letter to the Victim Protection Commission in Vienna. In a nutshell, I tell the story of the sexual abuse I experienced in 1959-1961 at a boys' boarding school in Steyr, Upper Austria, which was run by the Franciscan Order. I ask for clarification of my situation and send the letter.

The time of waiting is over. I have received a letter from the Commission for the Protection of Victims in which the director, Mrs. Waltraud Weber, expresses her regret on behalf of Cardinal Ziskovits about the sexual abuse and suffering suffered. She offers me a so-called clearing with one of three psychotherapists to tell about my abuse. 10 hours are at my disposal. At the end of this clearing process, the psychotherapist would prepare a report and submit it to the Victim Protection Commission. It will depend on this expert opinion how things progress. After that, the Commission would contact me.

She asked me to let her know as soon as I had chosen my therapist and made an appointment with her. The commission would tell the therapist what to do. Then clearing can begin. The rest of the letter were formalities and once again the expression of great regret.

The whole thing seemed like a guilty verdict to me. Telling someone about my life was one thing, but to pillory someone was another. I had not expected that my decision to approach the Victim Protection Commission would arouse such doubts in me. So I decided to make another visit to my friend to talk to him about the current situation. He had promised me his support, we had been friends for years and had already been through a lot together. We met at a café. His first question was, "Well, how are you, Kurt? You look loaded. Did you get an answer from the Victim Protection Commission?" "Yes, I did." I tell him about my situation and all the doubts that plague me.

"I'm in the middle of a fire. I have an invitation to clearing and at least four opposing opinions in my head." My friend laughs and says, "Yes, I understand! It's just that with the different opinions in your head, you're killing yourself." With a deep sigh, I agree with him. I see myself tormenting myself with it. My friend continues: "Cardinal Ziskovits has kicked some loose in you. I think it's best you stick to your chosen path. You accept the victim protection commission's offer and do the clearing. Certainly not easy, but better than doing nothing. My advice to you: grab it!"

From the three offered contact addresses I choose a first address. The doctor is a psychotherapist at the University Hospital Salzburg. I'll call her and be lucky. She takes off and asks for my request. I'm invoking the victim protection society that gave me your address. Then I describe my situation to her and ask her to do this clarification process with me. She listens to me attentively, and then notices that she has full understanding for me, but is totally booked out. Which she feels particularly sorry for. The vague hope that had germinated in me in the meantime immediately disintegrates again. My throat is dry as I say goodbye and my hands all wet. This whole thing's really upsetting me. Well-known doubts put me back in her vice.

Next, I call a psychologist and trauma therapist named Michaela Rabe. She takes off and greets me friendly. I would like to inform you that the Vienna Society for the Protection of Victims has provided me with its address as well as 10 hours for clearing my situation as a victim of abuse by the Church. I also tell her about my experience, my inner turmoil and the recurring doubts as to whether I should do the clearing at all. I ask for your support and advice. She says she understands me and is willing to do the clearing with me. Then she looks for the next possible date and we arrange a first meeting in a week.

This one week that separates me from the encounter with the therapist is a time of stress. For such times I have become accustomed to structuring my thoughts in my head by writing them down. I'm doing it now. I hold on to everything that is expressed in me. What have I heard or done that's going on inside me? There are different voices and opinions clashing, I have an entire parliament in my head. I write down every single thought and instinctively avoid participating in this debate or entering into a dialogue. All I ever read when I read this whole thing is that it's my fault. About what?

The Clearing

I arrived at Mrs. Rabe's practice and feel like I'm about to take an exam. I stand there agitated and tense and with wet hands and hope that this is not so noticeable during the greeting. I take a deep breath and press the button on the bell next to the name Michaela Rabe. I hear a door being opened and I think now it's coming. Shortly afterwards the front door opens. A woman becomes visible who is slim and looks quite young. I say, "Are you Doctor Michaela Rabe?" "Without doctor! I am a master of psychotherapy specializing in trauma treatment and yes, I am Michaela Rabe and welcome," she replies, "My name is Kurt Bauer and we talked on the phone. I have an appointment with you," I introduce myself. "Yes, yes, I know, come in." She opens the front door completely, steps aside so that I can pass and closes the door behind me. "I'll go ahead!" she says, turns around and walks towards the opposite room. On the door I notice a sign: "Please do not disturb - PRACTICE. Underneath: Michaela Rabe, psychotherapist".

The room I enter is flooded with light and seems friendly to me. On one side there is a desk with some files on it, a chair stands beside it. Here is a seating area where Mrs. Rabe invites me to take a seat. I choose a place where I have the light in my back. I don't like back-lighting, because then I can hardly recognize my counterpart. Mrs. Rabe sits down at the front of the table and puts her papers in order. She looks at me friendly and gives me time to find my way around.

I'm under a lot of pressure and it's all too right for me when it finally starts: "I suggest I give you some information so that you know where you are and what to expect." I nod in agreement. "I am a psychotherapist with a special training in dream therapy and was asked by the Church Victim Protection Commission to do a ten hour clarification process with you to determine the degree of trauma caused by sexual abuse.

I'm under a lot of pressure and I'm taking the floor. "I'd like to tell you about my current situation because I'm not sure I need those 10 hours." Mrs. Rabe nods confirming and encouraging me to continue. "I was a pupil in a boarding school run by Franciscans. I am aware that I've been sexually abused, but I don't know to what extent. It would be of great help to me if you could tell me after this lesson whether I have a trauma or not. So please feel free to say: I am sorry, but what you bring is not enough. I could then gratefully go home and be satisfied. For weeks I've been tormented by this insecurity. Yeah, no, maybe or not." So, now it's out there. It's not really easier for me. I'm waiting for the reaction.

Mrs. Rabe gets straight to the point: "Yes, I will do my best. I see that you are under a lot of pressure and of course I know about the gravity of the situation. As far as I can, I'll tell you today if I think the 10 hours of clearing makes sense."

So that's it. I'm impressed. She doesn't beat about the bush. She does not analyze and reflect as I have experienced in other therapies. I take a closer look at her. She meets my gaze, I like that.

"What's pressuring you, Mr. Bauer?" she asks me. "So certainly my condition has something to do with Cardinal Ziskovits and the victim protection society. I still remember the newspaper article in which he asked church victims of abuse to contact me. The core sentence was: Sexual abuse in the church does not expire! - But I was done with it! It's like the old wound's broken now."

Mrs. Rabe has a comment to make. "How did you feel about the abuse before this newspaper report?" "I had come to terms with it, maybe I was resigned. Up to this point I had already done various therapies in my life, but access to sexual abuse in boarding school had always remained a locked door. What is behind it remains hidden until now," I replied.

"I'll come back to my real question then. Mrs. Rabe insists, "not because I want to be annoying, but because I feel that she is putting something under great pressure and I want to understand you! A little resigned and with a deep sigh I answer: "I don't know. I feel like I've crossed an invisible barrier. I shouldn't have done that, reported to the Victim Protection Commission and now done the clearing with you."

Mrs. Rabe says: "I think I understand you. They are two different things, a therapy in which you talk about intimate things that nobody experiences except your therapist, and one to which Cardinal Ziskovits asks. That's a whole different challenge. For me, sexual abuse is the enslavement of body and soul. It's a state where you don't belong to yourself anymore. The victim can become in bondage to the perpetrator, this is also abuse. In Greek trauma means "wound". I don't care about the severity of your trauma. At some point, this will be an issue for the victim protection society. It is the wound of sexual abuse that you should consider and that only works if you take the 10 hours. We need this time."

So what can I say to that? I'm concerned and I'm thinking. I let some memories of recent times pass me by. "The way I feel right now, it reminds me of slavery. At least that's how it feels in the head. Something like this is ticking: If I look away and leave what happened alone... hmm, ... then everything will be fine again. Then the fear of it, what will the others say? But I also have no guarantee how my life will change if I tackle this process," I say my thoughts out loud. "Well, I'll think of something," says Mrs. Rabe, "think back. Did the therapy help you to cope with life? Are you standing better now?" I think, nod my head in agreement and say, "Yes, it did!" Mrs. Rabe continues: "Is there a reason that you have to think it can only get worse?"

Now I really have to laugh. Mrs. Rabe is curiously waiting to see what comes next from me. I say, "Yes, there is. It's my voices in my head. There's a machine running with ratings." We

look at each other. Mrs. Rabe shakes her head thoughtfully, smiles a little and says: "I cannot say anything about your trauma at this moment. But what's certain is: Your chances have improved significantly. You can decide to take advantage of the 10 hours of clearing or not. How do you see it?"

I say, "I'm not stupid, and now I don't have to think about it anymore. Yeah, I'll take the 10 hours." Here we finish our first session and I go home amazingly satisfied.

My decision

The next meeting with Mrs. Rabe begins with a statement from her: "In my collaboration with the Church Society for the Protection of Victims, I am required to ask you certain questions in order to be able to prepare a short report at the end of these 10 hours. If you experience something as too stressful or unpleasant, we can stop at any time. You don't have to answer any of these questions. Maybe you can't answer some of them because they are part of your trauma. How do you feel about that?"

"How am I doing with this?" I say, "I feel bad. On the one hand I tell about my sexual abuse and accuse two priests with it and this is not at all easy for me. Even though I know in my head that this is an injustice, in my memory it somehow belongs to the normal everyday life in the convent school. On the other hand, what I'm telling you is evaluated by complete strangers. It scares me and I have a cramp in my stomach." Mrs. Rabe nods confirming and says: "Yes, I understand that. Perhaps it will take some of your fear away when I tell you that what we are discussing is not going to come to the victim protection society at all. From what you tell me, I'll draw up an expert opinion. And then I'd like to say that sexual trauma is a very complex process."

There's a question I'd like to ask myself. "What do I need this report for?" Mrs. Rabe laconically means: "You don't need it at all! Cardinal Ziskovits offers victims of abuse reparations for the suffering inflicted within and by the Church. You can assert your claim with the expert opinion. The way there is 10 hours of clearing. I believe that this is not easy for you because you come into contact with wounds that you have already considered closed."

"Which brings us to the core," I say. "What do you mean?" asks Mrs. Rabe. "I don't believe that with a few thousand euros