

MANDARIN PRODUCTION & FOZ PRESENT

69 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Competition

MELVIL POUPAUD
DENIS MÉNOCHET
SWANN ARLAUD

BY THE GRACE OF GOD

(GRÂCE À DIEU)

A FILM BY
FRANÇOIS OZON

Lenght: 2h17

Format: 1:85 - Sound: Dolby SR/SRD

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SYNOPSIS

Alexandre lives in Lyon with his wife and children. One day he learns by chance that the priest who abused him when he was in scouts is still working with children.
He decides to take action and is soon joined by two other victims of the priest, François and Emmanuel. They band together to "lift the burden of silence" surrounding their ordeal.
But the repercussions and consequences will leave no one unscathed.



INTERVIEW
FRANÇOIS OZON

BY THE GRACE OF GOD is your first film about a news story, and with so many characters...

My initial idea was to make a film about male fragility. I've brought many strong female characters to the screen. This time, I wanted to turn my attention to men who are visibly suffering and feeling emotional, things we usually associate with the female gender. The first idea for a title was actually *The Crying Man*.

Then I came across the story of the Preynat case. On the victims' website *La Parole Libérée* (in English *Lift the Burden of Silence*), I read stories of men who had been abused as children at church. I was particularly moved by Alexandre, a fervent Catholic who gave an account of how he'd struggled in silence until the age of forty, when he finally felt able to tell his story. The website also featured interviews, articles and email correspondence between Alexandre and members of Lyon's Catholic hierarchy including Cardinal Barbarin and Régine Maire, the church psychologist in charge of providing support to victims of priests. I found these documents fascinating, so I contacted Alexandre.

Tell us about that.

He brought along a file of his correspondence with the Church up to when he filed his complaint. I was so touched that he trusted me with those letters. We hear some of them in voiceover at the beginning of the film. At first I considered using this incredible material to write a play, then I turned to the idea of a documentary. I met with Alexandre frequently and did a little investigative journalism, meeting other victims like François and Pierre-Emmanuel and people close to them, their wives, relatives, Pierre-Emmanuel's mother, their lawyers... I didn't film these interviews, but I listened and took notes.

What made you decide to switch from documentary to fiction?

When I started discussing my project in concrete terms with the victims, I sensed they were disappointed and reticent about the documentary idea. They'd already given many interviews to the media and been featured in television reports and documentaries.

They were intrigued when a fiction filmmaker approached them. They imagined a film in the spirit of SPOTLIGHT where they'd become fictional characters played by famous actors.
So I thought: This is what they want from me, and this is what I know how to do. But I approached the fiction with some trepidation, because I really liked these people and feared I wouldn't be able to bring them to the screen in a way that did them justice.

How did you go about writing the script?
Initially I was tempted to twist reality to make it fit my script. The victims left gray areas in their stories and I had a tendency to take short cuts. Plus, the sheer number of characters frightened me. I was tempted to reduce. For example, I wanted to blend François' and Emmanuel's lawyers into one character to streamline the script. But the two women had different personalities and different perspectives on the story, so I embraced the magnitude of the ensemble film and did my best to respect the real facts and their complexities.
For the first part of the film, I asked Alexandre for precise details concerning the timeline of his interactions with the Church, especially his meetings with Régine Maire and his confrontation with Preynat. It was easier with François and Pierre-Emmanuel because I had their depositions. I also had access to all of their testimonies on *Lift the Burden's* website. I knew their words, their expressions. In the film, when Emmanuel says to Preynat, "I was a child," those are Pierre-Emmanuel's actual words, although he had written them, he didn't say them directly to Preynat as he does in the film.

Did you meet Cardinal Barbarin, Régine Maire and Bernard Preynat?
Once I'd abandoned the idea of making a documentary, there was no longer any point in meeting them. There are no revelations. The facts of the investigation and the details I'm illustrating have already been exposed in the media or on Internet. I didn't take any liberties with the facts. My priority was to tell the personal stories of the men who had been molested as children from their point of view as victims. I did take some liberties with the storylines of the people close to them, while remaining true to their experiences and the spirit of their testimonies. That's why I changed their family names, making them fictional heroes, which I did not do with Cardinal Barbarin or Father Preynat.

What made you decide to structure the film as a sort of relay race between three characters?
The reality of what happened made it self-evident. I quickly realized that at a certain point, Alexandre's process stops and the story continues without him. His deposition leads the chief of police to open an investigation and contact François, who in turn creates the association *Lift the Burden,* through which he meets Emmanuel. It's a domino effect.
The film begins with an individual's struggle: Alexandre against the institution. Then he passes the baton to François, who creates a collective. And through that collective a new victim emerges: Emmanuel.

Alexandre and François were obvious choices because of their active roles in the case, whereas Emmanuel is more of an anonymous victim.
The choice of the third character was more difficult, because there were many victims to choose from. I needed dramatic progression. I needed the pain and emotions of each character to be different so I could convey different facets of the experience, different consequences of the Church's actions on the private lives of the victims. After Alexandre and François - who come from comfortable backgrounds and have partners, children and jobs - it struck me as interesting to have a third character who is less socially integrated, whose pain is more raw, more psychologically and physically apparent.
Alexandre and François told me about Pierre-Emmanuel. They said he came from a different social background and was very sensitive and vulnerable. So I met him, and he really touched me. In writing his character (renamed Emmanuel), I was also



inspired by the testimonies of other victims who were in great pain. I want us to sense a dormant rage in this character. He's suffered physically. He's an epileptic, though the real Pierre-Emmanuel is not.
The challenge is for the audience to get attached to each new character as he enters the story. Their stories are variations on the same theme, and I hope they enrich each other.

The film opens on the Cardinal walking from the back, then contemplating the city of Lyon from the top of the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière.
It was crucial to anchor the film in Lyon. Lyon was the first place of Christianity in Gaul and maintains a very conservative tradition of the Church. Geographically, the Basilica on a hill overlooking Lyon provides a visual metaphor for the power the Church holds over the city.
The idea wasn't to condemn the Church but rather to explore its contradictions and the complexities of the case. At one point a character explains his commitment to the association by saying, "I'm doing this for the Church, not against it."

By opening the film with Alexandre, a fervent Catholic, you're not immediately focusing on indignation against the Church.
Alexandre respects the institution and thinks Barbarin is an honest, courageous man who has always condemned pedophilia and who will thus take action. He believes in the goodwill of both Barbarin and the Church. And why not? At one point I film Barbarin praying. Maybe he's asking God for help. But it's difficult for this aging institution to make necessary changes. It's paralyzed by its old habits, conservatism and the culture of secrecy and protectionism that prevents anyone taking any meaningful action. And the problem with Preynat, setting aside his behavior with children, is that he was always seen as a good priest. He was well-liked by his parishioners and his hierarchy.



Right from the start everything is clear. There's no suspense around the abuses committed. The tension is in the consequences of Alexandre finally expressing himself.
We had to hit the ground running and get straight to the heart of the matter, setting the pace with the email exchanges between Alexandre and the Church. I found his emails so powerful and well-written that I absolutely wanted to use them, even though the financial backers were worried about all those voiceovers. What's so fascinating and vertiginous about this case is that everything is clearly set out. The facts are right there, but action doesn't follow, making the injustice all the more extreme and incomprehensible.
I could have based the entire film on email exchanges between victims and the Church, and between individual victims. Social media and the internet played a significant role, accelerating the creation of *Lift the Burden*. I obtained elements from those sources to write the association meeting scenes. In real life, the members didn't actually see much of each other.

Alexandre's and François' partners are very present in the film.
As they are in real life. Without their support, it would've been much harder for those men to do what they did. Their partners truly share in their struggle. The victims suffered for so long in silence that when they finally spoke out, their words affected everyone close to them, even provoking jealousy in the case of François' brother, who says, "We've had enough of your priest shit! It's all Mom and Dad talk about!" I wanted to give the audience a glimpse into the emotional and physical violence that can result when victims finally share their stories. I wanted to illustrate the repercussions.

Notably in Emmanuel's relationship.
His girlfriend was abused as well, and she had a very painful experience with the justice system. Emmanuel is having a much more positive experience. The media coverage does him a world of good. It's a heady feeling for him to finally speak out and to be recognized as a victim. Suddenly people want his opinion. He's found a reason, a meaning in his life. He told me he felt like

he was experiencing a sort of "live therapy." The group becomes a way for him to bloom and thrive as an individual. This is also true for François and Alexandre, but more so for Emmanuel, who had no job or social recognition. The risk is you could get pigeonholed. Didier, the victim who refuses to file a complaint, illustrates this when he says he doesn't want to be branded a "pedophile victim" for life.

Alexandre's own children also get very involved.

It's difficult for Alexandre to tell his children what he went through, but at the same time, they're at an age when they could be abused too. So it makes sense to him, though we might wonder if his children really want to hear it.

Victims often become capable of talking about what happened to them when their own children reach an age when they could be abused. Suddenly it all becomes horrifyingly clear: "I was little like them, innocent like them." It awakens a need to speak out and take action.

Alexandre's wife tells him he'll be a victim all his life if he forgives Father Preynat.

Her point raises questions I've also pondered. The Catholic religion's redemptive logic fuels the confrontation organized by Régine Maire between Alexandre and Preynat. Within that logic, the priest is supposed to ask forgiveness. Preynat does not, making Barbarin furious.

On the other hand, according to the victims' psychologists I interviewed, this confrontation is an aberration because it places Alexandre once again in the position of the victim facing his abuser, which Preynat continues to be. In order for the confrontation to be positive and healing, you must leave the ambiguous space of morality and religion and enter a legal framework.

Which begs the question: Is the Church's wait-and-see attitude a symptom of an aging institution stuck in its ways, or is it rooted in the very nature of the Catholic religion, a religion of forgiveness? Barbarin says, "There will always be an open door for sinners" even while agreeing that Preynat should be punished. His position is ambiguous. What side is he really on? This leads Alexandre to question his faith, as evidenced in the final scene when his son asks him: "Do you still believe in God?" The real question is: Do you still believe in the Catholic institution?

After the stylized DOUBLE LOVER (L'AMANT DOUBLE), your directorial approach here is more in the background, letting the subject matter and the characters' journeys speak for themselves.

I directed each part of the film according to the personality of the main character featured in it. To illustrate Alexandre's "crusade," my direction is understated and conventional, playing a lot on backlighting and chiaroscuro. When we get to François, the rhythm is choppier. It feels a bit more like an action film as he battles to bring the scandal to light and give voice to the victims. The tone then becomes more melodramatic with the arrival of Emmanuel, who is fighting for survival in a legal case that is over his head.

The most important thing at all times was to stick to their point of view, accompany their efforts as closely as possible. I wanted to ennoble their struggle, paint them as heroes in the tradition of certain American political films. I had to be close to the actors and keep the pace tight as there was a lot of information to get across. The film has an educational dimension that we worked to make more fluid in the editing by underscoring the sensation of a relay race.

For the first time, I used two cameras for all group scenes and meal scenes so the actors could act all the way through as freely as possible.



The only "cinema effects" are the flashbacks.
Since nearly everything here is built on words, at a certain point we need images to embody the violence inherent in what these men experienced as children. I created flashbacks for each character that show very little (a path, a door opening, a tent closing) but suggest a lot in the space of an instant through location, lighting... We know the facts, they have been stated. Now the audience imagines them, completing the horrific picture themselves.
François has the only flashback with dialogue. For him, the most painful memory is not so much what Preynat did as when his parents told him Preynat could go to prison. As a little boy, he did not want to be responsible for that.

What was the shoot like?
There was an urgency to make the film. The news was moving fast and the subject matter was difficult to finance. The theme of pedophilia scares people. The project was not considered bankable. Many locations were off-limits to us (the church interiors were shot in Belgium and Luxembourg). I found myself facing constraints similar to what we experienced on UNDER THE SAND (SOUS LE SABLE). Fortunately my producers and the whole team believed in the project and supported it, so rather than discouraging us, the hurdles we had to overcome gave us the courage to push the film and prove that it was necessary.

Tell us about the casting.
It's unusual to know the faces of the real protagonists without needing to seek actors who look alike because they are not known to the audience.
I'd worked twice with Melvil Poupaud, an actor who worked with Eric Rohmer in his youth, and I like him a lot. He's becoming even more interesting with age, and I knew that he was himself exploring the place of faith in his life. I'd also worked with Denis Ménochet, so I know that his energy and physical strength mask a heightened sensitivity, making him a good fit for François. As for Swann Arlaud, I'd just seen him in BLOODY MILK (PETIT PAYSAN) and sensed a restlessness and a fragility that corresponded exactly to what I wanted for Emmanuel.
In the role of Father Preynat, Bernard Verley, another actor who has worked with Eric Rohmer, brought charisma, strength and a friendliness that adds complexity to the character. He was not afraid to play such an unflattering role. The terrifying thing about this character is that he seems utterly oblivious to the gravity of his actions.

François Marthouret, who played the father in SITCOM, plays Cardinal Barbarin.
I've always loved the tone of his voice and his somewhat theatrical diction. Barbarin may have something in common with the father in SITCOM. They both speak uncomfortable truths in suave voices, full of understanding and sympathy, then do nothing. This was comical in Sitcom. Here it's far more terrifying, given the seriousness of the situation and the appalling disconnect between his words and his actions.

And Josiane Balasko?
I thought of Josiane Balasko, who I admire, right away. She is rarely cast in dramatic roles. I was thrilled that she was willing to accept a supporting role. I was also keen to work with Hélène Vincent, but wasn't sure whether to cast her as François' mother or Régine Maire. She herself chose the role of the mother, and does a beautiful job embodying a very human woman riddled with guilt. Martine Erhel plays Régine Maire. She was in my short films when I was a student at the Fémis. She looks a great deal like Régine Maire, and I knew she'd perfectly convey the character's fascinating blend of coldness and kindness.

The music was composed by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine.
I really liked their work on Andrey Zvyagintsev's LOVELESS, especially the way they used repetition and created tension, so I asked them to compose a contemporary score using traditional elements from church music like organs and choirboys.

Do you think this film might help change things?
I showed the film to a priest who said, "This film could be an opportunity for the Church. If it embraces it, maybe it will finally assume responsibility for the pedophilia in its midst and combat the scourge once and for all." Let's hope so.



INTERVIEW

MELVIL POUPAUD

How did François Ozon approach you about working together again?

First he told me the story, then he gave me the script, which was nearly finished. I admired its structure and the characters. The three men are very different and have experienced and managed the trauma in their own very personal ways. If the film were a painting, it would be a fresco with a multitude of characters, in which every interaction and every look has a meaning you can understand, and faith would be the backdrop.

And then there's childhood, a theme François often explores in his films. It's a fundamental theme for me too, as is faith. Knowing François is not a believer, I find it even more moving that he has approached the subject with such respect, precision and openness.

What is your relationship to faith?

I suppose you could say I'm a Christian, because I believe Jesus is my savior, and that revelation helps me live and inhabits me more and more over time. But my faith is very different from Alexandre's. He is fervent and actively involved in the Catholic church, whereas I don't belong to any organized religion. I haven't been baptized. I pray in my own way, similar to The Prayer of the Heart from orthodox tradition.

How did you approach your character, based on a real person?

François showed me news reports about *Lift the Burden* and interviews with the real Alexandre. But when I make a film, I never really want to stick to reality. I prefer feeling like I'm inventing something. To me a character is not someone you go to, he's someone you bring to you in order to embody him as sincerely as possible. So I didn't try to resemble the real Alexandre or speak like him. It wasn't a character study. I trusted the script as François wrote it, he'd spent a lot of time with the real protagonists. I knew he'd been faithful to their stories, and the character of Alexandre was clear enough in my mind that I didn't need to dig any deeper. Capturing reality was above all François' job, but now that the film is coming out, I hope the real people involved will like it and feel we've done justice to their struggle and to their ways of being and expressing themselves.

How did you approach the confrontation scene with Preynat?
When a script says the character is emotional or is crying, I have a Pavlovian reaction. I prepare myself, and when the time comes, my emotions flow quite naturally. But I wouldn't say I've got a gift for tears, like certain mystics! Actually, the challenge in that scene was trying to hold the emotions at bay and not fall apart in front of Preynat.
That scene really affected me. I felt it was a key moment in Alexandre's life, and in the life of any believer. Forgiveness is at the heart of Faith and Our Father. The words uttered during the confrontation with Preynat become extremely powerful and profound.

Alexandre's wife tells him, "If you forgive him, you'll be his victim for life." How do you feel about that?
That was the one thing in the script that François and I disagreed about. To my mind, if you believe, you can't say such a thing. A true believer would say, "Let us pray for you to find the strength to forgive him." We don't give forgiveness to the other person. It's not a thought process. It's not about working on yourself or even a question of morality. It is God's grace, which is greater than us. It makes us capable of forgiving even the unforgiveable. But it does not stop Alexandre from taking legal action. Forgiveness and justice are two separate things.

Your character's story is largely expressed in voiceover, through his email correspondence with Régine Maire and Cardinal Barbarin.
As we follow Alexandre through these exchanges and polite banalities, we get into the nuts and bolts of the institution. Alexandre respects its conventions and somewhat dusty formalities. My character is very polite and well-mannered at first, which his wife criticizes him for. But gradually a force rises within him, a sense of revolt, compelling him to circumvent the institution and appeal to justice.

Showing a Catholic whose faith is strong and sincere is one way to avoid caricaturing the institution.
Yes, François hasn't made an anti-Catholic film. He doesn't blame the institution or the believers. Obviously there is blame for Preynat. What he did is shocking and unacceptable. And the Church is shown as an institution with many gray areas, quite outdated and in need of renewal, notably with regard to its attitude toward pedophilia. But I don't think believers will find the film disrespectful. François was very careful with that.

Unlike François and Emmanuel, Alexandre is a member of the upper classes in Lyon.
BY THE GRACE OF GOD is rooted in Lyon, a town I've come to know quite well. Its social classes are very defined, even geographically. At first, my big fear was that Alexandre would come across as very conservative, anti-gay marriage, anti-abortion. We played with certain upper class codes, but I wanted to avoid slipping into a caricature of a backwards right-wing Catholic. Or in any case, to reach beyond such surface appearances and make the character sympathetic.

Alexandre's and François' partners offer great support.
It's beautiful to show men suffering from abuse and the women in their lives being the strong ones and offering support. It's often the opposite. I like the reversal of roles.
Alexandre's wife has been abused herself, which no doubt helps her be so available and so understanding. Emmanuel and his wife also share a background of abuse, but it's more toxic in their case because they've dealt with their trauma in such different ways. And yet we feel a lot of love and tenderness between them. That's the beauty of the film - its power to penetrate the human soul and make all these relationships moving.



Not only does Alexandre open up, he even discusses it with his children.
Alexandre is from a conservative background, but armed with a desire for justice and the help of his wife, he becomes very courageous. There is something heroic about him, and about François and Emmanuel too, as they take on the silence of their families, the institution and society. To me, that's what the film is really about. Three knights going into battle.

In the final dinner scene we realize that while the association is a great source of support, it can be confining for some members.
Just because you've gone through the same thing and are fighting for the same cause doesn't mean you will automatically become the best of friends. Tensions begin to rise among the members of the association early on, and that final dinner scene crystalizes the misunderstandings and the differences in social standing, life experience and education.

BY THE GRACE OF GOD is very different from TIME TO LEAVE (Le Temps qui Reste). Has anything changed about the way François Ozon works?
No, except that he's working even faster now! More than ever, I felt he was in complete control of his direction. He's so lively and agile on the set that I told him for a future film he should hire a mini-crew and do everything himself, in the spirit of Eric Rohmer! I really appreciate the lack of downtime.



When you first arrive on his set you might be surprised by the sheer rapidity and worry about whether you really gave it your all during the take. But once you've seen François filming the other actors and realize it's his approach and he won't stop until he gets what he wants, you let that go and relax into the work.

What was it like working with Denis Ménochet and Swann Arlaud?
I didn't really know Denis before. I like him a lot. He plunged in head first, entered the ring fighting, just like his character! As for Swann, I felt close to him without really knowing him. He was far more relaxed and serene. He was happy to be working with François and it was clear that François felt a great tenderness for him and for his character. The shoot really flowed. There was a naturel easiness between us.

What did you think when you saw the film?
The film is masterful in its sobriety, efficiency and depth. François leaves aside his propensity to provoke. I like that too, but it would have been inappropriate here. His direction isn't showy or spectacular, but it is stylish in three distinct ways. My part is quite solemn. Lingering shots in chiaroscuro convey my penitent, internalized struggle with the Church, with its vast, hazy rooms and silent corridors suggesting a cloak over everything. A cloak that is not without beauty. There are hints of Visconti in the ways the places are portrayed and the people are behaving.
The film picks up the pace and moves closer to the actors as it shifts its focus to the tenacious François. Then it becomes more visceral, more like Fassbinder, when it turns its attention to Emmanuel.

The film ends on Alexandre's face after his son asks him, "Do you still believe in God?"
That was a difficult scene to play. Everything was in the eyes. The trick was to not do too much in either direction. The beauty of this ending is that it's open. People can project what they want onto it. And it was important for it to be his son who asks him the question, suggesting a fourth relay handover.
If I were Alexandre, I would still believe in God despite the hardships endured. But it's good to leave the ending ambiguous. It's good to leave the film with that question on your mind. François says he's not a believer, but I say BY THE GRACE OF GOD is the film of a man who admirably understands the complexities of faith.

INTERVIEW

DENIS MÉNOCHET

How did François Ozon approach you about working together again?

François is one of the great directors of his generation.
And a friend. I felt very lucky that he chose to work with me again, especially on a film that, I hope, is going to shake up quite a few people.
We met for lunch and he told me about the project. As we were parting ways, I asked him what the name of the film would be. BY THE GRACE OF GOD was the last thing he said to me. I found myself walking through the streets alone, stunned by that powerful title. At the time I wasn't aware that Cardinal Barbarin had actually said those words.
Throughout the development stages François showed me screen tests, had me read scenes, asked me questions. Though I'm not responsible for anything in particular, I felt included in the process, and that was a great joy.



BY THE GRACE OF GOD feels a bit like a documentary in the way it follows the Barbarin affair and the creation of the association *Lift the Burden of Silence.*

We'd all heard about Preynat and Barbarin in the papers or on television, we know there are many cases of pedophilia in the Church, the media reports statistics, people make comments on Twitter... But the powerful thing about the film is that it takes us inside the story. We're right there with the people it happened to, we see first-hand the damage such abuse causes, we think about the consequences to their lives. The pedophile acts become doubly criminal - it's not only the molesting itself, but also the years of emotional trauma it causes.

How did you approach your character, based on a real person?

Obviously I watched a lot of interviews of the real François. I tried to adopt some of his expressions, but I didn't want to go overboard. François (Ozon) and the costume designer Pascaline Chavanne planned for me to wear more or less the same type of clothes as him, but I didn't want to slip into imitation or become a cardboard cutout. It wouldn't have served anyone to have me become a caricature.
In the end I was above all carried by the subject, which touched me personally. I completely surrendered to the story, bringing all my compassion and focusing on what it's like to have been abused as a child. When you discuss it with people, you learn that many experienced similar trauma during their childhood.

Did you meet the real François?

I ran into him. We were shooting in his house and he was staying in the same hotel as we were. But I didn't want to talk to him, especially as we were in the middle of the shoot. I would've suddenly gotten the feeling I wasn't in the right place, I'd missed something. I preferred to stay in the energy I'd originally developed for the character, put my humanity into his story. All while admiring the real François and what he did.

In addition to research directly linked to the Preynat affair, did you watch any particular films to find the righteous energy of your character?

I watched a lot of documentaries about scouts. I recorded them on my phone and on set, I would listen to the innocence of those children playing in the woods whenever I lost my energy and my sense of revolt among the agitation that reigns on a shoot, especially an Ozon shoot where everything goes so fast! I'd put in my earbuds and, like Dumbo's feather, those voices would help me get centered again, remind me why I was doing the film.

Your character François is the most combative and unforgiving member of the association.
Yes, he's quite a fighter. He enters the ring fists flying, he really wants to change things. He can't imagine settling for Preynat's excuses and forgiving him. But François is not out for revenge or on a mission to exterminate evil. His aim is to expose the abuse and the dramatic consequences it has on the victims' lives, and especially, to denounce the silent complicity of the Church and its authorities.

As a child he was able to tell his parents about it and they listened, but he was afraid of being responsible for Preynat's imprisonment.
Yes, and afraid he and his family would be stigmatized in their neighborhood and rejected by their fervent Catholic friends. So the family chose to write to the hierarchy and try to get Preynat removed from a position where he could do harm. And they thought they had succeeded, because the institution said, "Yes, of course, we will transfer him." Preynat was indeed transferred, but he was still in contact with children! People who abuse children are called pedophiles, but what do we call people who close their eyes to that abuse and merely transfer the pedophile to another location with other children? There's no word to define such a criminal. It's time to find one.

The film leaves plenty of room for indignation, yet it's not anticlerical.
Definitely not, and that's good. People's faith is precious to them, going to mass, having those moral guidelines, a way of living life with love. Faith inspires goodness and compassion, all those beautiful ideals at the heart of the Church's teachings. BY THE GRACE OF GOD is not anti-Church, but it wants the Church to open its eyes to these criminal acts, clean house and rise again. And maybe allow priests, hetero or homo, to have a sex life of their own and let children figure theirs out without interference.

During the press conference, your character sticks to the facts with the ruthless determination of an American film hero.
That's the powerful thing about the film, it sticks to the facts without accusing anyone. François wanted me to keep that press conference scene simple and factual. There was no need to be emphatic. The righteous energy came out naturally in the tone of my voice. The factual nature of the script becomes even more troubling as the actors embody the characters, adding their humanity and bringing the audience into the story. At one point during the shoot I was watching Swann and Josiane talking in the distance and it dawned on me that this story I knew by heart was taking on a new dimension.
Josiane is wonderful in the film. She says three lines and blows everyone away. As for Melvil, I've never seen him better. And Swann is just a Stradivarius.

How did you experience the shoot?
In the beginning I was focused on the job at hand, but the subject matter was so disturbing that some days I couldn't say lines I knew by heart or even get out of bed. It was as though my body had frozen in fear of confronting the story. Luckily François supported me all the way through it. And there was a lot of love between the actors. I didn't really know Melvil or Swann beforehand, but we became very close, very united.

Do you like François Ozon's fast working pace?
No, I don't like it! François has a different concept of acting than I do. He charges ahead with his characteristic impatience. You have to keep moving with him. It can be frustrating not to have more time to try and do better. I've told him but he doesn't care, he's happy, he got what he wanted!
Nevertheless, it's a joy to work with him. I trust him completely. He knows how to answer my questions. His instincts and his choices are impressively precise, he always has his finger on the right pulse. I learn so much with him.
I detect a progression in his way of working. It may also be due to the nature of this film, so different from the more distanced tone of IN THE HOUSE (DANS LA MAISON). On this film, I felt he was entirely in service to the subject and really playing along with us. That impression is all the more striking because he frames the shots himself.

Were you surprised he took on a project like this?
Not at all! François' filmography has always been extremely varied. But I do think he's starting a new chapter in his artistic career, with complete confidence in his filmmaking, which here he's using to serve a noble cause.
It's rare to have an opportunity to be in a film that provokes debate and raises awareness in a way that, I hope, will lead to necessary measures being taken to protect lives. CUSTODY (JUSQU'À LA GARDE) was one such film. I'm very proud of making these choices. Acting is a vain profession, but here, the vanity is put to good use!



INTERVIEW

SWANN ARLAUD

Tell us about meeting François Ozon.
He called me himself. UNDER THE SAND (SOUS LE SABLE) had made a big impression on me, and I really liked 8 WOMEN (8 FEMMES), POTICHE and IN THE HOUSE, so I was flattered that he contacted me. However when he told me he was preparing a film about a pedophile case, I have to admit I was a bit concerned. Knowing his work, I feared he might go to some pretty murky places. He hadn't finished writing the part of the script about my character, so I tentatively agreed pending a chance to read the script. Two weeks later I got the script and accepted with no hesitation.

Of the film's three protagonists, Emmanuel has the most painful private life.
When François told me about the film he said, "The first guy is a devout Catholic, married with five kids. The second is an atheist, very militant. And the third guy is really having a hard time." I knew right away he was offering me the third guy! It was so obvious. I seem to attract these roles.

How did you approach your character?
Emmanuel was abused before his sexuality had time to develop. He's clearly a wounded man, but I imagined him compensating for his bruised virility with strong outward signs of masculinity: an earring, a mustache, a motorcycle, leather... so many layers behind which he could hide. Composing his look really helped me get into character and connect to his pain.

Your character viscerally refuses to forgive.
And I get that! To me, there is no forgiveness. Nothing can diminish the pain Preynat inflicted on those children. To prepare for the role, I spent a lot of time on Lift the Burden's website. François also recommended documentaries about pedophile cases. Hearing all those victims' stories and diving into the script gave me nightmares. By the end I couldn't take it anymore. I was very upset, especially since I'd just become a father.

On the shoot things were simpler. I was focused on playing the role. Since seeing the film, I've had times when I feel upset. This subject makes me crazy with rage. For centuries, abuse like this has been part of human society and it's still being covered up. Raping a child is one of the most horrific things imaginable. How can society and the Church find even the slightest excuse for such acts?

Preynat's guilt is established from the start of the film.
Yes, and we're all the more shocked at the unbelievable way the institution handles it. Preynat admits his guilt, the Church acknowledges his admission, they say a prayer, they hold hands, they're a bit disappointed that he doesn't ask forgiveness, and that's it. We also hear the very beautiful letter Alexandre wrote to the Pope, but there is no follow-up to that either, despite the powerful rhetoric.
The film builds its suspense not on the guilt of Preynat or the Church but rather on the struggle of a handful of men to bring the story to light and make it a national issue.

Was making this film a political act for you?
It's hard for me as an actor to say I'm putting my political convictions into the films I make. That's more the director's role. But deep down, there is a bit of that in this case. I'm concerned on a personal level about this subject, and I was glad to be part of a film that tells the story differently than the media. When you watch the news, the headlines and the shocking images all become kind of normalized. And now, suddenly, this film tells the private, intimate stories of people who were abused thirty years ago. It shows us how their lives were messed up, how it's all still very raw. Fiction brings a broader dimension to the journalistic facts.

Unlike Alexandre and François, Emmanuel has trouble in his relationship after he speaks out.
Emmanuel met a girl with a similar history who'd been abused too. But the justice system was hard on her and her family came apart as a result. I thought it was interesting to show that, as opposed to Alexandre's wife, those who get the least help, the least support, are the ones most likely to lash out violently. Life just never seems to let up on them. As Victor Hugo said, misery is to blame.

The film also questions the way we listen to children, how we hear them, how we understand them.
It's not enough to want to listen to your child. You need to have the time and the emotional space. How could Emmanuel's mother hear her son, when she herself was dealing with a move triggered by a divorce from a gruff man who only made things harder and was even less capable of hearing their child?
The way children express themselves in these situations is complicated and can be difficult to interpret, as evidenced in the scene in which Emmanuel reproaches his mother. He says, "I told you Preynat kissed me, why didn't you say anything?" And she replies, "But he kissed all the children after Mass." What is a child saying, and at what point do we consider there's a problem? Children know when something's not right, but they don't always know how to express it clearly. As we were making the film it became clear to me that the first step should be the removal of the statute of limitations. Children who've been abused often need a lot of time to come forward. Since the shoot, the statute of limitations has gone from 20 to 30 years, which is a good start.

You enter the film after an hour and a half, adding a more visceral tone. Was that a daunting position to be in?
Thanks to François I felt confident, I felt like I was the cherry on the cake! And the idea of handling the darker part of the film appealed to me.
The film hits the ground running. Alexandre is in constant motion, walking, taking trains. We hear his emails in voiceover, the actual email exchanges from real life. The film here has the power of a documentary and an educational dimension that



Melvil handles admirably, because he's very touching. Denis moves us into more militant and rebellious territory, and we start enjoying ourselves because the institution is no longer giving us the runaround, now we're stirring things up! We feel good, we're looking forward to him getting it all out in the media. Then Emmanuel comes along and takes us to a purely visceral place. We feel like we're on a tightrope and everything could shift in an instant. It's important to show the different experiences of different victims. It's important to show that Emmanuel is not a saint, that he can suddenly become violent, that the abuses he suffered have had repercussions on his body and in his mind and have affected the way he feels about his sexuality. It was important to go there. We would almost understand if he grabbed a rifle and set off to shoot Preynat.

How did you approach playing an epileptic?

Through a friend, I met a woman who is an epileptic. She's taken a great interest in her affliction, doing a lot of research and even making a short film which includes a scene in which she experiences an epileptic seizure. That scene really helped me a lot. We talked at length and she helped me understand what happens in your body when you have a seizure. The synapses no longer connect and your body asks your brain, "Where are you?" Scenes like this are difficult because you're always afraid you won't be credible. The only way I could do it was to rehearse a lot, practice having seizures. And there was a doctor on set to make sure it was realistic.

What was it like working with François Ozon?

First we read the script out loud together and he listened to what I had to say. François is very open to whatever you might propose, he writes everything down. I had totally rewritten a few things, I really got into it! He takes it or leaves it, as he sees fit, which is fine. You're working together, it's not a power struggle. And when he keeps something in that you're not feeling, he explains why. All that work may not seem like much, but it makes it so that when you arrive on set, you feel you've appropriated the project and mastered your character. You don't have to think anymore, you just have to do.

What was it like on set?

Working with François is very enjoyable for an actor. You feel he sees you and appreciates you in the right way. He frames the shots, he's really with us, he's in on the secret of the acting. And he works quickly. It was one of the rare film shoots where I never spent an hour in a chair doing nothing. Once the work starts, you keep moving forward and never break character.

François never tries to push you into a place that doesn't fit. He goes with who you are and trusts you. You feel free to improvise and he feels free to direct you during the takes. You'll be playing a scene and suddenly he says, "Light a cigarette, go get a glass of water..." The scene where I slap my girlfriend wasn't planned, for example. And sometimes at the end of a take he says action again! So we take it from the top, a bit agitated. All of that brings truth to the acting. Seeing the finished film, I realize he was responsible for a lot of what came out of me inadvertently: a tear, an emotion, a moment of irritation...

The confrontation with Preynat at the police station is particularly poignant.

The Césars Ceremony (the French Oscar) happened three days before we shot that. I came to work that Tuesday with one of the hardest scenes to play, and I'd just been named the year's so-called best actor! The pressure was insane. I was terrified, feverish, so I went to see François. "My acting has gone downhill since I got that César, hasn't it?" He laughed and said, "No, not yet!"

What was your reaction when you saw BY THE GRACE OF GOD?

François is a great director. His direction is powerful, and sometimes very visible, as in DOUBLE LOVER. Here it seems he has adopted a more discreet position in service to his subject. Everything is sober and unpretentious, which did not prevent me from crying the whole way through. He has made a film that is not a tract against the Church when frankly, it quite justifiably could have been. But he was right. It's more true and powerful this way.

What is your relationship to faith?

I was raised in a completely anticlerical environment, which doesn't stop me from having a relationship with the invisible, which I believe also exists in all forms of art. I was a total believer, almost a mystic, when I was a child. I've always spent a lot of time reflecting about death, life, the unknown, the cosmos! I'm an agnostic believer. Faith to me is something we have inside that helps us live with the mysteries of life and alterity.



UPDATE ON THE PREYNAT CASE

AS OF JANUARY 2019

Father Preynat was indicted in January 2016 and placed under judicial supervision for sexual assault. More than 70 alleged victims have been identified by *La Parole Libérée*. In the majority of cases the statute of limitations has expired.

The investigation is still ongoing. No date has yet been set for his trial and he remains innocent until proven guilty.

Father Preynat also faces a canonical trial, which will resume in a "judicial" format following a year's suspension at the request of Cardinal Barbarin "so as not to impede the civil procedure" in order to open the way to "reparations."

Cardinal Barbarin, Régine Maire and five other members of the Catholic hierarchy appeared in court in January 2019 for non-disclosure of sexual assault on minors under the age of 15 and failure to provide assistance. The verdict will be rendered on March 7, 2019.

On August 3, 2018, the statute of limitations was raised from 20 to 30 years after the victim reaches the age of majority. And failure to report sexual abuse of minors is now considered a continuing offense.

In November 2018 in Lourdes, 118 French bishops voted to set up an independent committee to address pedophilia in the Church since 1950.



CAST

Alexandre Guérin	Melvil POUPAUD
François Debord	Denis MÉNOCHET
Emmanuel Thomassin	Swann ARLAUD
Gilles Perret	Eric CARAVACA
Cardinal Barbarin	François MARTHOURET
Bernard Preynat	Bernard VERLEY
Régine Maire	Martine ERHEL
Irène	Josiane BALASKO
Odile Debord	Hélène VINCENT
Pierre Debord	François CHATTOT
Chief Courteau	Frédéric PIERROT
Marie Guérin	Aurélia PETIT
Aline Debord	Julie DUCLOS
Dominique Perret	Jeanne ROSA
Jennifer	Amélie DAURE
Olivier Itaque	Nicolas BRIDET
Didier	Pierre LOTTIN
François' Lawyer	Fejria DELIBA
Emmanuel's Lawyer	Baya REHAZ
Louis Debord	Stéphane BREL
Sylvie Debord	Pauline ZIADE
Suzanne Cremer	Martine SCHAMBACHER
Maxime Frillon	Serge FLAMENBAUM
Emmanuel's Father	Christian SINNIGER
Nicole	Bernadette LE SACHE
Gauthier Guérin	Max LIBERT
Victor Guérin	Nicolas BAUWENS



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CREW

Written and directed by	François OZON
Produced by	Eric & Nicolas ALTMAYER
Director of Photography	Manu DACOSSE
Production Designer	Emmanuelle DUPLAY
Costume Designer	Pascaline CHAVANNE
Key Makeup Artist	Natali TABAREAU-VIEUILLE
Key Hair Stylist	Franck-Pascal ALQUINET
Casting Directors	David BERTRAND
	Anaïs DURAN
Editor	Laure GARDETTE
Sound Editor	Benoît GARGONNE
Sound Mixer	Jean-Paul HURIER
Original Score	Evgueni & Sacha GALPERINE
Production Manager	Aude CATHELIN
1st Assistant Director	Alain OLIVIERI
Script Supervisor	Joëlle HERSANT
Location Manager	Amélie SUPAU
Set Photographer	Jean-Claude MOIREAU

A theatrical version of the screenplay has been published by Les Solitaires Intempestifs.

Original score by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine, available on CD, vinyl and online (Music Box Distribution).