

Spaces of Untouchability:
Investigating the Space between Catholic Sexual Ethics and the Catholic Sexual Abuse
Crisis

by

Isabella Sherwood-Reid

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation in Religious Studies.

Whitman College
2020

Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Isabella Sherwood-Reid has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Religious Studies.

Lauren Osborne

Whitman College
May 20, 2020

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of the labors of many and the product of their unwavering support throughout a year of immensely challenging and heartbreaking work. To each member of the religious studies department at Whitman, thank you, most especially Courtney Fitzsimmons for her critical eye and mutual love of perhaps-excessively-long talks on our state of being, Katharine Mershon for her compassion and enduring, quiet support of the uncomfortable, Lauren Osborne for her expressive teaching that enticed me to study religion in the first place and fiber art inspiration, Jon Walters for his perpetual and thorough feedback and enduring positivity, and Walt Wyman for giving me the historical theological basis upon which this thesis is built. To my sisters in Bettie, thank you for walking with my in my valley of shadows, Maeve McCracken for sending her love all the way from France, and Alie Zagata and Sarah Fassio for providing escapes from my work and gossip in the kitchen. To my family, I am unfathomably grateful for your guidance and love throughout my collegiate experience: my father, Mark Reid, for granting me the opportunity to study what I love, my mama, Jessica Sherwood, for your understanding and tenderness from day one, my darling sister, Harper Sherwood-Reid, for the sharpest editing and gentlest sisterhood, and my nephew, Anubis, for being the best tiny bat boy. To Eric Wiessner, my beloved, I could not have done this without you, your advocacy for me, your gentleness, and your great excitement for this completion of this behemoth. Finally, to God, may my voice be used to amplify the downtrodden, and may this work contribute to your kindom of love and justice.

Abstract

This thesis examines the historical, theological, and social factors that have contributed to the sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The author asserts that a combination of these factors, in addition to, namely, a rejection and denial of sex and sexuality as abstract concepts, has allowed space for the preponderance and cover-up of sexual abuse occurring in the Catholic Church. Utilizing a synthesis of official Church doctrine, individual testimony, and public response through an empowering and inclusive lens, the author illustrates how the untouchability of the realm of sexuality has perpetuated repression of sexuality and sexual acts. Additionally, the historical analysis of the practice and theology of celibacy and the clerical state provide context for how historical theology pertains to modern religion and the daily lives of the religious. The ultimate aim of this work is to challenge commonly held perspectives regarding the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, especially those that incite further blame and shame upon victims, as well as rejection of the entirety of religion. Religions, like all systems of social organization, are historically situated, and equally subject to oppressive hierarchies, abuses of power, and rejection of the unknown. In approaching such systems with compassion, rather than accusation, religious scholars, theologians, sociologists, queer theorists, and emerging fields of inclusive study will be able to explore the obscured elements of those systems with more awareness for their own biases, and, ideally, illuminate the unknowable and reveal the untouchable.

Introduction

At the outset of the twenty-first century, the revelation of the sexual abuse of children, minors, and vulnerable adults by priests of the Catholic Church shook the global Catholic community, as was the admittance that it had been purposefully concealed for decades—perhaps centuries.¹ This revelation was deliberated by every echelon of society from Hollywood to the Pope; tabloids to lay constituents; academia to current men religious. There seem to be no bounds to the scope and perversity of the scandal. For all the reports of sexual abuse among Catholic clergy, a crucial voice remains absent—that of institutional Catholicism itself, the voice at the core of the issue. A *New York Times* article articulating the Catholic response to the growing sexual abuse crisis cited feelings of grief, sadness, feelings of betrayal, and even anger among the faithful. Interviewee Jessica Bede, a parishioner of Our Lady of Peace Church in Manhattan, even went so far as to say Jesus would be disappointed in the state of his Church.² The crisis challenges the presumption of morality that comes with adherence to the religious ethic of Catholicism, making it difficult to enact ones practice and

¹ ‘Catholic,’ as with any other collective religious identity, can be difficult to define and delineate. For the purposes of this thesis ‘Catholic’ will pertain to all of those who self-identify as such, in accordance with the strategies of most recent Pew Research Institute practices (Podrebarac Scuipac et al., "Confidence in Pope Francis Down Sharply in U.S.," Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life.) Furthermore, the Catholic Church, as an institution, is centered on its own dogma and orthodoxy, I find it appropriate to refer to the institution as a subject and acting body. This will always be in reference to the official and purported teachings, ethic, and message of the Catholic Church and the Vatican as the governing body thereof. Additionally, in order to specify when I am referring to the Catholic Church as an institution, all references will be capitalized as proper nouns, ie. Church, not church.

² Ibid.

identify as Catholic in the current day and age.³ It is unclear for those questioning the role of the Church in their lives and in the world whether the sexual abuse crisis is a result of human frailty in the face of sin, or if humans fundamentally need sexual intimacy and the Church is at fault for suppressing of those needs, or if the revelation of the depth of the crisis and its coverup is the result of something else entirely. Regardless of the cause, the most alarming aspect of the revelation of the sexual abuse crisis for believers is the fear that clergy—selected, trained, publicly acknowledged moral leaders, the official representatives of Jesus Christ—are not more moral, dependable, honest, and psychologically integrated than the general population.⁴ Two thousand years of veneration of the celibate clerical status and development of the priesthood has not led to a significant change in how individuals engage with sexual activity and sexuality in the Church; instead, the Church finds itself at the center of an international crisis of sexual morality.

³ Campbell Robertson and Sharon Otterman, “‘It’s Really Hard to Be a Catholic’: The Pain of Reading the Sex Abuse Report,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2018.

⁴ AW Richard Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis: A Secret World Revisited*, (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), 236.

Catholic understandings of sex/uality⁵ are based in the formally explicated Catholic sexual ethic. The ethic is based wholly in the Bible and the historical works of the Church Fathers, and is accepted as both reasonable and irrefutable on the basis of Church claims that all its teachings, catechisms, and laws stem from the word of God⁶ written in the Bible and the uniform, consistent interpretation thereof. The Catholic reforms of Vatican II in the late 1960s declare that the task of giving an authentic interpretation to the word of God has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Catholic Church alone, adhering infallibly to the will of God.⁷ This seemingly perfect ethic, however, does not explicitly discuss the celibacy it imposes on Catholic clergy. Rather, it focuses on sex/uality within marriage, and within exclusively heterosexual marriage; this emphasis minimizes the struggles of celibate clerical realities. The celibate state itself, imperfectly integrated into the psyche, can be fraught with loneliness, guilt, and denial, none of which are accepted topics of interrogation even

⁵ Sex as will or action and sexuality as orientation are very much intertwined, yet the Catholic Church holds that there is no such thing as a sexual orientation, only sexual behavior as a result of urge and action (Rev. Ronald Lawler, Joseph Boyle Jr and William E. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation and Defense*, (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998), 185.) This complicates the terms of sex and sexuality as they are used to refer both to the queer identity of celibates (Westar Institute/Jesus Seminar, “Pride Month, Queer Theory, and the Bible,” YouTube, July 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSQgmnlhztM&feature=youtu.be>.), and how they choose to enact, or not enact, whatever other sexually-attractive orientations they may hold. For the purposes of reconciling these two disparate perspectives on the nature of the sexual action and sexuality of priests, I use ‘sex/uality’ to refer to this concept, which implies the linkage and discontinuity of sex and sexuality, as well as the reality of non-heteronormative sexual identities, in necessary applicability to Catholic ethic and perspective.

⁶ Gender is a social construct created by humans, and it therefore becomes complicated and quite frankly problematic to impose human perceptions of gender onto God, who is very explicitly not human. However, I must have some basis upon which to reference God in this thesis. I have therefore decided to follow the Catholic convention of using capitalized masculine pronouns when referring to God, keeping with the Catholic lens of this project, and the most common usage.

⁷ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 19.

among a community comprised entirely of celibate men. Violation of the celibate vow is therefore unmentionable, and the boundary between moral and sinful sexual behavior for clerics is undefined. In conjunction with the obscurity of applied Catholic sexual ethics, there is a culture of hidden separateness within the Catholic Church as an institution between ethics and practice, brotherhood and hierarchy, holy love and earthly power. Beginning in seminary, orthodoxy and obedience are favored, while free inquiry and ambition are condemned, establishing a rigid structure in the all-male clerical hierarchy. While there is nothing objectionable in this alone, it has a propensity to lead to oppressive forms of interaction and organization termed ‘clericalism,’ which raises male clergy members to an informally holier status than lay members, based on the relative power of their position in the Church.

Catholic ethics refuse to engage with untenable celibate behavior, which, in itself, is a willful ignorance enough to cause moral confusion. However, there are other constructed elements of Catholicism that contribute to this space where ethics no longer apply. The space of mental untouchability in Catholic sexual ethics is constructed through several modes of operation within the Catholic Church, which serve to obscure sexual realities and sexual abuse. The glorification of suffering, based on the Passion of the Christ, is the exemplar and ideal for humbling the body. That veneration enables a perspective which obscures bodily trauma, valorizing it as something holy, negating interrogation and compassionate treatment of physical, mental, and spiritual injury. Invalidating the terror of trauma primes Church officials to not perceive the sexual abuse crisis as a truly trauma-producing pattern. The Catholic

Church as a governing body and educational institution stands to be distorted by its hyper-masculine hierarchy which prioritizes orthodoxy and obeisance. Clericalism, as a manifestation of that distortion, in combination with the absence of clarity and instruction on the celibate sex/uality, valorization of mortifying the body, and facts regarding how pedophiles and other perpetrators of clerical sexual abuse seek victims coalesce to make a space of cognitive untouchability within the Catholic sexual ethic.

This space, and the refusal to acknowledge that there *is* space untouched by ethics within the Church, have created a situation within which child sexual abuse and its coverup can occur due to an inacknowledgement of practical ethical standards. It is not an inevitability, but rather the result of a continued refusal to engage with any non-heterosexual, non-marital forms of sexual ethics—within a structure that glorifies the celibate status in clericalism—that perpetuates an avoidance of these issues. Based in analysis of the Catholic sexual ethic, the lens through which I examine the whole of the sexual abuse crisis, I interpret how the crisis has been handled and responded to by Catholics in accordance with the sexual ethic, and the absence of an applicable ethic, to reaffirm the existence of the space between ethic and practice where sexual abuse and coverup occurs. Essentially I argue that the way that Church law is orchestrated under the patriarchal hierarchy creates the possibility of acting antithetically to its teachings due to the ethics' inapplicability to particular modern situations and crises. Additionally it also fails to take into account present physical and psychological understandings of the intimate inner-workings of the body and brain. This is not an indictment of the Catholic Church, nor is it a proposal for prescriptive reform or alteration of Church

practice, ethic, or law. It is not my place to call for these things particularly given my identities as a non-Catholic, therefore as an academic outsider on the matter. Rather, based on my external analysis of the Catholic sexual ethic, I seek to address why prior attempts at reform have not succeeded as a result of spaces where instruction, institution, and reality no longer intersect, and examine how and why that space has the potential to allow and conceal the sexual abuse of minors.

Systematic and Practical Catholic Sexual Ethics

To fully understand how the sexual abuse crisis is a Catholic problem, it must be investigated as a *Catholic* problem, and therefore through the lens of the Catholic ethic itself. In order to understand how particularly Catholic perceptions of the crisis form, it is imperative to examine the Catholic sexual ethic as put forth by the Church itself.⁸ All members of the Catholic Church, and most especially the clergy, ought to be operating under the Catholic ethic, and it is important to acknowledge that there is a difference between modern, secular, and liberal sexual ethics and those of the Catholic Church. Firstly, the Catholic sexual ethic prioritizes sexual ethic in marital relations and contradictorily refuses to engage fully with the nature of the celibate status it imposes upon itself. Such fervent concentration on sexual relations within heterosexual marriage creates an impression that the Church is actively engaged with questions of sex/uality, when, in practice, that engagement only applies to a portion of the totality of human sex/uality. As a result, celibate sex/uality, according to the Catholic ethic, is defined solely by absence and opposition, and is not interrogated with the same urgency as marital sex/uality. The celibate status itself and its theological justifications

⁸ I use Father Ronald Lawler, Captain Joseph Boyle Jr., and Professor William May's book *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation and Defense* as the theological Catholic basis for my understanding of the sexual ethic. The primary reason I chose this text in particular is because it is ratified by the institution of the Catholic Church as in alignment with its currently held views. This ratification is evidenced by a few notes in the front of the work, essentially equivalent to a peer review, which ensure that the work is free of doctrinal or moral error according to Church officials. In this case, *Nihil Obstat*, meaning 'no objection' and *Imprimatur*, which is a license issued by the Church to permit publishing of religious books, are used, verified by a censor in the former case and the Vicar General of the Archbishop of Washington in the latter. The Archbishop of Washington himself also wrote a forward to the second edition of the book, furthering the Church's evident support of the teachings enclosed therein.

have been secured in Catholic ethics through thousands of years of reasoning, despite celibacy's initial formal institution for social, political, and institutional simplicity.⁹ Extracting the power of the Church from the secular concerns issues of paternity, property, and power—more specifically preventing bishops from fathering children and creating genetically held positions or transference of Church property to children or spouses upon his death—was a financial and bureaucratic decision.¹⁰ While this does not demean the worth of celibacy for Catholics as indicative of sacrifice out of love of God, it does testify to the Catholic Church's tendency toward incorporating institutional ideals into theological ethics.

In acknowledgement of this thesis' focus on the Catholic sexual abuse crisis, and therefore on the celibate state of priests, it is necessary to properly explicate the Catholic understanding of sex/uality. I preface this outlining of the Catholic sexual ethic, as presently held and promoted by the Catholic Church, by noting that the ethic does focus primarily on sexual activity within and pertaining to marriage. In so doing, the doctrine forms a negative definition of celibacy, as neither deviant sexual behavior nor ordered marital behavior. This emphasis, however, does not draw away from the value or applicability of the Catholic sexual ethic pertaining to the sexual abuse crisis. It serves instead to support the notion that the sexual abuse crisis is both systemic and individual, a division stemming in part from the insufficiency of Catholic dialogue about the nature of sex/uality beyond the bounds of marriage. Understanding the

⁹ Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender Power and Organizational Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

untouched chasm in which the Church places sex/uality and how it perceives right sexual action clarifies the liminal, ambiguous position of the celibate state, and explicates how that in turn informs the official Catholic stance on the sex/uality as a whole.

The Church locates the source of the sacrament of holy matrimony¹¹ in Genesis and the indissoluble union of Adam and Eve¹² in their prelapsinarian¹³ state in the Garden of Eden.¹⁴ God created Adam and Eve as complimentary parts in the image of God, which came together in one flesh, before the Fall,¹⁵ in a sinless union, an ordered

¹¹ In accordance with the Catholic Catechism 1601, "the marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament (Canon 1055)." Catechisms 1660 and 1638 then affirm the sacramental nature of the marital bond, which produces grace for the purposes of counteracting original sin along with Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony (Catechism 1210).

¹² "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.'" (Gen 2:23 (New Revised Standard Version).)

¹³ The prelapsinarian state is that of total innocence prior to the Fall. I am using this term instead of 'innocence' because it connotes more accurately the theological weight of Adam and Eve's union in the absence of sin.

¹⁴ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 22.

¹⁵ The Fall is the theological term applied to the moment in which Adam and Eve fell from prelapsinarian innocence in the garden of Eden. Catholic Catechisms 416-421 describe the Fall as follows: in their disobedience to God by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve abused their free will and turned away from God (Gen 2:17). They have transmitted this nature, deprived of original holiness and justice, to all their decedents by the name of 'original sin.' As Adam is humanity in the body of one man (St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* 4:1), all are implicated equally in original sin. Subsequently, all humans have an inclination to sin, called 'concupiscence.' Concupiscence is the inclination to sin inherent in all persons, more specifically and within the breadth of this essay, concupiscence refers to the uncontrollable desires and yearnings of the sexual body (Aline H. Kalbian, *Sexing the Church: Gender Power and Ethics in Contemporary Catholicism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 3.) Although, for Catholics, the victory that Christ won over sin abounded greater blessings than those which original sin deprives, a legacy in which all are equally implicated as well (Rom 5:20). Thus the Catholic implication of the Fall is that the transmission of original sin with inclination towards it conferred on all humans as decedents of Adam and Eve.

mode of sex/uality.¹⁶ God created these forms of order, which, according to Catholic doctrine, humans intrinsically strive to respect and fulfill.¹⁷ As a result of the Fall, sin and disorder came into being; Adam and Eve discovered their nakedness and feelings of shame, feelings which are together indicative of how the Catholic Church believes sex/uality and the holy body as created by God were wounded by the presence of sin.¹⁸ This order, sanctified in marriage, reproduces the proper relationship of humans with God, orders the passions to the will in chastity,¹⁹ and symbolically recreates the union of Jesus Christ and the Church, all of which provide special graces, according to Catholic doctrine.²⁰ In the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus, the son of God, prelapsinarian perfection is restored.²¹ The evidence of the divine reinstatement of the

¹⁶ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 36.

“Some Pharisees came to [Jesus], and to test him they asked; ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’ and said ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Mt 19:6)

¹⁷ Kalbian, *Sexing the Church*, 6.

¹⁸ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 49.

¹⁹ Catechism 2337 describes chastity as “...the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.” Chastity thus mirrors and embodies the order of God and the utilization of the good gift of sex/uality for holy and more prelapsinarian purposes.

²⁰ In accordance with Catholic Catechism 1996, grace is “*favor*, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.” The application of grace to the marital union is extrapolated in *Catholic Sexual Ethics* as Christ instituted and perfected the sacrament of marriage, which sanctifies the spouses and gives to them, regardless of deservingness, the help necessary to overcome the Fall and become perfected as in Eden. (Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 23.)

²¹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 130.

holiness of marriage, and subsequent the reordering of the body and sex/uality to the will of God, is indicated in Jesus' presence at the feast of Cana.²² His presence affirms the inherent goodness of the marital union,²³ which situates Jesus himself as a crucial element in the reconstruction of moral sex/uality. In Catholicism, the act of conjugal love in the marital union not only exemplifies some of the highest virtues of the Church, but imitates the holy love of Christ himself as professed in the sixth commandment,²⁴ through the facilitation of conjugal fidelity and charity which enables humans to learn how to deeply and unconditionally love another. The sacrament of marriage is the only moral outlet for sexual desire, due to the imperfection and sin resulting from the Fall; further, it provides grace and order to sex/uality that can heal the soul from original sin.

Considering the holiness of Catholic love and marriage in the context of sexual desire and disordered passion after the Fall, the Catholic interpretation of 1 Corinthians affirms marriage as the sole means of expression for any sexual desire or activity, for it is better to engage in sexual activity within marriage than to be tormented by the thought of it while unmarried.²⁵ Catholic teaching on proper sexual conduct within

²² "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples has also been invited to the wedding." (John 2:1-2)

²³ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 48.

²⁴ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 24.

²⁵ "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (1 Cor 7:8-9)

marriage emphasizes a necessary order of the human goods²⁶ in marriage; any action that fails to properly acknowledge this God-given order of the relation between sex and marriage to its natural productive ends—that of children—is therefore immoral.²⁷ Doctrinally, the separation of pleasure and conception does not honor the Catholic criteria for ethical sexual action. True acknowledgement of the natural worth of a human person, respect of total self-giving in conjugal love, and procreative motivation are necessary for a sexual act to be morally good. In other words, if the sexual act takes place such that conception would not be possible, or such that it is not motivated by procreation, it is anathema in Catholic teaching.²⁸ This interpretation of the sexual ethic is extrapolated into sexual behavior by Catholic catechists Father Ronald Lawler, Captain Joseph Boyle Jr., and Professor William May, “... sensuality and sexual desires, under the influence of sinful concupiscence, can lead us to treat persons as objects of sexual gratification and not as irreplaceable and nonsubstitutable persons with whom we must join in community that respects the dignity of all.”²⁹ Therefore, based on this view of conferring of charity and resulting conception of children as the

²⁶ These goods are threefold; first, the procreation and education of children for the worship of God, second, the fidelity of the spouses, and third, the indissolubility of the marital union (Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 22). These blessings cannot be found in any other relationship or form of kinship, and specifically work to counter the weight of original sin on the human soul.

²⁷ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 14.

²⁸ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 28.

²⁹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 124.

sole purpose of sex/uality, the following are prohibited as mortal sins:³⁰ adultery, fornication, prostitution, homosexual acts, masturbation, pornography, rape, divorce, polygamy, incest, and all ‘free unions’ that are seen to alienate and divorce the sexual act from the persons engaged and objectify them as mere tools for sensual enjoyment.³¹ The refusal to moderate sex/uality through marriage becomes a great sin, as Catholic doctrine holds that all sin is the result of will, and the deliberate malicious refusal to use will for good or willful use for harm, is the most sinful of all evil.³² Thus, it would be mortally sinful for one’s sexual interest in their partner to be exclusively aimed at finding pleasure such that they would view their partner exclusively as an object of sex or lust, rather than as a fellow in community.³³ The trouble with pleasure is that, given that it is a gift from God—as is all else in the Catholic life—it must therefore be inherently good. In this context, it would be blasphemous for Catholics to insinuate that

³⁰ Mortal sin defined by Catholic Catechisms 1855-61 is an act, thought, or utterance which destroys charity in the heart of a person through grave violation of God's law. In order to be a mortal sin, rather than a less serious venial sin, it must be a grave matter pertaining to the ten commandments, committed with deliberate consent and full knowledge of the act. While mortal sins are redeemable through repentance, unrepented they destroy the covenant with God and cause exclusion from the kingdom of heaven.

³¹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 30.

³² Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 94.

³³ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 63.

God created the universal desire for sex³⁴ and that it inherently leads to sin; therefore it must have a good purpose and a good meaning. The goodness of God's plan for sex/uality is in the development of charity and the rearing of children, not in the pleasure itself. Sexual pleasure can draw people away from heavenly goods, like those rightly gained in marriage,³⁵ and lead them to pursue sex over the eternal goods of heaven, resulting, despite the great sacrifice of Jesus, in their damnation.³⁶ Catholic sex/uality takes on an air of danger, as its improper and disordered use—any behavior that cannot promote conception—can drive humans to their own degeneration, and thus it must be exercised with caution in accordance with Catholic teaching.

Even within the righteous bounds of marriage, sexual activity must be regulated by the virtue of chastity, lest distraction from heavenly goods take hold. Chastity is a virtue which frees love from aggression and selfishness, enabling self-possession out of which authentic love—charity—can be developed, along with emotional affectivity. Chastity—and by extension the whole of the Catholic sexual ethic which supports it—does not seek to suppress or deny sex/uality but to apply God's intelligent order to it.³⁷

³⁴ Outside formal Catholic ethics, people who experience little or no sexual attraction and/or who self-identify with asexuality, hold a legitimate identity as asexual. Generally characterized by a lack of sexual attraction, an absence of desire to engage in behaviors deemed sexual, or the experience of a desire that is not directed toward others, asexuality is a psychologically, physically, and, most importantly, experientially verified identity (Karli June Cerankowski, and Megan Milks, *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 17, 24.) However, the Catholic ethic maintains that the heterosexual desire for sexual intimacy is a universal desire and asexuality, as with all other queer identities, not only does not exist, but is a denial of the most fundamental identity as a child of God (Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 185.)

³⁵ See footnote 24, Mt 19:6.

³⁶ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 76.

³⁷ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 125.

Catholic doctrine stipulates that humans inherently want to adhere to that order, which is enabled by the Church in its teachings through the enforcement of general and particularly *sexual* moral norms. These are largely as outlined above through right sexuality and chastity.³⁸ Considering the celibate/married binary established in Catholicism, it is worthwhile to clarify that in the Catholic perspective the two are theoretically held in equal esteem, serving to mutually reaffirm each other:

“Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but also presupposes it and confirms it. Marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with His people. When marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginity or celibacy exist; when human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator, the renunciation of it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven loses its meaning.”³⁹

For the priest, sexual behavior is not excluded because it is innately evil, it is curtailed in the hopes that as a witness to Christ’s ideal, the priest will strive more genuinely toward loving and serving his community purely on the basis of God’s holy presence in each member. That hope held in celibacy overpowers the yearning to overcome death through progeny, exclusive mutuality is eschewed, and the celibate becomes free to serve all equally, independent of merit or presentation.⁴⁰ This aspiration is parallel to the hope that, in marital conjugal love, one might achieve conjugal charity and come

³⁸ Kalbian, *Sexing the Church*, 6.

³⁹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 137.

⁴⁰ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 34.

closer to emulating the life of Christ. The creative spiritual force behind sexual activity is redirected into the priest's acts and demeanor of loving service.⁴¹ Catholic celibacy is promoted on the basis of the virtue of love, as parallel to yet still apart from the charity—and grace-producing sacrament—of marriage, although in the Catholic sexual ethic, far more attention is devoted to the explication of the heterosexual married ethic than to celibate sexual ethics, resulting in the lack of clarity regarding the practice of celibate sexual ethics.

⁴¹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 40.

History and Practice of Celibacy

The conceptual development of the Catholic virtue of chastity and its radical form, celibacy, arose out of the intellectual, social, and legal culture that surrounded early Christianity. In a climate informed by stoic philosophy's asceticism and rational procreative norms and Jewish perspectives on the intrinsic nature of sex/uality,⁴² "Christianity did not make the world ascetic; rather the world in which Christianity found itself strove to make Christianity ascetic."⁴³ With the fervent hope of a second coming of Jesus in early Christian communities, sexual activity, even among the married, was a denial of that inevitability. Yet as generations went on without any reappearance of Christ, this ascetic thinking was reworked to conform to developing notions of 'preparation of the soul' for the kingdom of God. Celibacy became more popular as a mode of exercising the will and evidence of devotion to the kingdom of God over the temporal world. Early Christians were perceived as deviants; preaching social upheaval, impending judgement, and novel adherence to a living God in Jesus, and those involved in the movement disarmed the surrounding Roman authorities who, in turn, subjected them to persecution and brutality.⁴⁴ Thus, in a world in which opportunities for self-possession were rare, exercising the will over the body was one

⁴² Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum International PubGroup, 2006), 33.

⁴³ Elizabeth Abbot, *A History of Celibacy: from Athena to Elizabeth I, Leonardo da Vinci, Gandhi, and Cher*, (New York: Scribner, 1999), 54.

⁴⁴ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 51.

of the only loci for such activity.⁴⁵ As the Church grew and centralized through the next several centuries, celibacy as a subset of chastity also centralized. Subsequently, the call to celibacy, whether spiritual, financial, or purely on the basis of survival, became concentrated under the early Church through institutional monasteries. Furthermore, regulation of sex/uality and ‘animalistic passion’ through fear was central to the development and maintenance of the Church’s governance and power by granting a foothold in the physical body, utilizing the flesh as a moderm of more total control.⁴⁶ Consecrated celibacy arose from early Christian asceticism as a response to the centralizing needs of the early Church, and the contentious environment in which Catholicism developed.

At the very outset of Catholicism, celibacy was at the core of most thinking—and tension— Pachomius, the founder of the first established monastery in Percepts, outlined the first set of rules for the consecrated religious, most of which engage specifically with celibacy.⁴⁷ Early medieval monasteries were ‘hotbeds of degeneration:’⁴⁸ large, landowning, wealthy, and powerful institutions notorious for falling prey to sexual and secular desires. In multitudinous attempts to moralize monasteries, obligatory celibacy for Catholic religious was invoked and revoked repeatedly. It was first introduced in 305 at the synod of Elvira for all clergy, then

⁴⁵ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 55.

⁴⁶ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 27.

⁴⁷ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 100.

⁴⁸ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 104.

revoked in 325 at Nicaea on the basis of Church Fathers⁴⁹ and the irrefutable evidence of the holy union of Adam and Eve as the natural state for humans. For the purposes of distinction between the clergy and ‘ordinary mortals,’ in 370, clergymen, even those that were married, were banned from indulging in sexual relations.⁵⁰ A 401 synod in Carthage instituted the first formal Christian vows of celibacy, and by 450, sexual abstinence was imposed on all positions above subdeacon.⁵¹ These declarations were ignored more often than not, as for many priests at this time marriage was a practical and economic decision—not a theological and ethical one. Even if they were not engaging in sexual activity, alongside children, wives could provide economic support tilling land, making clothes, and preparing food while priests performed their ministry.⁵² Nevertheless, the theoretically celibate Apostolic missions attracted people dedicated to Christianity, and thus wealth, and promptly became less ascetic. This perceived degeneration inspired the medieval penitentials, which introduced a scaled system of sin and penance that became the basis for Western legalistic morality. It

⁴⁹ Early Christian understandings of celibacy are largely based in Augustine’s *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, which states that lust assumes power over the whole body, and not only the externally in sexual urges and behaviors but also internally in cognition and the ‘total extinction of intellectual sentries.’ (Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, (New York, Penguin Classics, 2004), 577.) Particularly in the case of sexual relations with women Augustine held it was impossible that Solomon mistakenly supposed that he ought to serve ideals; he was induced to such acts of sacrilege by feminine cajolery, essentially that womanly wiles would innately draw susceptible men from holiness and intellect to sin (Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 570.) Yet Augustine struggled greatly with celibacy, and he based this analysis and exegesis in general feelings of shame regarding sex/uality, largely taken from his own hyper-sexual past (Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 587.) Augustine’s writings informed the perspective of the Church on the evil of sex/uality and the righteousness of celibacy, but also how it was largely unachievable and an unnatural state for most men.

⁵⁰ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 109.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 111.

coincided with a shift from public confession and penance to private confession to a priest, which increased his power, and reiterated the differentiation of the celibate, with their higher callings, and the married, who had lower earthly destinies. The teachings of Church Fathers and constant reaffirmation of the value of celibacy continued to be inadequate in suppressing the sex/uality of priests and other men and women religious throughout the middle ages, so in 1073 Pope Gregory VII instated vast Church reforms with celibacy at the helm.⁵³ In the Second Lateran Council in 1139, any marriage of clergymen was rendered invalid; even if he was married at the time of the papal decree, that union was nullified.⁵⁴ From the thirteenth century on in Catholic history, any candidate for a religious order had to be single, a requirement which still stands today. Thus, celibacy, consecrated virginity, and the degenerative potential of disordered sex/uality became institutionally finalized in the Catholic Church.

The most current definition of celibacy, according to former priest and psychosexual expert, Richard Sipe, is as a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed,

⁵³ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 104.

⁵⁴ From the Second Lateran Council, points six through eight of which proclaim "...those in the orders of subdeacon and above who have taken wives or concubines are to be deprived of their position and ecclesiastical benefice. For since they ought to be in fact and in name temples of God, vessels of the Lord and sanctuaries of the holy Spirit, it is unbecoming that they give themselves up to marriage and impurity. Adhering to the path trod by our predecessors, the Roman pontiffs Gregory VII, Urban and Paschal, we prescribe that nobody is to hear the masses of those whom he knows to have wives or concubines. Indeed, that the law of continence and the purity pleasing to God might be propagated among ecclesiastical persons and those in holy orders, we decree that where bishops, priests, deacons, subdeacons, canons regular, monks and professed lay brothers have presumed to take wives and so transgress this holy precept, they are to be separated from their partners. For we do not deem there to be a marriage which, it is agreed, has been contracted against ecclesiastical law. Furthermore, when they have separated from each other, let them do a penance commensurate with such outrageous behavior. We decree that the selfsame thing is to apply also to women religious if, God forbid, they attempt to marry." (Second Lateran Council—1139 A.D., Papal Encyclicals Online, last modified February 20, 2017, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum10.html>.)

that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive.⁵⁵ As a psychological state, apart from abstinence, periodic, or temporary celibacy, celibacy itself is abnormal,⁵⁶ not inasmuch as those who pursue it are abnormal; instead, that the state and notion of celibacy itself acts and exists beyond the heterosexual norm of modern Western society. Existing beyond that norm others the celibate from the general lay population further than their commitment to God and distinctive ways of acting, dressing, and ordering their daily lives already might. The Church itself acknowledges that celibacy is, while not unnatural, an abnormal state entirely dependent on the grace of God.⁵⁷ True celibacy in psychological *and* Catholic perspectives is characterized by mature integration of mutually-beneficial relationships and patterns of relating in the psyche, internalization of the celibate ideal as an intentional achievement, and a subsequent process of refinement of the celibate state that transverses both awareness and psychological integration. Ultimately, or, more realistically, ideally, celibacy is not the absence of relationship, rather the forging of intimacy with the divine through fuller expressions of love for all, regardless of their apparent external worthiness.⁵⁸ Instead of this seeking of divine intimacy, however, a priest might instead seek a more human form of intimacy and become overly emotionally invested in those he serves in a psychologically immature level. In this form of relating to others, one typically

⁵⁵ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 32.

⁵⁶ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 83.

⁵⁷ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 191.

⁵⁸ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 272.

struggles to create and maintain healthy boundaries—or, worse yet for a priest’s celibate integration, he can enter into dynamic sexual relationships in which he feels ministered to in an otherwise impossible reciprocal manner.⁵⁹ This state, called ‘transitional sexual behavior’ in priests, consists of sex in the service of maturing or growing up sexually, learning about sex, and resulting in either a rededication to the vocation or acceptance of a secret sex/uality.⁶⁰ In regarding sexual experience as an opportunity for growth and learning for the priest, however, this form of learning disregards the emotions and inalienable human worth of the other person involved, often leading to spiritually challenging, immature, or even abusive relationships.⁶¹ This sort of relationship centers the priest and what he stands to gain from it, often at the expense of the physical, emotional, or spiritual needs of the other person involved, whose needs and potential gain are perceived as less important those that of the priest. It is therefore possible for the education of the priest in sexual matters to contribute to unequal power structures and domination that can become unhealthy or abusive. Additionally, he has little or no foundation on how to be in intimate relationship with others, as, critically, physical and emotional intimacy are not part of seminary education. Active sexual activity, on the other hand, is an evident violation of the celibate vow especially as it necessitates a willful breaking of the vow and theologically, turning from the will of God and doctrine of the Church.

⁵⁹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 95.

⁶⁰ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 100.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Determining what qualifies as a violation of the celibate vow, as constructed by the Catholic Church, and the celibate state, as explicated by Sipe, can be a complicated process, yet this delineation is critical for understanding the space between doctrine and practice where—critically, for this thesis—abuse has been able to occur. In regards to the question of will, since the time of the gnostics, unprompted sexual events, like night emissions, have been subject to intense scrutiny as the ultimate test of celibacy. Sometimes, however, the celibate vow can be violated without purposeful willing. While masturbation, like fornication, is a mortal sin, on the basis of dissociation of the meaning of the conjugal act from its unitive purpose, night emissions, colloquially known as ‘wet dreams,’ often occur without stimulation or conscious erotic thought.⁶² The ability or inability for the celibate to control their sexual behavior even in sleep has been used as evidence for the unnaturalness of celibacy, and the core depravity of the human being as a result of original sin and resulting concupiscence. According to the third century Christian ascetic St. John Cassian, the ability for a man to overpower the sleeping mind was the greatest test of the celibate will, and warns that only at this stage of total control over and obliteration of sexual urges has the priest truly achieved celibacy.⁶³ Any sexual response, conscious or not, is indicative of the priest’s incomplete integration of the celibate ideal. Further perpetuating this notion of total sexual eradication, Sipe’s psychological analysis of the celibate state holds that when a

⁶² Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 73.

⁶³ Cassian’s six steps to celibacy: he is not smitten by carnal impulse upon awakening, does not dwell on voluptuous thoughts even if they sneak into the mind, he can survey the world without lust, he is unaware of physical movement, he can read or discuss procreation without lust but a calm and pure activity, and lastly even in sleep is untroubled by visions of women. Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 88.

priest has achieved celibacy, he will no longer even have sexual thoughts, much less act upon them.⁶⁴ Sipe sees celibacy as only achievable for a very small and select set of the population,⁶⁵ and perceives marriage, in its right and ordered sex/uality, as a far more achievable and moral choice for the majority of men.

Those who have taken celibate vows may very well still have night emissions, or masturbate. But this is not always a source of stress for the priest, it can sometimes be quite the opposite: that the act of masturbation can reaffirm the his vocation, instead of his disobedient sinfulness. According to one priest,

“[Masturbation] is to celibacy what intercourse is to marriage. Intercourse in marriage celebrates love, forgiveness, dependency, fun, togetherness, unity, and commitment of [one’s] body to another. Masturbation in celibacy is not so much a celebration but a reminder of [one’s] humanness, dependence on God, humility, loneliness and commitment of [their] body to God...”⁶⁶

This particular experience of breaking celibate vows through masturbation highlights the lived division between Church theology and the theology of its members and even its priests; the fact that this man, likely among others, has found ways to healthily rationalize and theologize their sexual activity, is indicative of that fissure. The ability of this priest to justify a mortally sinful sexual behavior⁶⁷ is further evidence of the lack of definition regarding the celibate status; if he is able to incorporate what the Church

⁶⁴ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 302.

⁶⁵ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 301.

⁶⁶ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 78.

⁶⁷ See footnotes 30 and 31.

calls a violation of his celibate vow into a holy meditation on his sexual sacrifice for God, there may be space for justification of far worse violations of the celibate vow as well.

Seminary as Celibate Institution

Having, now, a comprehensive understanding of the official Catholic perspective on sexual ethics, it is possible to critically examine how these ethics are reconstructed as measures enacted in the Church, and their impact on the daily lives of Catholic religious. As established above, many of Catholic definitions of celibacy are negative. By defining celibacy as that which is not fornication and not marriage, I contend there is little actual direction on how to live a celibate life. Further, I articulate that the focus on marital sexual ethics over and above celibate sexual ethics, which all Church leaders theoretically hold, creates a space of untouchability and unknowability within celibacy. This, in turn, can distort ethics to create space in which abusive behavior might occur, as it appears in the sexual abuse crisis. Most of the education regarding celibacy occurs in the seminary, which has its own limitations as an institution within the Church—namely that it reproduces the same adages and distortions that exist throughout the Church as a whole. The purpose of the institution of Catholic seminaries is to educate young men on the orthodox doctrine of the Church. As there is little mention of celibate sexual ethic and activity within the established Catholic sexual ethic, as established in the explanation of marital sex/uality and

definition of celibate activity as merely the opposite. There is therefore little to no attention paid to the practice of celibacy within seminary.⁶⁸ This absence persists despite the presence of mandatory celibate instruction in formal Catholic Canon law, as Canon 247 states "the students are to be prepared through suitable education to observe the state of celibacy, and they are to learn to honor it as a special gift of God... They are to be duly informed of the duties and burdens of sacred ministry in the Church; no difficulty of the priestly life is to be kept back from them." What exactly this education comprises of remains undefined, in keeping with the Catholic sexual ethic, which similarly fails to define exactly what the celibate sexual ethic is and how to enact it. Despite recent attempts to add celibate instruction to the human and pastoral development courses in the seminary curricula,⁶⁹ the subject is neglected in the face of an already overcrowded academic schedule.⁷⁰ This form of academic overcrowding coupled with an intensely rigorous daily schedule is perhaps one of the only ways in which celibacy is taught to seminarians. The horatium of daily activities is supposed to be instituted in such a manner that the young seminarian cannot help but to become so exhausted and overwhelmed with his studies that he necessarily becomes celibate in

⁶⁸ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 26.

⁶⁹ Specifically, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, who proposed in 1982 that "this education should deal with specifically such topics as the nature of sexuality, growth towards sexual maturity, marital and celibate chastity. The single state, premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, and homosexuality... It is clear that confidence in being able to live out the response of celibacy is based in God alone. Seminarians, with a sensitive appreciation of women and their natural attraction to them, will base their determination to lead a celibate life on their special love for Christ." (The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation (3rd ed.)*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1982), 24-5.)

⁷⁰ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 48.

mind and body.⁷¹ Seminaries are total institutions,⁷² necessitating the curtailment of the self in the service of conformity in the largest and smallest aspects of a seminarian's lifestyle; while this works in some ways to affirm the Church theory that it is possible to exhaust sex/uality out of a seminarian, it also works counterproductively when there is no teaching on how to live celibacy and vast evidence that this system is not, and likely never was, working.⁷³ The sense of loss or grief that many seminarians experience as they come to terms with their vocation and their own mortality—which cannot be overcome with progeny—is not addressed in the seminary system.⁷⁴ This differentiation from the heterosexual, family-oriented norms of the Catholic Church and the secular world adds to the priest's sense of social otherness; that otherness, within the confines of the Church, fosters contradictory feelings of simultaneous inadequacy and superiority. The priest feels himself to be apart from society as a whole, and is simultaneously told that this lonely separation makes him greater and holier than the non-celibate community, an experience which is not bridged by any sort of practical seminary instruction.⁷⁵ The cognitive dissonance resulting from the

⁷¹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 314.

⁷² This based on Erving Goffman's characterization of mental asylums as total institutions in his book *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Patients*, as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life," which I, along with Keenan, find to be a particularly apt comparison to the institution of seminary (Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Patients* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 11, quoted in Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender Power and Organizational Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50.)

⁷³ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 50.

⁷⁴ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 34.

⁷⁵ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 292.

concurrent feelings of lacking and ascendancy contributes to the most detrimental expression of clerical culture in a systematic perception of greatness called clericalism, which I discuss in detail in the fourth chapter, under “Clericalism and Cyclical Abuse.”

The priestly perspective on celibacy emerging from this total educational program is not generally particularly favorable. As of 1972, before conversations regarding clerical celibacy in light of sexual abuse had reached the fervency they have now,

“the overwhelming majority of the priests agree[d] that celibacy provides a priest with more time to be available to the people but slightly less than half think that celibacy is essential to fulfill the potential of the priesthood, and only one-third think that the nature of the priest’s relationship with God excludes companionship with another in marriage. On the other hand, approximately half [thought] that celibacy may be harmful to some priests and half also think that many men are kept from the priesthood by the requirement of celibacy.”⁷⁶

The celibate element of the vocation is seen by the majority of those participating in it as largely nonessential and, at worst, detrimental to the efficacy of the priest in his role. The theological reasoning behind the institution of celibacy doesn’t appear to largely factor into these priest’s perspectives on celibacy, and, where it does, it opposes the teachings of the Catholic Church, denying that celibacy makes priests closer to God or more able to fulfill their vocations. Vatican II held that priestly celibacy was a ‘brilliant jewel’ of the Church; as such, it ought to be maintained with hope in God’s ability to

⁷⁶ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 94.

resolve the critical shortage of priests and other related concerns.⁷⁷ While the Church has invested considerably less in the celibate status after Vatican II, all movements to alter or abolish it have failed.⁷⁸ Paul VI, the conservative Pope at the head of Vatican II, ratified the continuation of mandated celibacy on the following terms:

“(1) Christ was a lifetime celibate and recommended celibacy as a special gift. (2) Celibacy denotes and also generates great charity, love, and spiritual devotion. (3) Priests ‘made captive by Christ’ come to share his essence, of which celibacy is an essential feature. (4) Priests who face a ‘daily dying,’ or renunciation of legitimate families, will draw closer to God. (5) celibacy liberates religious from familial demands that would take time away from ministry. (6) Celibacy is not unnatural, for God-given logic and free will can overcome sexuality. (7) Solitary religious are not lonely but rather filled with God’s presence. Occasional loneliness replicates the life of Christ, who ‘in the most tragic hours of his life was alone.’ (8) The ‘lamentable defections’ of priests are not a reflection of the rigors of celibacy but on the inadequacy of the

⁷⁷ The Vatican, “Sacerdotalis Caelibatus: Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Celibacy of the Priest,” *The Pope Speaks* 12 (1967): 291-319.

⁷⁸ Liberal pope John XXIII leaned towards optional celibacy in VII, but died suddenly in ‘63, leaving Paul VI in his place to preserve the rule, leaving the religious, as always, separate from the hierarchy and unheard voices. His argument for rescinding mandatory celibacy for clerics is as follows: “(1) Jesus did not exact celibacy of his disciples; it was a freely chosen act of obedience to either a special religious or spiritual gift. (2) The Church Fathers wrote long ago—different times, different mores. (3) The rule of celibacy bars devout Catholics blessed with a religious calling from joining holy orders if they cannot accept lifetime celibacy. (4) The Church values clerical celibacy more highly than the need for priests in desperately undermanned parishes worldwide. (5) A married priesthood would eliminate most of the harmful deceptions and hypocrisy currently reducing its membership. (6) perpetual celibacy has detrimental physical and psychological effects, including alienation and bitterness. (7) A religious’ acceptance of celibacy is passive rather than voluntary.” (Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 377.)

initial screening process. (9) Rather than warping personalities, celibacy contributes to maturity and psychic integration.”⁷⁹

Essentially, according to Paul VI, the sacrifice of celibacy makes the priest more able to devote his life to God in a fruitful and fulfilling manner—contrary to what the majority of lower-level priests communicated about their own experiences. Thus an element of contention emerges in cohesive notions of celibacy, which further complicates the application of Catholic sexual ethics to the daily practice of Catholic clergy.

The totality of Catholic seminaries as institutions contributes substantially to the development of the sexual ethic within the proceeding generation of Catholics. Yet, as the seminary system rewards orthodoxy, there are few opportunities for inquiry or modification. Celibacy remains central to the life of the priest, although despite this emphasis there remains little differentiation and delineation of what exactly the celibate Catholic sexual ethic requires in practice. Education on the topic for younger seminarians also remains elusive. The events of the sexual abuse crisis did not occur in a vacuum, nor were they brought on by some inherently pedophilic element of Catholicism; the spaces of absence and antithesis that define the sexual state and direction of the priest operate in conjunction with a seminary system based on those ethics that base a seminarian's experience in an uneven power dynamic. The obedience required by that power dynamic further precludes attention to itself and self-reflection on the celibate state and Catholic sexual ethic recommended by Sipe for fullest

⁷⁹ Abbot, *A History of Celibacy*, 377.

integration of the celibate ideal into the psyche. The unintelligible and opaque space of sex/uality and morality in regards to it is therefore further developed by the sexual ethic as explicated, or *not* explicated, by the Catholic Church, and the institution deployed to educate future leaders of Catholicism on that ethic.

Sexual Abuse Crisis

The crux of the issue is that, in some aspect of the system of Catholic ethics, there is space for the justification of sexual abuse of children, minors, and vulnerable adults, especially seminarians. I am making an argument regarding the nature of Catholic sexual ethics and how they relate to the abuse crisis, and inform the systematic coverup thereof. It is nearly impossible to surmise how many people have been abused by Catholic clergy in the twentieth century because current estimates do not account for statutes of limitations, non-disclosure agreements, the incapability of the mind to clearly recall trauma, as well as the shame of abuse preventing victims from coming forward. It follows that even the most thorough investigation would undercount the number of victims. It is known that, however, since 1947, over one thousand of those victims were children in the state of Pennsylvania alone.⁸⁰ The Vatican's disciplinary body, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, reported 3,420 credible abuse accusations against minors worldwide between 2002 and 2012, and as a result defrocked 848 priests.⁸¹ These statistics are merely numbers, quantifications of experience that cannot be simplified into numbers. Nevertheless, the statistics help to give shape to the scope and timeline of the crisis. While the majority of these cases

⁸⁰ Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman, "Catholic Priests Abused 1,000 Children in Pennsylvania, Report Says," *New York Times*, August 14, 2018.

⁸¹ Chico Harlan and Stefano Pitrelli, "The Vatican, Not Known for Its Transparency, Actually Has Abuse Statistics Buried on Its Website," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-vatican-not-known-for-transparency-actually-has-abuse-statistics-buried-on-its-website/2019/02/22/f6c072c0-36d5-11e9-8375-e3dcf6b68558_story.html.

have occurred in the United States,⁸² it is not, as once thought, an issue limited to the United States, to the English-speaking world, or to developed nations.⁸³ The pervasiveness of this issue within the Church transcends national borders and conceptions of development. The crisis of revelation began in Boston and spread to other largely-Catholic regions of the U.S., particularly along the U.S East Coast. Major reports of abuse then appeared in Germany, the Philippines, and large swaths of Latin America—including, notably, Pope Francis’ home country of Argentina.⁸⁴ No recognizable pattern of the abusive behaviors themselves appear, nor identifiable trends regarding how these abuses begin, nor the nature of the abuse. Invariably, however, the abusive priest emphasizes that this behavior is not something to discuss or acknowledge in any setting. Incorporating Catholic symbols and terminology into the sexually abusive behavior is particularly common to sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church;⁸⁵ which is rationalized as beneficial, holy, or educational for the child, often in circumstances in which the priest, as explored in chapter three, utilizes sex as a tool for his own self-discovery and as an opportunity for growth and learning.

⁸² Michael Rezendes, “Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years,” *The Boston Globe*, January 6, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/06/church-allowed-abuse-priest-for-years/cSHfGkTlrAT25qKGvBuDNM/story.html>.

⁸³ Jason Horowitz and Laurie Goodstein, “Pope Francis Summons World’s Bishops to Meet on Sexual Abuse,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2018.

⁸⁴ Jason Harowitz, “Pope Francis Admits ‘Grave Errors’ in Chile Sex Abuse Cases,” *New York Times*, April 11, 2018.

⁸⁵ I have no desire to write in detail the nature of the abuse, nor do I think explicit details would provide any further support for my argument. If, however, you find it valuable for your understanding of this work as a whole to know the precise nature of the abuses, the two most important sources for my understanding of the scope and nature of clerical sexual abuse are the Netflix documentary, *The Keepers* (Ryan White, “The Keepers,” Netflix, May 19, 2017.), and the testimonies on the website for Bishop Accountability (Accounts by Survivors and Their Friends and Families, BishopAccountability.org, <http://origin.bishop-accountability.org/accounts/>.)

As priests are perceived as entirely non-sexual beings, they are trusted with children and other vulnerable persons, therefore gaining access to potential victims is not particularly challenging, given the privileged positions of priests in communities of faith. This trust and presumption of celibacy, which is realistically carried out by approximately forty percent of Catholic priests at any given time,⁸⁶ gives abusive clergy occasion and cover for their behavior.⁸⁷

There are a few established perspectives on the general motivation for abuse within the Church; firstly, that sexual abuse of minors is an inevitability—that abuse in the Church continues due to cycles of abuse originating in the very beginning of the Church itself that have been perpetuated and even permitted by the ecclesiastical structure of the Church.⁸⁸ Secondly, there is a theological argument for abuse: the way the Catholic Church goes about the intertwined concepts of gender, sexuality, and the body based on exegetical interpretation and texts of the Church Fathers leads to a disordered way of thinking that leads to abuse, again implying some inevitability of sexual abuse within Catholicism.⁸⁹ Lastly, there is some moral failing in the Church’s understanding of sex/uality which promotes molestation and child sex abuse.⁹⁰ It is,

⁸⁶ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 302.

⁸⁷ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 156.

⁸⁸ Emma Green, "Why Does the Catholic Church Keep Failing on Sexual Abuse?" *The Atlantic*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/02/sean-omalley-pope-francis-catholic-church-sex-abuse/582658/>.

⁸⁹ Hilary Jerome Scarsella and Stephanie Krehbiel, "Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies and Responsibilities," *Religion Compass*, September 2019, Wiley Online Library <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12337>.

⁹⁰ Kenneth L. Woodward, "Double Lives: The Peril of Clerical Hypocrisy," *Commonweal Magazine*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/double-lives>.

however, not one of these factors alone that has led to such devastating prevalence of child sex abuse in the Catholic Church.⁹¹ There is no evidence that members of the clergy sexually abuse children, or adults for that matter, at higher rates than any other group in a population.⁹² If there is any inevitable root cause to be gleaned from these frankly terrifying numbers, it is that the factors named above work together to contribute to an environment, based in the postulated ethic and structure of the Church, that is not only unwilling but unable to combat abuse within itself.

Clericalism and Cyclical Abuse

Questions concerning the success and validity of the Church structure that has not actively destroyed but merely obscured devastating child sexual abuse often center on clericalism, even for Pope Francis himself.⁹³ Clericalism is the systemic theological prioritization of the cleric over and above laypeople, perspectives at odds with notions

⁹¹ In all circumstances where people are treated as objects of sexual gratification, in both secular and Catholic perspectives on ethics, there is an utter lack of regard for the fundamental worth of that person in their reduction to an object of pleasure. The sheer number of both persons abused and abusers in the context of the Catholic Church can be overwhelming. It is absolutely critical to always keep in mind that each one of these persons, each one of these children, have suffered immensely, as individuals. There is no statistic that can encompass each one of their degrading and immensely saddening experiences.

⁹² Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 11.

⁹³ While Pope Francis has made Catholic reform, especially in regards to the sexual abuse crisis, one of his most important projects as Pope, James Carroll claims that “[Francis] is woefully in the grip of male-dominated, celibate clericalism, even though he criticizes it.” (James Carroll, “In Summoning Bishops to Address the Sexual Abuse Crisis, is Pope Francis Again Missing the Point?” *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2018.)

of universal human dignity and equality in the Bible.⁹⁴ In clericalism, the priest believes himself to be holier than all others, and that perception of holiness increases exponentially with the status of his earthly position within the Church hierarchy.⁹⁵ Clerical culture is also exclusively male, which can become, in the words of Sister Maria del Rey Danforth, a ‘stag party supreme,’⁹⁶ the epitome of the damaging, hyper-masculine aspects of clericalism. The origins of clericalism are in the American nineteenth-century religious revival, the ‘Great Awakening,’ which brought forth increased respect for the supremacy of church authorities, especially in the United States. As Catholicism became more visible through intensely sensual and experimental piety,⁹⁷ the prejudices against American Catholics became more pertinent and aggressive. During this era, Catholic communities were isolated largely in inner-city ghettos, requiring closer contact and greater reliance on local Church officials.⁹⁸ This led to veneration and heightened positions of societal power for particularly male

⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:29 questions, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?” thus Francis is citing the words of St. Paul, the suspected originator of the Letter to the Corinthians and first Pope, as the source for arguments against clericalism.

⁹⁵ This definition is a conglomeration of several elements of other theories of clericalism, based within and without the Catholic Church as an institution. According to Marie Keenan, clericalism is the situation in which priests exist in a more Godly hermeneutical world set apart from laity. This sense of elitism is affirmed by their ordination and notably their celibacy, which place them a relationally privileged position to laypeople. (Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 142.) Clericalism is generally conceived as a scourge upon the Church, as passionately noted by former seminary rector, Donald Cozzens, who calls it “always dysfunctional and haughty, crippling the spiritual and emotional maturity of the priest, bishop, or deacon caught in its web.” (Paul R. Dokecki, *The Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis: Reform and Renewal in the Catholic Community* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 128.)

⁹⁶ Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 48.

⁹⁷ John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 12.

⁹⁸ John Deedy, *American Catholicism: And Now Where?* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 152.

clergy, thus further shading clericalism as solely an American problem—much like clerical sex abuse appeared at its outset. Regardless of this perspective of the Americanness of clericalism and sexual abuse as an offshoot thereof, acquiescence and utter obedience to Church officials as constructed in clericalism has been proven to be a far more widespread problem than it first appeared. This is especially notable in the promotion of a sense of infallibility that allows for denial of sex/uality institutionally, leading to negation, and continuation, of the clerical sex abuse crisis.

Clericalism is not merely an issue of Church organization, but of the particular masculine supermacy within that rigid hierarchy. It is therefore critical to examine how the cyclical perpetuation of abuse beginning in seminaries furthers the obstruction of sex/uality as a topic of interrogation and inquiry, as well as indicates how deeply ingrained sexual abuse is within the hierarchy of the Church. Preservation of the problematic system of seminarian secrecy and abuse is reliant on denial of size and importance of the issue of sex/uality in seminary training, or total denial of the issue of sex abuse in seminary settings. This leads to implementation of systematic secrecy to enclose any breaches in the denial of sex/uality thereby eliminating accountability and risk for the Catholic Church and its structures; any breach of presumed celibacy, be it abusive or not, is deemed a sinful ‘act’ or ‘behavior,’ as opposed to an orientation or attraction, removing evidence of patterns and trends from experiences of sex/uality in seminary.⁹⁹ The seminary environment coupled with traditional Catholic teaching on

⁹⁹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 143.

women, through archetypal Eve, as the originators and ultimate source of sin,¹⁰⁰ which fosters a perception of sex *with women* as the greatest sin. Thereby, sexual behavior with men and children can be negatively defined as beyond the realm of sinful fornication.¹⁰¹ If one is to hold that, in the Church in which familial structures are artificially constructed and patriarchal modes of operating are favored—and prized as replications of the holy relationship between God and His son Jesus—¹⁰² cycles of abuse occur much as they do in traditional family structures, it then holds that a priest who is abused during his seminary years is more likely to perpetuate that abuse.¹⁰³ All of these factors serve to make sexual abuse within the confines of the seminary forgivable through confessions and therefore forgettable, negating the reality and perpetuation of the sexual abuse crisis itself.¹⁰⁴ The prevalence of sexual abuse in seminaries indoctrinates young priests into believing that sexual abuse is part of the Church and, as it is not expressly discussed in the nonexistent conversations and education regarding sex/uality, can trend towards a liminal space unreachable by Catholic ethics and behavioral constraints. As Church law does not expressly establish that sex between a cleric and an adult is a canonical crime, bishops find themselves vexed about how exactly they should handle allegations of clerical misconduct

¹⁰⁰ See footnote 4.

¹⁰¹ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 12.

¹⁰² Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, XII.

¹⁰³ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 143.

involving adults—even in cases in which coercion is an operative factor.¹⁰⁵ Beyond the realm of Catholic ethics, and beyond the realm of Catholic teaching, as far as the seminary is concerned, instruction on celibacy is irrelevant to the teaching of future priests. This makes the seminary the basis of the continuation of the Catholic Church as a total institution, wherein the organization supersedes the self. As is evident in prior explanations of seminary structure, obedience and orthodoxy are prioritized above all else.¹⁰⁶ It is within the overt secrecy of the seminary as an institution that discussion of sex/uality is oppressed, damning perspectives of women are solidified, and the strength of the homosocial hierarchy is affirmed. The Church is not only the teacher, the employer, the father, and the social network of the priest, it is also the law-giver. Conceptualizing seminaries as total institutions in the context of sexual abuse of minors by Roman Catholic clergy illuminates the process of how seminaries create a template for clerical culture, clerical masculinity, and clerical living that created the opportunity and space for sexually abusive patterns to become normalized and justified.¹⁰⁷

Gender and Sex/uality

Understanding how the Church favors conformity, and how, as an institution, it is perceived to contribute to the sexual abuse crisis through seminary indoctrination, is

¹⁰⁵ Woodward, "Double Lives."

¹⁰⁶ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 51.

is therefore more evident, though not more justifiable, how certain identities, particularly homosexual ones, are cited as the causes of degenerate morality within the Church and therefore as the core of the sexual abuse crisis. Many say that the reason for the sexual abuse crisis is the sexual liberation of the Western world that emerged in the sixties and seventies, or gay infiltration of the Catholic Church;¹⁰⁸ perceiving homosexual acts and sexual liberation as moral evils, those who propose that homosexuality is the root cause of pedophilic abuse in the Catholic Church see it naturally proceeding from this era. I do want to be explicit here: the preponderance of gay men in the Catholic Church is not why there is a sexual abuse crisis. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the Catholic Church does not see homosexuality as an identity or a sexual orientation, rather it exists only as an urge upon which people may act, and only those *acts* are homosexual—not the people enacting them. To refer to people exclusively by their sexual identity, holds the Church, undermines their most essential identity as a child of God.¹⁰⁹ This stance denies the existence of queerness or non-heterosexual orientations outright, a denial which, for full understanding of how the Catholic Church proceeds to interact with gender and sexuality, must be kept in the fore. Permitting sexual sin or evil in a homosexual act is not the same as fully committing oneself to sin, as in self-identifying as homosexual—although the worst of all sin is inciting another to act sinfully. If there were no distinction between

¹⁰⁸ Joshua J. McElwee, “In New Letter, Benedict Blames Clergy Abuse on Sexual Revolution, Vatican II Theology,” *National Catholic Reporter*, accessed October 1, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/new-letter-benedict-blames-clergy-abuse-sexual-revolution-vatican-ii-theology>.

¹⁰⁹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 185.

‘permitting’ as an indirect consequence and being morally responsible for the consequences of action, then God would have necessarily ‘set Himself upon evil’ in creation of humanity and a free will which permits evil deeds, it is not only logically impossible but blasphemous to insinuate that God created evil and is not, therefore, wholly good. The emphasis, therefore, is not on a homosexual orientation, but rather on action, in that a homosexual orientation is not inherently evil but acting upon it is, as a violation of natural law.¹¹⁰ The Church’s exact position on homosexuality, however, in terms of what the Church understands as orientation and acts is variable in its relation to sin. In 1976, Paul VI declared that homosexual activity was *not* inherently sinful, and urged pastors to adopt rules appropriate to the unique physical and psychological needs of all gay persons in the Church.¹¹¹ The more recent “Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics,” says quite the opposite: that all homosexual activity is sinful in principle.¹¹² In its most degrading form, the Catholic Church declares that homosexual persons are invariably unhappy because they do not have the grace of fidelity and permanence provided by the expressive fruits of procreation—and essential relation to enduring goods only achievable in the heterosexual union of procreative marriage. Further, this perspective stipulates that a homosexual life is a bitter one, wherein one constantly seeks orgasm and physical pleasure rather than the procreative natural good of sex/uality.¹¹³ Yet Catholic theology also acknowledges that

¹¹⁰ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 94.

¹¹¹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 135.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 190.

the homosexual condition is not voluntarily established and thus outside conscious control.¹¹⁴ At present, Pope Francis' relatively liberal stance on homosexuality can be summarized in his "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons." According to his letter, people who are homosexual can be good and self-giving like other Catholics, but in the homosexual activity, they "confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent."¹¹⁵ Homosexuality is therefore perceived as intrinsically disordered as a result of this reasoning, and as the guardian of the immortal souls of all members of the Church, the Pope cannot, regardless of secular views, approve of homosexuality.¹¹⁶ However, as guardian of the earthly bodies as well as souls of all Catholics, Pope Francis also declares that homosexual persons should never be subject to malice or violence and that any discrimination of homosexual persons on the basis of their identity as such ought to be condemned by the Church and in law.¹¹⁷ The Catholic hierarchy is, institutionally, homosocial, inherently lacking binary gender differentiation, composed entirely of one masculine gender, justified by the sexing of

¹¹⁴ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 186.

¹¹⁵ "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," The Vatican, last modified October 1, 1986, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

This is additionally complicated as, statistically, there is greater incident of homosexuality in the clergy than in the general population. It is not the focus of this thesis to evaluate the reason for this statistical anomaly, but I do find it important to include as a foil to the notion that homosexual men are overtaking the Church in order to molest and abuse children.

God¹¹⁸ and the very maleness of Jesus.¹¹⁹ Other homosocial institutions, like prisons, lumberyards, ranches, and the military sometimes foster situational homosexuality, in which homosexual encounters can occur as the sole outlet for sexual energy and as the result of high competition and exclusively male exchange. This does not, however, delegitimize the very real identity many members of the clergy have—their sex/uality may not be purely the result of their situation. There are, indeed, accounts of a higher proportions of self-reported homosexuality within the clergy than in the general population.¹²⁰ This statistic, however, is often inaccurately coupled with the heightened occasion of sexual abuse of minors in the Church, implying that, at least within the Catholicism, if not everywhere, homosexuality describes not only sexual attraction to the same gender, but also, “as if by magic, pedophilia, sexual abuse, moral decline, social degradation, and intellectual and spiritual darkness.”¹²¹ To cite homosexuality as the source of abuse in the Church makes no logical sense, as heterosexuality is not cited cases of heterosexual pedophilic assault; orientation and pedophilia are importantly distinct entities in which the latter is a disorder of sexual object attraction.¹²² Critics of the Church have also cited the vows of celibacy as the source of the sexual abuse crisis, arguing that suppressing the human libido might lead to

¹¹⁸ Kalbian, *Sexing the Church*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 141.

¹²⁰ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 153.

¹²¹ Sean Larsen et al., “Symposium: In the Closet of the Vatican: Power Homosexuality, Hypocrisy,” *Syndicate* (blog), May 28, 2019, <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/in-the-closet-of-the-vatican/>.

¹²² Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 131.

rampant pedophilia and rape.¹²³ Insinuating that queer identities—¹²⁴including homosexuality and celibacy—only adds to the sense of worthlessness and abomination that these people already feel in the Church, as their most core identities are implicated as the cause of abuse. Building on this sense of deprivation noted by Scarsella, queer members of the Catholic Church are more likely to see themselves as unworthy of the inherent human dignity conferred by God and, in turn, to be abused or manipulated, not become abusers and manipulators themselves.¹²⁵ The Catholic Church's fundamental denial of queer identities, coupled with the insinuation that those same identities are the cause of the sexual abuse crisis, complicates the Church's incorporation of sex/uality into the sexual ethic.

The real issue with the sexual abuse of minors is not queerness, rather the abuse of power in the form of pedophilic behavior. Pedophilia is not just sex with a minor below the legal age of consent—that behavior is merely against the law, not a psychological diagnosis. According to the American Psychiatric Association, pedophilia is a medical issue; in which a person experiences recurrent and intense sexual urges and sexually arousing fantasies, of at least six months duration, involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child generally under the age of thirteen, and a pedophile can be attracted to any child regardless of gender. The person has either acted on these urges or is markedly distressed by them. Curiously, and notably in the

¹²³ Jason Horowitz, "Vatican Power Struggle Bursts into Open as Conservatives Pounce," *New York Times*, August 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/27/world/europe/vatican-power-struggle-bursts-into-open-as-conservatives-pounce.html?module=inline>.

¹²⁴ Westar Institute/Jesus Seminar, "Pride Month, Queer Theory, and the Bible."

¹²⁵ Sean Larsen, "In the Closet of the Vatican."

context of the homosocial, male, Catholic environment, pedophilic behavior almost exclusively manifests among men. While there is hesitation to label pedophilia as a sexuality, parallel to hetero/homo/pansexuality etc., like other sexualities, the individual with pedophilia is unable to choose when they become sexually aroused, only to resist the temptation to act on that arousal.¹²⁶ What can be concluded, however, is that while homosexuality and pedophilia both occur with greater frequency in the Catholic Church, there is no evidence for their interconnectedness and especially no evidence that homosexuality or persons with homosexual attractions are the sole perpetrators of sexual abuse, as homosexual and pedophilic sexual motivations come from entirely different sources and are not necessarily linked to one another. However, the consistent engagement with questions of sex/uality in the fervent search for a reason behind the sexual abuse crisis in recent years necessitates its inclusion in my analysis of how the lack of celibate, homosexual, or otherwise queer sexualities in Catholic sexual ethics creates a space without ethical direction and repercussion, revealing space in which sexual abuse within the Catholic Church might persist.

Catholic Sex/uality and Violence in the Body

Considering the broad question of inevitability in the sexual abuse crisis, much of the belief that this is the core of the crisis is based in a perception that the structure of the Church's teaching on sex/uality is wrong or oppressive, and that it inherently

¹²⁶ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 202.

leads to sexual abuse. The particularly *Catholic* way of viewing sex and the body is situated deeply within the contexts of original sin, masculine clericalism, and its purported sexual ethic which promotes, above all, chastity and procreation within the confines of the marital union. Consider the theological implications of the Catholic savior, Jesus Christ, literally sacrificing his body for the forgiveness of the sins of humanity—Jesus’ refusal to claim autonomy over his body and allow himself, the son of God, to be crucified when he had all the power and ability of the divine to avoid doing so, is the highest model and ideal for Christian bodily sacrifice.¹²⁷ The doctrine created to demonstrate how evil is overcome in the world through Christ’s willful sacrifice is utilized for the purposes of oppression through glorification of suffering, verification of an impulsive God, legitimacy of structural hierarchy, and valorization of victimhood.¹²⁸ This ethical model can be used to perpetuate gendered forms of abuse, wherein victims are instructed to give their bodies as holy sacrifice for the abusers’ eventual conversion, salvation, and repentance—the Catholic mission of internal moral perfection.¹²⁹ A failure on the part of the victim to act on the Catholic virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation by seeking justice is indicative of a lack of Catholic morality, which represses resistance or punishment following incidents of sexual abuse. In the secular world, there is increasingly emphatic attention on the voice and worthiness of victims of secular sexual abuse. In the Catholic world, however, the

¹²⁷ “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not my will but yours be done.” (Matt 26:39)

¹²⁸ Scarsella, “Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies.”

¹²⁹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 73.

inability of the persons who experience sexual abuse to exhibit holy forgiveness for an abuser supersedes the validity of a victim's suffering. The concept of Catholic forgiveness is wielded as a tool to perpetuate both silence and abuse, eradicating the possibility of accountability of the abuser for their own actions. The Catholic perspective on the human body, however, is wounded by the moral lapse resulting from Fall; although created by God and thus necessarily good, flesh is invariably sinful.¹³⁰ The treatment of bodies as a means for sexual pleasure is entirely antithetical to the Catholic ethic regarding sex/uality and the purpose of sexual feeling. Contrastingly, given that the body, and further that sex/uality, is already distorted by the presence of sin, there is a general belief that any disordered sexual behavior can be forgiven as any other sin, with confession and firm resolution to amend the behavior.¹³¹ This perspective can include even the greatest violations of another person, such as abuse, rape, and physical violence. Catholic theology appears to participate in a system which casts human nature as irrevocably sinful, as explicated in the first chapter, "Catholicism and Catholic Sexual Ethics," increasing the sense of shame and worthlessness that already make victims of abuse susceptible to more violation, further confirming and perpetuating a frequent sense of worthlessness. If the victim of sexual abuse sees themselves and their sex/uality as degenerate and unclean, as a result of inherent wrongdoing in original sin, they may perceive themselves to be at fault for their own assault. Sexual violence is perpetuated when sin is defined as the prioritization of self

¹³⁰ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 49.

¹³¹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 233.

over others—as it is in Catholic theology.¹³² To break the cycles of abuse, however, a victim must prioritize their survival and safety over the expressed needs of the abuser. Thus theology works against their survival and ensuing safety.¹³³ This perspective, however, is not unique to Catholicism. Any theological concept can be molded into a shape that perpetuates sexual violence if the motivation for sexual violence exists in a theologically-based ethical environment. At times when that theological environment, as when the Catholic male power and influence as constructed by the Catholic Church, is at risk, the hegemonic imagination of those in power construct controlling images of their own righteousness and the immorality of the victims to preserve their own identity. These controlling images, insinuating the morality of the clergymen over and above those of victims, regardless of age, gender, status, or any other identity factor, are then used to justify assault and intimate violence.¹³⁴

¹³² Scarsella, “Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies.”

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Stephanie M. Crumpton, *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5-7.

Canon Law and Abuse of Power

I have established that the sexual ethics of the Catholic Church regarding the proper conduct of priests in celibacy is defined negatively by what it is not, and furthermore that this ethic is largely separate not only from the lived reality of most priests but from current psychological understandings of sex/uality and the celibate state. Yet not one of these factors can be cited as the sole cause and reason for the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. On the contrary, these factors, along with the incomplete and inapplicable guidance around sexual ethics within the Church structure, create a peculiar space wherein sexual ethics are ambiguous and abuse can be morally and theologically rationalized. Written policies regarding complaints of abuse by clergy by all US diocese seek to disentangle these factors and indeed affirm the solely psychological nature of sexual abuse and pedophilia. This method adamantly avoids the self-examination that would make apparent the source of the abuse crisis, the Church itself, and fails to incite examination into how it has enabled moral and ethical failings.¹³⁵ The official statement in response to all accusations of abuse in US diocese is as follows:

“A small fraction of priests (no larger than any other segment of the population) sexually abuses children because they are psychiatrically ill, either because of genetic (biological) or psychogenic (psychological) forces. Such behavior is

¹³⁵ Peter Steinfels, “The PA Grand-Jury Report: Not What It Seems, It’s Inaccurate, Unfair, and Misleading,” *Commonweal Magazine*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/pa-grand-jury-report-not-what-it-seems>.

illegal and harmful to minors. Offenders will be treated psychiatrically. Bishops pledge full cooperation with civil authorities investigating abuse. Victims of abuse will be given comfort and offered counseling.”¹³⁶

The issue, as already evidenced by theological and practical explanations of the Catholic celibate state, goes far beyond psychology, for if it were the whole truth it would be possible to diagnose, treat, incarcerate, or bar from entry to ministry those with psychological disorders that may lead them to abuse children.¹³⁷ In some ways, the Catholic understanding of celibacy does not engage with recent psychosocial developments in awareness of the complexity of human growth, sexual development, sexual identities, sexual behavior, and sexual love. Yet in other ways, the institution of the priesthood lacks attention to its source in scripture and Catholic theology, as an enacted parallel to the life of Jesus Christ, and struggle towards adherence of the free will to the perfect will of God.

When celibacy is spiritualized in this manner, it is further drawn away from practical application and most especially from the struggles with and struggles of those who practice it. Elevating celibacy to a Godly gift, as opposed to a daily struggle, makes it the responsibility of God and not of the individual practicing celibacy. This allows for the practitioner to justify lapses in his celibacy as indicative of the separation between God and humans as a result of the Fall and the resulting imperfect communication, not as an incapacity to integrate the frankly inaccessible ideal of

¹³⁶ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 232.

¹³⁷ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 233.

celibacy into his psyche. The fraught coexistence of these conflicting opinions on the intersection of psychology, lived experience, Canon law, and theology occurs in the complex space of the Catholic Church, a homosocial, patriarchal institution in which those making the laws regarding sex are precisely those who, at least theoretically, have not experienced sex at all. Alienated from the lay population, from women, and from role models of physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy sexual practices, the ecclesiastical power structure controls sexual behavior among its clerics through institutionalization of the celibate body. In its worst manifestation, it has created a cyclical pattern of corruption that can override the good intentions and self sacrifice¹³⁸ to which the seminarian vows himself.¹³⁹ Canon 227 states that, once vowed, clerics are promised to observe perfect and perpetual sexual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and to enable their service to God and humankind with a clear and undivided heart. They are therefore are obliged to observe celibacy as special gift from God for the task ahead.¹⁴⁰ Yet the celibate vow functions not only for the purposes of service and devotion to God—celibacy also gives the Church a foothold in the body of the cleric. He is likely to be unsure about how to go about his celibate practice. He may be psychosexually immature and unable to form intimate, non-sexual relationships. He is likely to experience loneliness and mourn the loss of his reproductive capacity. Due to the hierarchical, hyper-masculine environment of the Church which promotes logic

¹³⁸ James Carroll, “After Pennsylvania, What Pope Francis Should Say in Ireland,” *The New Yorker*, August 22, 2018.

¹³⁹ Generally, these are to poverty, chastity, and obedience, with the particulars varying by order, and whether he is a religious or diocesan priest. (Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, XXIV.)

¹⁴⁰ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 30.

above emotion and suffering over integration, the priest has no space or place to process these complex feelings.¹⁴¹ Yet, celibacy in the Church is power; Patrick Wall, a Canon lawyer, affirms this relationship between denial of sex and self and power in the Catholic Church:

“...celibacy holds the central role in the Roman [Catholic] rite regarding governance, ecclesiastical office, and authority. A person must be *celibate* for the bishop to appoint or install him in a role of essential governance, an ecclesiastical office, or a position exercising principle authority. Reflexively, once a man is released from the obligation of celibacy (laicized), canonically he is incapacitated to hold any office, function, or delegated authority. The bottom line is: celibacy is essential for a man to hold a position of power and authority in the Western Rite of the Roman Catholic Church, validly and licitly.”¹⁴²

Celibacy and male power in the Church are thus intrinsically linked and theoretically inseparable, and that male power is then responsible from the creation and perpetuation of the Catholic sexual ethic. Therefore, in considering the sexual abuse crisis in context with the exclusively male development of the sexual ethic, it is necessary to interrogate how these factors contribute to the cognitively unreachable space of sexual morality for priests.

This circumstance and method of the Church’s understanding of itself creates a culture in which conformity is rewarded over free inquiry.¹⁴³ There is no space where

¹⁴¹ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 292.

¹⁴² Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 4.

¹⁴³ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 234.

the sexual ethic might evolve or where the general members of the clergy could voice their concerns or propose solutions regarding the crisis. Vatican II, while largely acclaimed for its modernization of the Church, still systematically emphasizes authority over service and service over self-care, both of which can also lead to abuse of power and of self.¹⁴⁴ The inability to prioritize self over others in any circumstance degrades perceptions of self-worth and can lead priests to seek power over others in order to gain some sense of control over their lives. The priest may also become absorbed in his own sense of worthlessness stemming from a belief that he is unable to protect himself from the advances of others' power. Clericalism is deeply entrenched in every facet of the workings of the Church, evidently in the administration and higher levels of Church authority, but its effects remain in even the smallest daily workings of the ministerial priest. Constrained within this hermetical world first in seminary,¹⁴⁵ and then the monastery or parish house, priests exist in a space in which they are unable to maintain boundaries.¹⁴⁶ Much of this inability to create and maintain personal and professional boundaries is due to the Church structure itself which favors total self-giving,¹⁴⁷ hence the resulting oppressive and total hierarchy of clericalism. For a priest to have power or autonomy within the Church, he must be obedient to those above him, and that necessitates sacrifice in terms of his values, his time and energy, and even the security of his body and spirit. The life of all Catholic clerics is based on this

¹⁴⁴ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 46.

¹⁴⁵ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 41.

¹⁴⁷ See chapter 1.

affirmation of conformity and sacrifice, and priests, possessing a solely clerical perspective of the world, subsequently become extremely limited in terms of their ability to empathize with and minister practically to their lay congregants. Clerical culture at once promotes a worldwide fraternity of men who support one another, but also one in which the expectation is to deeply conform to expectations, not be outspoken, or excessively popular or successful.

The hidden separateness, antithetical to the overt conformity within clericalism, is bolstered by this contradiction between guise of the brotherhood of Christ and the reality of a patriarchal ecclesiastical structure. The closeness of brotherhood is tainted by aggressive, masculine culture that favors adolescent psychological development and adolescent psychological response—¹⁴⁸ perhaps because of the delayed psychosexual development of many clerics as part of an authoritative agenda to infantilize priests. The ensuing dependent modes of operation make them more subservient to Church officials.¹⁴⁹ Equality in the sight of God¹⁵⁰ is often superseded by the hierarchy of Church officials, which favor of personal gain and authority. The power of the Church officials, at its source, stems from the direct line of succession from Jesus Christ to the current Pope,¹⁵¹ and from the Pope to each member of the Church. Thus, any argument

¹⁴⁸ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 234.

¹⁴⁹ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ “But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:25-28)

¹⁵¹ Joseph Card. Ratzinger, “The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church,” *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, November 18, 1998, 5-6.

against the system is ostensibly an argument against Church theology and its fundamental truths regarding the passage of power from Jesus to his disciple Paul. In short, to reject clericalism and hierarchy is to commit blasphemy—further entrenching clericalism in the very core of Catholic theology. This line of succession from Jesus to every Church leader is entirely male; in the rare circumstance in which women gain power in the Catholic Church, it is always less than or subservient to male power. Women cannot be bishops, cardinals, much less access the level of power conferred in the papacy. Clericalism disrupts the equitable elements of the theoretical basis of the Church in favor of a system which promotes and enables a homosocial, masculine hierarchy—and resistance to the oppression of this system is equated with resistance to God and the Church, hampering any attempts at major reformation.

In accordance with Canon Law 391, all bishops have total legislative, judicial, and executive power within their diocese.¹⁵² As the Pope is ostensibly the bishop of the Catholic world, he has total power within the entire realm of the Church. After the papal encyclical of Vatican I, it was declared that, as successors to the apostolic legacy of Peter, popes have the most supreme power of teaching, and, by extension, they are functionally infallible.¹⁵³ In practice, this means that no pope can contradict the inherently holy and true teachings of another, and any knowledge that a new pope may

¹⁵² "It is for the diocesan bishop to govern the particular church entrusted to him with legislative, executive and judicial power according to the norm of law. The bishop exercises executive power himself. He exercises executive power either personally or through vicars general or episcopal vicars according to the norm of law. He exercises judicial power either personally or through the judicial vicars and judges according to the norm of law." (Canon 391)

¹⁵³ Decrees of the First Vatican Council, Papal Encyclicals Online, last modified February 20, 2017, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum20.htm>.

have, conferred by divine revelation and importantly *not* by human understanding, must also be inarguably holy and true. Papal infallibility as a concept and its relation to the Church structure as a whole is based largely in the gospel of Luke, which characterizes the Church as the body of Christ¹⁵⁴ with a head—the Pope—guiding and commanding the body, acting as conscience and reason for the wayward limbs,¹⁵⁵ reinforcing the institutional structure of the church.¹⁵⁶ It is precisely this logic which makes hierarchical ecclesiastical structure so inextricable from Catholicism itself; is the also the very same logic utilized in the sexual ethics—that these structures and rules are the word of God. That logic is sourced from the Bible and interpreted along the same lines in accordance with the Catechisms, and this entanglement with the core of Catholicism is part of what make clericalism seemingly impossible to dismantle.

Furthermore, and perhaps even more problematically, men in the sight of God and in their God-created bodies are revered and powerful in traditional Catholic theology, and boys are seen as inheritors of this legacy.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently, there is a tendency for priests to see themselves as worthy of veneration by adolescents and see affective exchanges between an older male ‘hero’ and young admirer as ‘natural’

¹⁵⁴ According to T.H. Sanks, “...the portrait of a community guided by the Spirit in Luke’s writings has influenced the Church’s trust that the Spirit continued to guide it throughout history.” (T.H. Sanks, *Salt, Leaven, and Light: The Community Called Church*, (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1997), 48.)

¹⁵⁵ This hierarchical model is not the only way to order the Church, Matthew’s gospel makes the Church out to be a teaching authority composed of communal bodies—church leaders ought not seek power or even distinctive clothing. Alternatively, John emphasized the individual relations to God, Jesus, self, neighbor, and world, pervasive egalitarianism, and equality of sexes. (Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 45.)

¹⁵⁶ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 44.

¹⁵⁷ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 234.

extensions of that structure.¹⁵⁸ The overt acceptance of relationships between men and young boys, or to a lesser extent, girls, despite the sexual ethic's resistance to same-sex relationships and adamant condemnation of rape,¹⁵⁹ is evidence of the space between the ethic and the clerical structure. This space allows for such relationships of affection and veneration to occur with limited resistance, as clerical culture is entirely apart from lay culture. There are no prescriptions from the Church on how to act in these situations, and relationships that place vulnerable people in the care of priests, even predatory ones, are not only tolerated but promoted as a continuation of clericalism and the vocation as a whole. Sexual abuse is part of a larger, though not illegal, moral failing on behalf of priests in the forms of sexual involvement with consenting adults, tolerated by ecclesiastical authority.¹⁶⁰ There are thus two issues with Church organization that lead to the clerical abuse crisis as it is today: failure to identify structural and public elements of the Church with regards to the ordained, and the centrality of the papacy and by extension, higher Church officials, without any checks to their total power.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 235.

¹⁵⁹ Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 194.

¹⁶⁰ Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 237.

¹⁶¹ Keenan, *Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 46.

Catholic Responses to the Sexual Abuse Crisis

The evidence that I have been developing, that the sexual abuse crisis is not some inherent element of Catholicism, nor a few ‘bad apples,’ but rather the result of a culture and a sexual ethic which refuse to engage with sex/uality and perpetuate a space of mental untouchability around sex/uality within the Church, is largely supported by the Church’s own response to the sexual abuse crisis. Few of the responses from the past three popes acknowledge or engage with the topic of sex/uality. This included Pope Francis, who was lauded for his relative liberalism upon his election to the Holy See in 2013, who now appears to be participating in the suppression of sexual topics within the Church especially regarding the abuse crisis. The first acknowledgement of the sexual abuse crisis was a test of the modern Catholic Church, made by Pope John Paul II via email in November 2001—the first of its kind both technologically and ideologically. John Paul II wrote that bishops from Oceania, the agents of the apology, ‘apologized unreservedly’ in a 1998 synod responding to the issue of revelations of sexual abuse there; “the Church expresses deep regret and asks forgiveness,” he added. He focused on the spiritual harm that had befallen the victims of abuse, and the loss of faithfuls in the Catholic Church. This apology failed, though, to recognize the physical, mental, and emotional trauma often resulting from sexual abuse, and the systemic harm within the Church. The three bishops John Paul appointed to oversee the problem in the U.S. were criticized by other members of the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops

(USCCB) for their inability to invent any creative responses to the problem.¹⁶² It was not merely the actual abuse that fomented mistrust amongst Catholics, but the Church's subsequent and ongoing coverup of the abuse, and its redistribution of abusive clergy into positions in which they were able to continue their behaviors.¹⁶³ In response to the Church's inaction for over a decade, in 2002, the USCCB created the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*,¹⁶⁴ notably without papal authority or consent through the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse.¹⁶⁵ The creation of an ad hoc committee and action of U.S. bishops, among others, to resolve this issue without papal input, especially during the reign of Pope Benedict XVI, illuminates the prioritization of other dilemmas of faith, including less urgent ethical dilemmas, like abortion and gay marriage, over the real and continued abuse of children. The critical work of dismantling the hegemonies that allowed for continued abuse was neglected until the resignation of Benedict XVI in 2013.

When Pope Francis was elected thereafter, he made it his personal goal to reform the Church, and emphasized the eradication of sexual abuse was a significant

¹⁶² McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 291.

¹⁶³ Robertson and Otterman, "It's Really Hard to Be a Catholic."

¹⁶⁴ Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 15.

¹⁶⁵ The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* directs United States action on the following principles: "Creating a safe environment for children and young people; Healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors; Making prompt and effective response to allegations; Cooperating with civil authorities; Disciplining offenders; Providing for means of accountability for the future to ensure the problem continues to be effectively dealt with through the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection and the National Review Board." (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People PDF," last modified June 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/Charter-for-the-Protection-of-Children-and-Young-People-2018-final.pdf>.)

part of that reform. One year after his election in 2014, he created the Vatican Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church. The aim of the commission was to investigate and support victims of abuse with pastoral care and legal processes within the Church. In March of that year, Pope Francis claimed that this commission was able to fulfill all the needs of the Church in terms of resolving sexual abuse.¹⁶⁶ However, for all the lofty ideals of the commission, Marie Collins, an Irish woman who had been a victim of abuse, left the board after just a few years, citing what she called ‘resistance by some members of the Vatican Curia’ to the commission’s work.¹⁶⁷ As the only survivor of sexual abuse of the commission, Collins’ disappointment and subsequent resignation illuminates a key issue with the Church’s dealings in sexual abuse resolution and reparations: the consistent degradation of victims and their inadequate reintegration into the Church, even if the victims were willing and able to reenter the Church. Following Collins’ criticism and widespread resistance to necessary reforms, the original board dissolved rather chaotically, only two members of the founding board of nineteen remain, United States Cardinal Seán O’Malley, OFM Cap., and Columbian Bishop Monsignor Ali Herrera.¹⁶⁸ Pope Francis, however, is known for his adeptness with words—one Cardinal, Christoph Schönborn of Vienna, has even said that he speaks like Jesus.¹⁶⁹ In keeping with that reputation, he sought to resolve

¹⁶⁶ Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, The Vatican, last modified 2018, <http://www.tutelaminorum.va/content/tuteladeiminori/en.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Carroll, “What Pope Francis Should Say in Ireland.”

¹⁶⁸ Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

¹⁶⁹ Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 370.

the sexual abuse crisis with his articulation and careful exegesis, here in his letter addressed to the people of God:

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.”¹⁷⁰

The entirety of his apology and argument is centered around this verse of 1 Corinthians, which describes the body of the emerging Church in the words of Paul, which is utilized by Francis to reenforce the unity of the Catholic Church around the issue of protecting children and victimized persons. In verse twenty of 1 Corinthians the original form of the Church takes shape: “...now are they many members, yet but one body,”¹⁷¹ thus creating the notion of a unified Church. As there should be no schism in the body,¹⁷² there is thus a need, Francis argues, for the harm done to one member to be the communal responsibility of the entirety of the Church as assembled

¹⁷⁰ Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God, The Vatican, last modified August 20, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

It cannot be expected that Francis’ reference to Catholic exegesis is a universal understanding, so I will reference the Biblical verse he is citing as evidence. “As it is, there are many members, yet one body.” (1 Corinthians 12:20.)

¹⁷² Ibid.

“...there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” (1 Corinthians 12:25.)

by God¹⁷³. The reparations he calls for in the letter are spiritualized as well: “prayer and penance will help. I invite the entire holy faithful People of God to a penitential exercise of prayer and fasting, following the Lord’s command.” Demanding an end to spiritual corruption, Francis continues his theologized message: “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light,”¹⁷⁴ he writes, directly addressing the notion that men religious are somehow closer to God, and elevated to a near-angelic position due to their clerical status. Such elevation is one of the main critiques of clericalism, as it makes clerics seemingly perfect—akin to angels. In reminding Catholics that Satan was once, too, an angel before his fall, Francis begins to delve in to his primary argument against the infallibility of the clergy and clericalism more broadly.

Francis believes that this infallibility of clericalism is at the core of the sexual abuse crisis. He equates the problem of widespread abuse with the issue of clericalism, which he vows to reform: “clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”¹⁷⁵ Thereby amalgamating the abuse of power, abuse of conscience, and sexual abuse as a singular issue. He joins Catholics as a singular people in their salvation, synchronous in their obligation to ease the

¹⁷³ Ibid.

“And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, seconds prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:28.)

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

“And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14.)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

wounds of abuse. Francis concludes his letter with a plea, not to the institutional *body* of the Church, but to the *people* of the Church:

“It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable. Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others. An awareness of sin helps us to acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds caused in the past and allows us, in the present, to be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion.”¹⁷⁶

This excerpt distinctly engages with his prior citation of Corinthians affirming the importance that every aspect, every member, in the body of the Church work with and for it as one body: “the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”¹⁷⁷ Francis reminds Catholics of the sacrament of penance, suggesting that confession and therefore *awareness* of sin helps acknowledge wrongdoings. Scarsalla, however, sees this Catholic emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation as preventative to achieving justice for victims. The Church’s response to the clerical abuse crisis is indicative of how—and when—the issue is spiritualized for the continuation and protection of itself through the controlling images of clerical holiness in clericalism and application of Biblical exegesis to justify or apologize for abusive patterns. In so doing, sex/uality, and its abusive misuse, is

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:21.

spiritualized. Notably, however, this spiritualization does not occur within the bounds of the established Catholic sexual ethic. It is not within the bounds of celibacy and division of the entire devoted heart, rather, it is under the guise of unloving behavior and clericalism. Systemic sexual abuse is no longer framed as merely a public relations problem or even a legal problem, but a theological problem of the utmost importance for Catholicism.

Conclusion

Catholic sexual ethics, as formally explicated by the Catholic Church, understand ordered sexual activity within the sanctified sacrament of marriage to be the only ethical expression of sex/uality. While humans are fundamentally depraved according to Catholic exegesis, a result of the Fall, they are also redeemed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Catholicism centers love exemplified by Jesus in all its depictions of ethics and theological morals, and it is within that conception of love that Catholicism prohibits sexual activity that is disordered—outside marriage, queer, unproductive—that which does not honor and love each person according to their innate worth conferred by Jesus. While the condemnation of such actions ought to theoretically suppress nonconsensual sexual behavior, like rape and sexual abuse of children, all of this explanation occurs within the very clearly defined bounds of the marital union. The way that Catholicism educates about sex/uality excludes any sort of non-marital sexual values or ethics. This, in turn, makes sex/uality a taboo subject, and it is subsequently unreachable by the followers of Catholicism who are not married, most importantly including the representatives of Jesus Christ, the priests.

The Church's failure to acknowledge itself and its role in the sexual abuse crisis, and to examine how it views sex/uality, and most especially how it prevents conversation, exploration, and understanding thereof, is indicative of how the sexual ethic is really inapplicable and unusable in the context of the sexual abuse crisis. The laws the Church has failed to establish, regarding sexual behavior and ethics for priests

have, more accurately, not been established in the first place. The negative definition of what exactly characterizes violation of the celibate vow creates an unknowable space within Catholic sexual ethics: there are essentially no sexual ethics for the Catholic priest. He is unable to act rightly when his entire ethic is, theoretically, based in the Catholic ethic and the Catholic ethic repeatedly and continually refuses to engage with the question of and possibility of *breaches in* the celibate vow. While it may be easy for the non-clergy to see how forcing sexual activities upon children and minors, especially violent and cruel sexual activity, is objectively wrong, such intuition is counteracted by the willfully ignorant celibate sexual ethic embedded in the Catholic Church. This is not an apology for abusive priests, but instead an open investigation into how the Church's own sexual ethics and hierarchical systems of power have created space for sexual abuse, its perpetuation, and its coverup, by its own failure to acknowledge the reality of sex/uality and sexual abuse. Mortification of the body in the emulation of the Christ, holy obedience, perceptions of greater holiness of the clergy, and the affirmation of sex with *women* as the ultimate sin to be avoided, even more vile sex with un-consenting and underage children, all work together to create a space that neither allows nor explicitly *disallows* sexual encounters with vulnerable persons. It is this space that, coupled with the increased likelihood that a man with pedophillic inclinations will be attracted to positions with higher access to children, such as the priesthood, teaching, coaching, or scouting,¹⁷⁸ can be cited as the primary reasons why the preponderance of sexual abuse has come to light, if not its impetus.

¹⁷⁸ Woodward, "Double Lives."

The origin of the priestly state in celibacy is in the institutional and bureaucratic needs of the Church in the middle ages. While theologically justified as providing the cleric with an undivided heart for service, it was also intended to prevent bishops from fathering children and willing property or wealth to their biological children and not the Church. This begins to show the integration of the celibate state and the priesthood with the Catholic Church as an institution, now which has not only holy goals, but secular ones as well. While the celibate ideal is deeply entrenched and intertwined with Catholicism as a whole by the eleventh century, exactly how celibacy works any the psychological integration and maturation required for true celibacy remains inaccessible for many priests, especially given the lack of education and information regarding how to be celibate. With no explicit understanding of how to use their sex/uality nor how to repress it or integrate it fully, and taking into account the lack of discussion regarding celibate sexual ethics, the untouchability of celibate Catholic sex/uality becomes solidified. The development of this space throughout the two-thousand year legacy of the Catholic Church is punctuated by recognition that being celibate is a challenge, and that the Church has not and is not doing enough to acknowledge the space between the ethic and the ideal of celibacy for priests and the day-to-day lives of men religious. There is no sexual ethical code for priests nor a prescribed way of dealing with immoral sexual behavior in Canon law.

Thus, history arrives at the sexual abuse crisis of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. While the individual actions of the abusers are based on a conglomeration of factors, such as pedophilic attraction, being abused themselves, or a need to exert

power over others, what truly makes this a *crisis* is how it is perpetuated and concealed in the very annals of the Catholic Church. Catholic understandings of the glorification of bodily suffering demean the pain of suffering and transform it into something holy, a parallel to the greatest sacrifice of Jesus, therefore transforming causing suffering, as in a particularly brutal sexual act, into a sanctifying experience for the victim. This perpetuates the separation of the intellectual space of sex/uality and especially priestly sex/uality from reality and from suffering, making it a liminal space in which rules of ethics no longer apply and, subsequently, the terror of sexual abuse can occur.

Furthermore, the demonization of women in the Church, as a result of Eve's tempting and causing the Fall of both her and Adam, portrays sex with women as the greatest evil of all, causing damaging perceptions of femininity and potential for justification of sex with minors as less evil, being not with women. Blaming queerness and homosexuality for the sexual abuse crisis again draws attention away from the systemic nature of the crisis, and degrades members of the Church for an orientation over which they have no control—an orientation which is a gift of God. The space between Catholic understandings of sex/uality and the practiced life of the cleric within the Church as an institution festers with fear of women, degradation of fellow men religious, ignorance of the inapplicability of the sexual ethic, and systematic abuse of power within the strict theologized hierarchy of the Church; all these factors serve to obscure the reality of clerical sex/uality and prevent acknowledgement, responsibility, and engagement thereof. Thousands of years of turning away from sex/uality, of praying that with enough will power and discipline it may, by a miracle of God, vanish

away, have proven to be in vain. The theoretical space of sex/uality becomes increasingly opaque and less accessible by ethics, law, and conversation; enabling the crisis to exist and continue under the dark cloak of intentional ignorance.

The concealment of sex/uality and subsequent concealment of the sexual abuse crisis as products of the Catholic Church's inability to engage with the celibate ideal it has created is affirmed by Pope Francis' response to the sexual abuse crisis. He centers his apologies and comments on the lack of Catholic love exhibited by abuse of minors, and the devastation is wrecks on the institution as a whole. He further cites clericalism as the sole perpetuator of the crisis, as it bolsters the perceived infallibility and holiness of Church leaders. This, however, is but one more aspect of the crisis. Pope Francis' inability to address the sexual element of the crisis is indicative of the untouchability of sex/uality and how that deepens the chasm between the ethic and the lives of Catholic men religious. It is precisely this chasm that I direct attention to—it is not the cause of sexual abuse, but it is where it occurs, and the protective covering under which sexual abuse is able to continue undetected by the majority of the population, and uninhibited by the majority of the institution.

Although I am not prescribing a solution for the Catholic Church, I hope to fracture the sphere of untouchability in Catholic sex/uality. I understand that the scope of this crisis is far more than one singular document can undo, yet every voice raised against abuse and oppression has an impact. I hope that the voices of every victim and every person who suffers because of the Catholic sexual abuse crisis is amplified in my

work. If I am able to draw attention to that which refuses to draw attention to itself, and make transparent that which obscures itself, I will have achieved my aims herein.

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