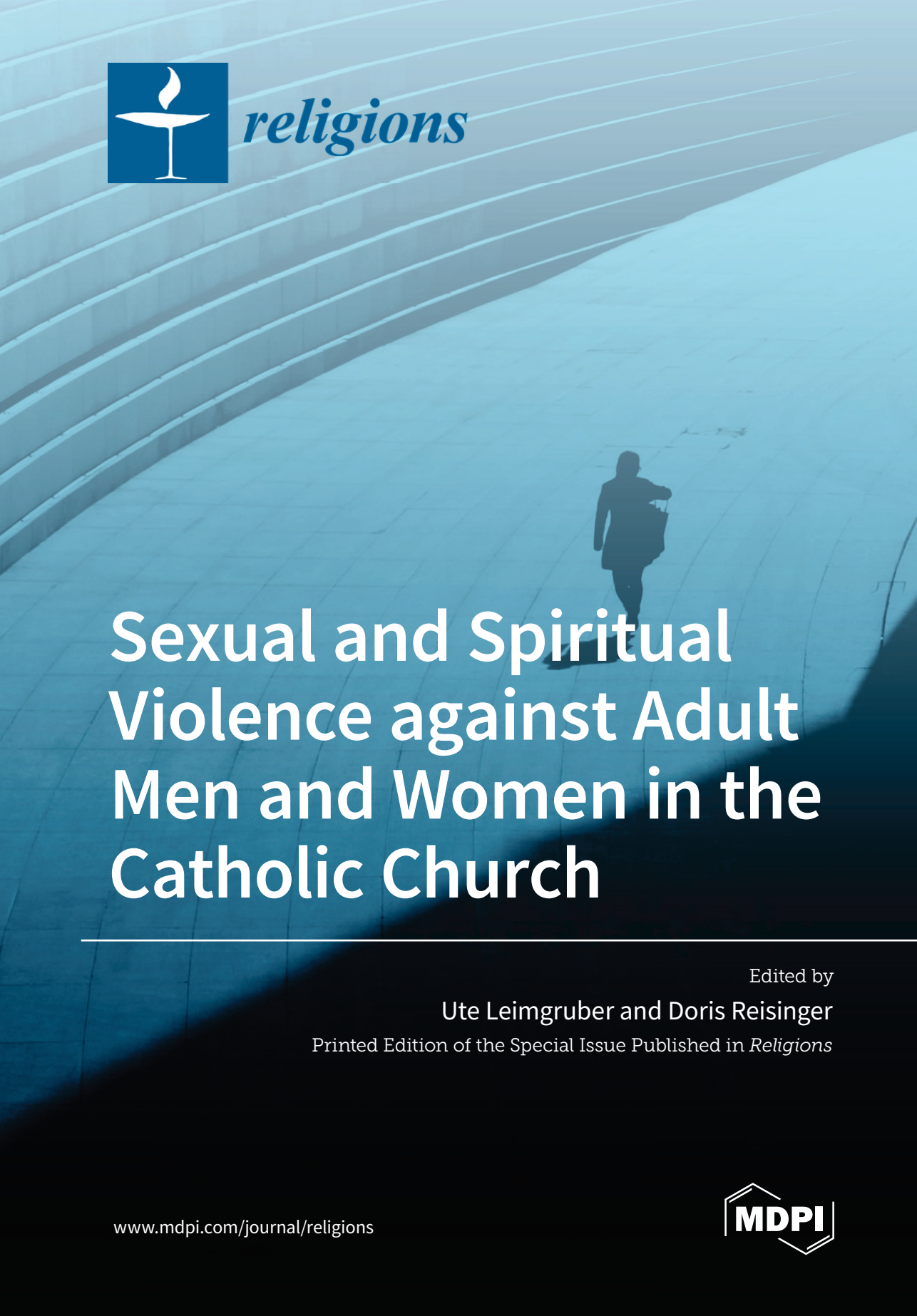

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Sexual and Spiritual Violence against Adult Men and Women in the Catholic Church

Edited by
Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Printed Edition of the Special Issue Published in *Religions*

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This is a reprint of articles from the Special Issue published online in the open access journal *Religions* (ISSN 2077-1444) (available at: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/ssv).

For citation purposes, cite each article independently as indicated on the article page online and as indicated below:

LastName, A.A.; LastName, B.B.; LastName, C.C. Article Title. *Journal Name* **Year**, *Volume Number*, Page Range.

ISBN 978-3-0365-6247-6 (Hbk)
ISBN 978-3-0365-6248-3 (PDF)

Cover image courtesy of Hongmei Zhao

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Preface to "Sexual and Spiritual Violence against Adult Men and Women in the Catholic Church"

This Special Issue of *Religions*, entitled "Sexual and Spiritual Violence against Men and Women in the Catholic Church", focuses on spiritual and sexual abuse of adults in the Catholic Church. Based on the observation that the patterns and logics of violence associated with the abuse of adults differ from those associated with the abuse of minors, it sheds light on the specific situation of adults as victims of abuse in the Catholic Church. The issue also has a special focus on the sexual abuse of teenage girls and adult women in the Catholic Church which appears to be closely linked to certain conceptions of gender that are taught by the Roman-Catholic magisterium and deeply ingrained in the culture of an exclusively male-dominated clergy.

Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger
Editors

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Article

Vulnerance of Pastoral Care

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Abstract: Disproving assumptions to the contrary, this article clearly shows how and why adults can become victims of abuse in church contexts. It does this by focusing on the pastoral care context and the interdependent potential risk factors lying within. As previous studies suggest, this context is especially susceptible to perpetrating abuse. Approximately three-quarters of all cases of abuse occur or begin in the context of pastoral care or spiritual counseling. Often, theories of pastoral care do not address this danger and tend to idealize the practice of pastoral care. In contrast, it is necessary to recognize a specific power to victimize due to the theological and structural power differential in pastoral relationships. Therefore, this article proposes a complex understanding of "vulnerability" and "vulnerance" that accounts for the victimization potential inherent in all pastoral care settings and advocates a theory of pastoral care that is not only concerned with the individual but also incorporates reflections on structural and systemic power dynamics.

Keywords: sexual and spiritual violence; abuse of adults; clergy abuse; violence against women in church; pastoral care; vulnerability; vulnerance; professional sexual misconduct (PSM)

Citation: Leimgruber, Ute. 2022. Vulnerance of Pastoral Care. *Religions* 13: 256. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030256

Academic Editor: John Jillions

Received: 7 February 2022
Accepted: 15 March 2022
Published: 17 March 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

According to the German MHG study[1] on the sexual abuse of minors "three quarters of all victims were in a clerical or a pastoral relationship with the accused" (Dreßing 2018, p. 7). If we broaden our view to first-person documents and the accounts from victims who are adults, this observation is confirmed: when clergy commit sexual abuse (initiation, grooming strategies, and concrete acts), it takes place within the context of pastoral care or pastoral counseling (see, e.g., Haslbeck et al. 2020; Fortune and Poling [1994] 2004; Byrne 2010). Sexual abuse and spiritual abuse go hand in hand—especially in the context of pastoral relationships. The "Meffan" report from the Boston Diocese states: "There are three allegations. They were all young women. The incidents began in the early or late high school years. The allegations include lovemaking, inviting her to undress, inviting her to his bedroom; touching and fondling, everything short of intercourse; bride of Christ, imagine Christ touching, kissing, having intercourse with her, hugging him around waist and kissing of genitals. All under guise of spiritual counseling" (Review Board of the Archdiocese of Boston 1993). To a large extent, the context of pastoral care is a place in which priests encounter adults and can involve them in the dynamics of abuse. This is where perpetrators and victims meet, where relationships of trust are established and where they are often later violated. "Often, it is a recurring pattern of misuse of the ministerial role" (Fortune and Poling [1994] 2004, p. 5). Thus, with respect to adult victims, it is particularly important to take a closer look at the specific aspects of pastoral relationships and the theories of pastoral care and how these situations can enable abuse to occur.

The first part of the article discusses a common understanding of pastoral care in Germany and casts doubt on whether the issue of abuse is sufficiently considered by this understanding. I then it shows why pastoral care theories remain deficient if they do not explicitly discuss the structural power to harm that lies within all pastoral care contexts. In the following section, to grasp these interdependent abuse potentials, the article introduces the term "vulnerance" as a readiness to use violence in connection with "vulnerabilities". Finally, consequences for pastoral care are drawn. It must be seen more

clearly that pastoral care in itself harbors the danger of harming help-seeking people. In the future, the awareness of "vulnerance" in pastoral care must play a central role in the theological-scholarly discourses, in the practical training of pastoral care workers, and also in the evaluation and processing of cases of abuse.

2. Theories of Pastoral Care in Relation to Sexual Abuse

The vast majority of all cases of abuse in the Church take place in the setting of pastoral care or spiritual counselling (see Dreßing 2018, p. 7). This is a major reason why it is important to look not only at the perpetrators and the victims, but specifically at the setting of pastoral care.

2.1. Focus on Individual Actors

For centuries the theories of pastoral care were mainly focused on priests as individuals, on the Catholic side often within the framework of a universally conceived provision of pastoral care and the sacraments (see Hoelzl 2017; Lohausen 2018). This centering on the clergy and universalizing of pastoral care were overturned in the 20th century when theories of pastoral care were founded upon contemporary social sciences. Today, pastoral care is oriented towards the person in need and is intended to offer help to people in crises of faith and life. Additionally, it is clear to all current concepts that not only theological considerations, but also sociological and psychological contexts as well as system theories must be taken into account (see Karle 2020, p. 403). From a historical perspective, this is a progression in the humanization of pastoral care that can hardly be overestimated. In contrast, little has changed in the focus on the individual. The practical theological theories of pastoral care still focus in broad ecumenical agreement on the individuals involved; pastoral care is essentially, according to one of the handbooks on the subject, "person-centered" (Burbach 2018). Pastoral care is "encounter, interaction, designed time" (Klessmann 2008, p. 15). It is about people accompanying people on the way to a more meaningful life. The guiding perspective is focused on individuals. Authoritative for the theology of pastoral care within German-speaking Roman Catholicism is the foundational work by Doris Nauer. According to Nauer, pastoral care is "a comprehensive care for the soul of a human being" (Nauer 2014, p. 322). Within her concept of multidimensional pastoral care, she describes a complex competence profile for the pastor (Nauer 2014, p. 316) extended by a small-scale profile of their pastoral role. A pastor has to be many things, including for example a spiritual role model, a representative of the church, a mystagogue who brings people deeper into the faith, a comforter, blesser, dispenser of the sacraments, an expert in meditation, a healer, crisis expert, liberator, helper, an expert in solidarity, and much more (Nauer 2014, p. 317). Here, a rather clear positioning of the people involved is described: one person is in crisis, the other is the expert in crises situations; one needs comfort, the other gives comfort; one needs help, the other provides help, and so on. One could also say that on one side there is the needy, hurt, or vulnerable person, and on the other side there is the helpful, strong, individual in a professional position to provide pastoral care.

2.2. Ideals of Pastoral Care

We see that in most present publications an ideal of pastoral care is outlined as "attentive participation in the lives" (Karle 2020, p. 405) of others, as "interested attention and accompaniment" (Karle 2020, p. 405), being "close to people, tradition-oriented, and (...) at the cutting edge" (Nauer 2014, p. 328). Pastoral care is "the mother tongue of the church" (Bosse-Huber 2005, p. 11) and as "simple, elementary, approachable, and often associated with loving gestures, touches, and a warm tone of voice" (Morgenthaler 2009, p. 297; with reference to Bosse-Huber 2005). From the theological ideals of pastoral care and sacraments, reference is made to a corresponding, almost romanticized practice (see, i.e., Schneider and Patenge 2004). If one wishes to illustrate or depict pastoral care, it is almost always symbolized by touching. For example: one person puts an arm around the

shoulder of another, one hand is enclosed within another's two hands—always people are physically close to each other. According to Doris Nauer "credible pastoral care aims to enable those who give pastoral care to think and/or say confidently and proudly, 'It is something precious to be called to pastoral care'" (Nauer 2014, p. 322).

3. The Power to Victimize in Pastoral Care

Despite this ideal, practice is often different. Many adults, especially women, are victimized in pastoral care contexts by their pastors who have a spiritual responsibility for them. Already in 1984, a study provided "some data: 12.67% of clergy surveyed reported that they had had sexual intercourse with a church member" (Fortune and Poling [1994] 2004, p. 5) In 2008, Diana Garland conducted a national research project in the US on the abuse of adults by clergy (Garland 2009). Her study found "3.1% of adult women who attend religious service at least once a month have been the victims of clergy sexual misconduct since turning 18" (Garland 2009). Additionally, the US John Jay Report (Terry et al. 2011) reported that there were more incidents of sexual relationships between clergy and adult women than between a priest and a minor. To date, for the German speaking Catholic context from which I come, no studies or statistics that specifically pertain to Catholic clergy and adult women have been done—this is an important area for continued research. However, the stories of many victims correspond to the insights so far. One example: a woman with the pseudonym Lindsey reports that the priest supposedly "counseled" her empathetically over a long period of time before sexual acts occurred: "Never having had much personal contact with a pastor, I thought this was probably what a pastoral relationship was like. (...) At first our conversations ended with hugs, then with brief kisses that eventually turned in light petting that turned into heavy petting. (...) During the next two years we had occasional sexual intercourse" (Poling 1999, p. 104f). This is only one example of many stories told about sexual behaviors within pastoral relationships, which we can observe in all Christian denominations. Consider the Catholic Church: What does it mean for the theory of pastoral care that at least three quarters of all cases of abuse happen or are initiated in the context of pastoral counseling or sacramental settings? What happens when one looks at the subject of pastoral care with the perspective of those who have been affected and with the sensitivity of the abuse that has occurred?

3.1. The Topic of Abuse in Pastoral Care

In reading the numerous scholarly texts on, and application-oriented depictions of, pastoral care with the hermeneutics of experiences of violence and abuse, one thing stands out: the subject of violence and abuse is not prominent in the majority of publications. Often readers search in vain for the topic of abuse within the context of pastoral care in textbooks on the subject or on diocesan websites. There are only a few practical-theological publications in the German-speaking world which deal with the topic of abuse in pastoral care in its own chapter (e.g., Morgenthaler 2009, p. 372; with reference to Tschan 2005). Some texts mention the dangers, but only in passing. Abuse and violence do not seem to be a generally addressed topic, but are mainly discussed in publications that are already active in this specialized field, such as publications on trauma sensitive pastoral care. Andreas Stahl, a well-known expert in this field, writes: "Neither are church congregations or institutions and Christian families abuse-free places, nor are workers in pastoral care beyond the categories of victim and perpetrator. Pastoral care workers have been victims or perpetrators of violence in the social sphere and potentially will be so in the present and in the future" (Stahl 2021, p. 271). Barbara Haslbeck and Erika Kerstner, who have already done a lot of research on the topic of trauma and abuse, put the matter succinctly: "Pastoral counselings are not a power-free space" (Haslbeck and Kerstner 2016, p. 79). On the other hand, many books with a specific view on abuse lack an analytical view of pastoral care, even if the system as a whole is considered (e.g., Keenan 2013). In other pastoral theology books, the question of power plays a role, albeit a minor one. Doris Nauer points to a position of authority and power that arises in pastoral care: pastors and especially clergy

have, according to Nauer, an "authority and fullness of power" in pastoral care in several respects (Nauer 2014, p. 415), and they can and must behave accordingly and learn to deal with it so as not to harm anyone. In evangelical churches, the issue has been analyzed before. Marie M. Fortune and James N. Poling write: "The role of minister/counselor carries with it authority and power and the attendant responsibility to use this power to benefit the people who call upon the minister/counselor for service." (Fortune and Poling [1994] 2004, p. 7).

Although this provides constructive direction, it simultaneously may fall short. For in doing so, it could suggest the idea that one can act in pastoral care—if one would only approach it reflectively enough—without assuming a dangerous position of authority and power; the responsibility for this seems to lie with the individual. One could also say that this is a consequence of the fact the theory of pastoral care focuses primarily on the personal competencies of the individual pastoral care workers. According to Nauer, pastoral caregivers need, among other things, relational competence, because "destructive relationship building (...) [can] in extreme cases (...) lead to sexual abuse" (Nauer 2014, p. 298). Unlike Fortune and Poling, in many European theology publications the position of authority and power of pastoral caregivers is often understood in a negative and damaging way (e.g., Bieler 2017; Burbach 2018; Nauer 2014). Canon law also points in this direction, through its provision that clergy and other church people may "violate the sixth commandment by abusing authority" (c. 1395 § 3 CIC).

3.2. Inevitable Structural Power Differential

Power in pastoral relationships may be interpreted as something that can or should be avoided (on the complex contexts around power cf. Anter 2012; Laverack 2019). However, again, this may be a misleading reading. For the asymmetries of power are inscribed in pastoral relationships before any personal action occurs: formally, due to the professional setting between the participants, and materially, because of the fact that already in the common term, which goes back to Gregory the Great, *cura et regimen animarum* contains the concept of 'leadership' or 'rule' and thus power differential, authority, and not least a capacity to injure, are always present. In other words, pastoral care does not work without an asymmetry of power and authority. The pastor cannot avoid this power differential, nor does it per se lead to abuse. However, it may lead to abuse if it is either denied, made taboo, or exploited for the pastoral caregiver's own desire for power or pleasure.

The statement in almost all manuals and textbooks, that pastoral care ideally proceeds in a linear way and accompanies people on their path in a progressively healing manner, that "pastoral care [takes place] with people on equal footing" (Nauer 2014, p. 181), is anthropologically, ethically, and historically welcome, and yet from a structural perspective it is somewhat naïve. For such an idealized and strictly person-centered understanding of pastoral care is in danger of overtaxing those involved and becoming undercomplex with respect to relationships involving subtle dynamics of power and underlying patterns of dependency. Every pastoral caregiver has the power to harm others within pastoral care relationships. It is a complex relationship in which pastoral caregivers should know how to act professionally and justifiably, as parts of their professional activity. The asymmetries lie on several levels and cannot be exclusively related back to the respective persons, because every pastoral care relationship contains structural power asymmetries that should be openly reflected.

3.3. Structural Power to Harm, Using Confession as an Example

I would like to illustrate this with the example of the sacrament of confession (see Karl and Weber 2021). Ulrich Engel writes: "in the theological justification of the sacrament of confession as well as in the associated pastoral practices, possible abuse of power is structurally or systematically inherent" (Engel 2021, p. 95). He points out that because of these potentials for abuse, "a critical analysis of the system-immanent dependency relationships and a systematic-theological reassessment of the institute of confession [is] needed.

Thus, it is absolutely necessary that the structural dangers inherent in the sacrament be honestly named" (Engel 2021, p. 126). It is important to note that the manifold experiences of abuse cannot simply be explained by the misdeeds of individuals, neither is "clergy sexual abuse (...) just an issue of confused sexuality" (Fortune and Poling [1994] 2004, p. 39). Sexual abuse in church is always associated with forms of structural violence (Galtung 1988; Hallay-Witte 2020) and pastoral relationships exhibit structural dangers. These include theological concepts such as the "*sacra potestas*" as the priest's authority to absolve, or asymmetries as expressed in language games such as "confessor father" and "confessing child/penitent" or "shepherd" and "flock" (Engel 2021, p. 129; cf. Werner 2019, p. 166f.). Male priests are still the gatekeepers of these sacramental resources. From an evangelical church context James N. Poling asks: "What situations are more dangerous for women than pastoral counseling, pastoral care, spiritual direction, and ministry supervision?" (Fortune and Poling [1994] 2004, p. 58).

Another structural aspect with an inherent high power asymmetry lies in the concrete place of a confessional or a conversation room, which may become secret, unobserved and inaccessible crime scenes. "Locations as power factors [are] important because they make it possible to take hold of people and enable disciplinary subjugations" (Sander 2021, p. 120). Hans-Joachim Sander therefore warns against a "thoughtless naiveté" in dealing with the scenes of sexual abuse, such as confession rooms or sacristies (Sander 2021, p. 120f.). Here, the perpetrators are the "lords of the house," here they are in charge, the place is not suspected of becoming the site of a crime due to its sacred function and to the "presumption of security" inherent in the overall setting. The abuse is a kind of "home field advantage" for many perpetrators. This phenomenon is also described by the victims: "The actions of a priest were not questioned, so he could get away with anything", so Cornelia Berra, who had been abused by a pastor for years (pseudonym; in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 51). Under these circumstances, it is clear that a concrete, often intimate conversational situation between two (professionally, ministerially, theologically, psychologically, etc.) unequal persons can never generate a relationship "on an equal footing". These obvious power differentials prevent true and free consent.

The complex and intertwined asymmetries, the mutual interdependencies between psychological dynamics, "theological constructs, ecclesial practices, and systemic logics" (Sautermeister 2021, p. 73) are structural dangers. These are present in other pastoral activities, analogous to confession, such as retreats, one-on-one meetings, counseling sessions, etc.

4. Vulnerance

Thus, there is an inescapable, structural danger within pastoral care which, however, has hardly been discussed in the theories of pastoral care or within the research on abuse. When we talk about abuse in pastoral care, we have to include the structural as well as the individual active and passive components of injuring and being injured. In order to gain a better grasp of these components in the following, a term introduced into the theological discourse on vulnerability by Hildegund Keul will be helpful: "*Vulneranz*". While "vulnerability" means a possible injury that may or may not happen and that can possibly be averted, "vulnerance" means the special readiness to use violence in connection with vulnerabilities (Keul 2020a, 2020b, 2021a); see www.vulnerabilitätsdiskurs.de; accessed on 15 March 2022). The term "vulnerance" is a neologism in German and actually comes from the field of political science (see Münkler and Wassermann 2012, p. 77). Following Hildegund Keul, I propose using the English translation "vulnerance" (Keul 2021b). This needs to be discussed, especially regarding sexual and spiritual abuse within settings of pastoral care, in relation to a reflected concept of vulnerability.

4.1. Vulnerance and Vulnerability

One reason structural dangers have not been accounted for within the research on abuse to date could be due to an understanding of vulnerability and abuse that focuses

on the victims and ignores other factors, such as the vulnerance of the situation. The concept of "vulnerability" has been the defining factor characterizing potential victims; and as such it plays an important role in processing and preventing abuse. Worldwide and in various Christian denominations, concepts of protection and prevention measures in cases of sexual abuse in the church refer to "children and vulnerable adults", for example in Australia (Anglican Communion Office 2017), Ireland (Cumberlege Commission 2007), and Germany (Rahmenordnung–Prävention 2019). The Vatican guidelines currently in force also explicitly mention "vulnerable persons", regardless of age, as potential victims of sexual abuse and within the scope of the relevant norms (Supreme Pontiff Francis 2019, cf. Vos Estis Lux Mundi Art. 1 §1 a; § 2 b). The church's regulations clarify that certain people are vulnerable because of their age and therefore in need of protection, so that any sexual contact with them is prohibited. It is true that minors need special protection because of their vulnerability. Children and adolescents are more vulnerable, that is why they are always and everywhere covered by regulations, simply on account of their age. Accordingly, prevention often starts with the potential victims, for example, by attempting to make them strong and resistant to attempted abuse.

For adult victims, however, the situation is somewhat different. The central category under which adults are placed as victims is that of "vulnerability". Adults must be "in need of protection and assistance" to fall within the legally described category of abuse (e.g., Ordnung 2019). However, what is meant by being "in need of protection and assistance" is not uniformly regulated (Heyder and Leimgruber 2020, pp. 118–21).

In the case of minors, it is clear they are vulnerable and therefore need to be protected; in the case of adults, however, there are only a few cases in which a pre-existing "need for protection"/"vulnerability" can be established without any problems, for example, in the case of an intellectual disability. Often it is complicated, for example, when adults are traumatized by previous experiences of abuse. We know of many cases in which perpetrators integrate this previous trauma of the victim within their actions and exploit it for their own advantage or pleasure: " . . . actually, what happened was that he used the first trauma by my brother like a 'nose ring' by which he dragged me behind him," as Edith Schwarzländer describes (pseudonym, in Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 171). Another affected woman with the pseudonym Et Al writes retrospectively about how a priest exploited her psychological instability during pastoral care: "Following my father's death I was confused, and I turned to Patrick for counsel. Looking back, I see that that's when he began to exploit my vulnerability" (Poling 1999, p. 25). However, should church proceedings be initiated, this specific vulnerability and "need for protection" according to the sense of the regulations for adults can hardly be proven. So, what about the cases where adults, who do not clearly fall under the "need for protection and assistance" provision narrowly defined in the regulations at the time of the crime, become victims of spiritual and sexual abuse in the Church (see Haslbeck et al. 2020)? According to the current state of the church regulations, they are not considered vulnerable *de lege*, thus they are not covered by the regulations. What happened to them would not be 'abuse' *de lege*. It therefore falls short of the mark since the corresponding regulations and pronouncements usually focus on the vulnerability of victims and mention adults in the same breath as children and adolescents as "vulnerable adults".

A key is to look at the contexts in which the abuse occurred and a correlated understanding of the categories of "vulnerability" and "vulnerance". As stated earlier, vulnerability as the possible injury that may or may not happen expresses a more passive component. It refers to the vulnerability of individuals, groups, or systems. "Vulnerance" refers to the active ability to wound. Vulnerance concerns the personal-existential (confessor, pastor), but also the institutional, systemic level (church, institution, religious community, family" (Karl 2021, p. 172). Vulnerability and vulnerance are not mutually exclusive polarities but are in a complex and dynamic interdependent relationship.

The German MHG study reveals that the vulnerability of those affected is met to a frightening degree by the perpetrators' enormous power to inflict injury. It mentions,

for instance, forms of clericalism in a closed, perpetrator-friendly system as dangerous factors (cf. Dreßing 2018). Furthermore, the study notes that a pastoral situation which favors perpetrators is one with "maximum authority and power" with simultaneously "minimal external control (Dreßing 2018, p. 265). It is, therefore, necessary to broaden the view beyond those individuals involved to include the contexts in which the acts occur. Recent debates increasingly point to the ambiguous situation of pastoral caregivers, who exhibit vulnerance and vulnerability in equal measure: "As a pastor (...) one is not per se harmless and as a pastor (...) one is also not invulnerable" (Sautermeister 2021, p. 92). Nor is it simply the case that the individuals being counseled in pastoral care are generally particularly vulnerable, always weak and "quickly become victims of violence" (Keul 2021a, p. 62): vulnerability is far more complex and can by no means be attributed unilaterally to one of the individuals involved. It becomes clear relatively quickly that the predominant juxtaposition in pastoral care of the vulnerable and needy person being counseled and the reliable, strong pastoral caregiver falls short, as does the focus in the regulations for prevention and regulations related to abuse on the vulnerability of the victims. In both instances, the thinking is too categorical and thus not appropriate to the complexity. As Hildegund Keul notes, the "opposition of vulnerability, weakness, insecurity, passivity on the one hand and security, reliability, resilience, strength on the other hand" (Keul 2021a, p. 64) should be overcome. The ability to be harmed and the ability to harm, vulnerability and vulnerance are not only complex in individual terms, but also in situational-systemic terms.

4.2. A Concept of Vulnerability in a Broader Sense

Here, among others, Judith Butler's reflections develop this further. Butler, too, does not think of vulnerability and agency as opposites, but brings them together: "We are never simply vulnerable, but always vulnerable to a situation (...) a social structure, something upon which we rely and in relation to which we are exposed. (...) To be dependent implies vulnerability. (...) If that is so, we are not talking here about my vulnerability or yours, but rather a feature of the relation that binds us to one another and to the larger structures and institutions . . . " (Butler 2020, p. 46). In her view, vulnerability is not a subjective state, but should be considered as a "feature of our shared or interdependent lives" (Butler 2020, p. 46). Judith Butler does not understand vulnerability as something that is added to a person's constitution after the fact, as if there were a pre-existing untouched integrity. Instead, for Butler vulnerability is a basic component of human existence. Vulnerability is "experienced and lived in a unique and specific way for each person" (Pistrol 2016, p. 241), but this also means that it is distributed unequally.

This is of particular importance for pastoral care (see, e.g., Seibert 2022, p. 340). The complexity of vulnerabilities, with their individual and institutional aspects and interdependencies, must absolutely be included in pastoral care. The vulnerability of the persons involved is not simply a characteristic that attaches to someone and is independent of the particular situation in which one finds oneself and the other persons with whom one is dealing. It is not a quality that can be examined after the fact to qualify the sexual act as abusive or not. This would make it too easy and disregard the structural potential for violence.

In the case of pastoral care and its forms of social interaction, the power to harm which facilitates certain forms of spiritual and sexual violence for pastoral caregivers becomes evident. The reflections on the structural vulnerability of sacramental pastoral and pastoral care settings integrate them theologically and institutionally into the discourse and processing of abuse; and it leads to overcoming the simplistic juxtaposition of vulnerable victim on the one hand and violent (individual) perpetrator on the other (cf. Hallay-Witte 2020, 77ff.).

Abuse is not a criminal phenomenon within an otherwise per se "good," healing, nonviolent pastoral context. However, rather, this context is ambivalent, ambiguous, infused with power and dependencies, and therefore potentially violent. When we talk about the systematic background of abuse related crimes, this is a factor that should

not be underestimated. There is no such thing as an "innocent" pastoral situation, no pastoral relationship takes place "on equal footing". In other words, it is not simply a matter of identifying the vulnerability of the persons involved and then "protecting" them (paternalistically). As necessary as the protection of particularly vulnerable people is—in terms of pastoral care it is too short-sighted. In my opinion, the mistake lies in separating the situation from the people involved or in seeing the people involved independently of the situation, as if it were in a vacuum.

4.3. Subsequent Vulnerabilization

The particular problem becomes clear again when one looks at a specific aspect of the concept of "vulnerable adults": that of subsequent vulnerabilization. It is clear that not all adult victims of abuse within the church were from the outset "vulnerable persons" in the narrow sense of the church's regulations when they encountered the perpetrator; they were not a "person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence" (Supreme Pontiff Francis 2019, Vos Estis Lux Mundi Art. 1 § 2 b). Often, it is only because of the special relationship with the offender that they are placed in a heightened vulnerable state, usually in the context of pastoral relationships. The cynical thing about this is that it is only because of the abuse that they have been traumatized and psychologically or physically impacted to such an extent that they eventually—even after the actual crime—fall under the narrow definition of "needing protection." This is one of the specific problems of the existing regulations: If victims do not fall under the narrow bounds of the regulations ("Ordnungen") as a "person in need of protection," their case is not recognized as abuse and the perpetrator is not punished—and yet the acts are often a traumatic event for the victims resulting in disorders related to the regulation of stress as well as corresponding long-term consequences (Tschan 2004, p. 182). This leads to the fact that they do not enter the circumstances of the crime as "psychologically and physically impaired" and that the crime is therefore not recognized as abuse, but that they exit as "psychologically and physically impaired" and therefore qualify as one "in need of protection." While the act does not meet the required conditions ("in need of protection and assistance") under which it would be prosecuted and punished as abuse, it does produce those conditions. There is another reason why, on the one hand, it is essential to think through the concept of vulnerability of adult victims and, on the other hand, to better define pastoral care. In pastoral care relationships, there are complex power and dependency relationships that need to be considered in both personal and systemic terms. It is imperative to include this complexity within pastoral care contexts and in the theory of pastoral care. It pertains to the roles of the participating parties as well as the power for both individuals and structures to harm (=vulnerance), which is inherent in all pastoral care relationships. For it is not only particularly vulnerable persons who can get caught up in the dangerous maelstrom of abusive relationships and therefore in need of protection, and it is also not only the sexual abuse of these particularly vulnerable individuals that needs to be punished. Due to the vulnerance of pastoral care relationships, a boundary must be drawn here prior to the initiation of the (professional) pastoral care situation, which offers a reliable security for those accompanied by pastoral care.

4.4. Acknowledging Vulnerace in Pastoral Relationships

The recognition of the setting of pastoral care as an independent risk factor can be found in a text by the German Bishops' Conference, which was already mentioned above—it is a text, where one might not expect it at first glance: in the "Ordnung für den Umgang mit sexuellem Missbrauch Minderjähriger und schutz-oder hilfebedürftiger Erwachsener durch Kleriker und sonstige Beschäftigte im kirchlichen Dienst" ("Regulation for Dealing with Sexual Abuse of Minors and Adults in Need of Protection or Assistance by Clergy and Other Employees in the Church Service" of 18 November 2019). It conceives of the abuse of the particular vulnerability of individual groups of people, similar to Pope Francis'

aforementioned Apostolic Exhortation "Vos Estis Lux Mundi." Let us take a closer look at the German order: In the case of minors, vulnerability is indisputable; in the case of adults, it is defined separately, namely as a need for protection or assistance in accordance with the sense of the German Criminal Code (see § 225 Abs. 1 StGB).

The "need for protection or help" is thus a vulnerability covered by criminal law, but the German order adds to this, with a view to the systemic vulnerance of the setting: "Furthermore, this includes persons who are subject to a special relationship of power and/or dependency. Such a special relationship of power and/or dependence may also exist or arise in the context of pastoral care" (Ordnung 2019, Nr. 3). In other words, the order mentions—almost in passing—the vulnerance of pastoral care relationships. However, it seems as if the order stops halfway thereafter and does not draw any consequences from the statement of vulnerance, because (a) it does not explain what it means by "the special power and/or dependency relationship," (b) it does not define when a person is "subject to" it, (c) because of the "can" formulation, it does not clarify when which criteria give rise to a "special power and/or dependency relationship" in a pastoral care context (Heyder and Leimgruber 2020, p. 210). In short, while the order acknowledges systemic vulnerance in pastoral care, it does not go so far as to formulate it as an unambiguous and legally effective factor with regard to acts of abuse, but ultimately subordinates it again to the guiding perspective of individually vulnerable victims (which, incidentally, leads to great difficulties in the concrete application of the legal order). Following Marie Keenan, we could diagnose this problem as "organized irresponsibility" (Keenan 2013, p. 154).

5. Consequences for Pastoral Care

Now, what does this mean for a theory and praxis of pastoral care, which is sensitive to this interdependent and structural potential for violence? Apart from the fact that further and deeper research is needed, I would like to briefly formulate some consequences (see Leimgruber 2022).

5.1. Change of Setting

One step for concrete practical actions is to consider to what extent the setting, which in itself is already imbued with vulnerance, can be changed. Parallel to other contexts, for example, therapeutic contexts, the following can also apply here: if a situation is endangering, preventive measures must be taken to change the framing conditions of the situation. This includes, for example, modifying the intimacy and secrecy of inaccessible potential crime scenes, whose vulnerance is especially evident in two-way conversations such as confession (Leimgruber 2022). In quite a few communities, for example, architectural modifications have been made to minimize the potential for danger in one-on-one conversations.

5.2. A Complex Understanding of Vulnerablitiy by All Participants

What is clear is that the "complexity and ambiguity of vulnerability" (Gilson 2021, p. 103) based on interdependencies should also be discussed in the theory of pastoral care. "The realities of experiences and discourses of vulnerability are complex. Our concept of vulnerability should be as well. (...) a simplified use of the concept is a misuse. (...) theories, that maintain that vulnerability calls for ethical response must also be political, critically attuned to existing power dynamics and their histories. Such critical analysis, however, entails at once avowing vulnerability as an ineradicable shared condition and analysing how it materializes in conditions of inequality, violence, and neglect" (Gilson 2021, p. 104).

In pastoral care, it would be an important step to abstract from the polar balance of power between strong and weak, between helping and being helped, and to recognize pastoral care as a space in which vulnerability plays a role as an "indelible common condition" (Gilson 2021, p. 104) and at the same time is dealt with professionally. Pastoral care and other forms of counseling or human leadership is basically ambivalent in the inherent tension between mechanisms of trust, closeness, and distancing (see Seibert 2022,

p. 351). Katharina Karl uses the image of "showing scars" for this: "The image of the pastor must free itself from the claim of invulnerability. (...) It is liberating (...) to know about limits and to be able to articulate them. (...) In order to avoid vulnerance, vulnerability must be taken seriously and must be perceived" (Karl 2021, p. 177). She demands that one must learn to deal professionally with their own scars and from there come to a new understanding of authority. Only in this way, she says, is it possible to formulate an understanding of pastoral care "that responds to basic components that are susceptible to abuse" (Karl 2021, p. 178).

5.3. Professional Treatment of Experiences of Violence and Trauma

However, it is not only a matter of preventing harm, but also of noticing that people request pastoral care who have already experienced violence or are traumatized. In light of the data, pastoral workers have to reckon with the fact that people with experiences of abuse are present throughout the church—for example in their congregations, the liturgies, the associations, etc. Frequently, those affected by abuse tell of new injuries including retraumatization, due to the insensitivity of their pastoral care workers. Thus, there is an urgent need for a higher demand of competence on the part of pastoral care workers, including trauma competence and sensitivity to violence. To recognize the differentiations and—as pastoral caregivers—to integrate them existentially, requires a high degree of consolidated spirituality and professionalism. This raises the question of the quality of pastoral care and the qualification of pastoral care workers, also with the aim of ensuring quality standards (see Tschan 2004, p. 184). Here, there exists a monumental task to train pastoral care workers, where it is simply not enough to talk about the occurrence of Professional Sexual Misconduct (PSM) in pastoral care. There needs to be an intensive and ongoing examination of the vulnerance of pastoral care and the position of chaplains within the systemic potential for violence. It also requires competencies among chaplains for dealing with traumatized persons (e.g., Stahl 2021; Kerstner et al. 2016).

5.4. Sexual Abuse in Pastoral Care as Professional Sexual Misconduct (PSM)

Every pastoral care relationship implies that those involved are at risk simply because of institutional vulnerance. I argue that the setting in which pastoral care takes place should be recognized as a third player, as a power factor in its own right. This would systematically embed the responsibility of the acting individuals in the inevitable and always present asymmetrical pastoral care relationship.

In this sense, a revision of the prevention guidelines and legal provisions is needed. A renewed revised text must clearly define that a pastoral relationship generally contains an imbalance of power and that this cannot be avoided or even resolved by the pastor's behavior, no matter how competent it might be. However, there can and must be a transparent and responsible way of dealing with it. This would mean that there can be no consensual sexual contact in the pastoral context *à priori*, not even among adults. The concept of a vulnerability focus in the processing of abuse should be modified. Abuse victims should not have to prove that they were "in need of protection and help". Samuel Fernández writes: "The disciple opens his or her conscience to a master who has an ecclesiastical support and in 'the face of sacred power, instinctive resistance gives way' [s. R. Blàzquez Pérez]. Therefore, vulnerability is not to be seen as a deficiency of the disciple, but a necessary condition of discipleship, which always implies an asymmetrical relationship. Actually, the assumption that the victims may have been abused because of their psychological deficiencies is rejected by scientific research. Hence, adult victims should not be labelled as 'vulnerable adults.'" Fernández demands, "the responsibility of the Church as guarantor of the trustworthiness of her representatives" (Fernández 2021, p. 568).

Sexual abuse in pastoral care relationships should fall under the umbrella of Professional Sexual Misconduct (PSM) (Tschan 2004, p. 181). A sexual relationship is abusive even if there is no visible violence, and the act appears to be consensual. The testimonials of many adult victims, especially women, show that they simply did not consent, even if they

did not say "no" out loud, even if it was supposedly nonviolent (see Haslbeck et al. 2020). Yet, it goes further: within pastoral ministry, professional standards for pastoral care are needed—for reasons of safety for both parties. This means that sexual relationships within the context of pastoral care are a violation of the duty of pastoral care which accompanies professionalism and should be treated as an instance of PSM. Even if an individual who is being cared for within a pastoral relationship initiates a sexual encounter, the pastoral professional must set clear boundaries—for PSM in the context of pastoral care, it is irrelevant who initiates the sexual encounter (Tschan 2004, p. 181). Pastoral care relationships are inherently vulnerate, and pastoral care workers as professionally acting, professionally trained, and professionally supervised agents must have the prerequisites to correctly carry out the tasks assigned to them. Although it is not possible to elaborate here, it would be worthwhile to analyze the guidelines of different Christian denominations in different countries. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, professional guidelines were established as early as 1987. These state, among other things: "Pastors and pastoral counselors are always responsible for emotional, spiritual, and physical protection of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority. Breach of this protective relationship is improper and/or unethical" (Fortune 1989, p. 136f.). It is significant that such rules have not been generally accepted and enforced in the Roman Catholic Church to this day. Two positive examples: (a) In the US, the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. (National Catholic) developed a so called "Virtus Model Code of Pastoral Conduct for Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Employees, and Volunteers (Code of Pastoral Conduct)" (Virtus 2010), which could be adopted by dioceses if they so choose (see Byrne 2010, p. 78). These "Pastoral Standards" also focus on the care of adults in certain pastoral situations as follows: "1.4. Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors must never engage in sexual intimacies with the persons they counsel. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual comments. (...) 1.6 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships. 1.7 Physical contact of any kind (i.e., touching, hugging, holding) between Pastoral Counselors or Spiritual Directors and the persons they counsel can be misconstrued and should be avoided." It is noteworthy that the "Pastoral Standards" do not speak of "vulnerable adults", but of "parishioners": "4.2 Staff and volunteers who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services must avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with minors, other staff, or parishioners. Staff and volunteers must behave in a professional manner at all times. 4.3 No clergy, staff, or volunteer may exploit another person for sexual purposes" (Virtus 2010).

(b) One of the few documents from the Roman Catholic Church in Europe that has clear rules referring to the "self-definition" of pastoral care workers comes from Switzerland in 2002. The Swiss Bishops' Conference (Schweizer Bischofskonferenz 2002) points out the "pastoral dependence" (5) and warns against "unprofessional care" (6). It is clear: "He [the pastor] alone bears the responsibility for this. (...) Even if the request for a sexual relationship comes from the other person, this is not a legitimation for entering into such an encounter (...) because this makes the pastoral task impossible and disregards it" (6). Here, a pastoral professional ethos is at play with clear consequences, and it does not consider adults who are affected by abuse exclusively on the basis of vulnerability. "Even in the case of supposed or expressed consent by the victim [to participate in sexual acts with the pastor; U. L.], the requirements needed to qualify as sexual exploitation or harassment are met" (4).

Even if a policy will not solve everything, such clear regulations are needed today for all areas of pastoral care, in all dioceses worldwide. They would not only bring security for those involved in contexts of pastoral care, especially adults (Byrne 2010, p. 79), they would be a legal remedy for victims of abuse, to which they could reliably refer. By making such changes to their own regulations, church authorities could live up to their oft-stated assurances that they are doing all they can to resolve abuse and prevent future acts. More

to the point, I would say that they have specific duties as guarantors with respect to those who are accompanied/counseled. With the German Bishops' letter "Pastoral Care is the Heart of the Church", published in March 2022, a first step has also been taken for Germany (cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2022). It remains to be seen how it will be implemented in practice and in training of pastoral care workers, both lay and clergy.

6. Conclusions

If vulnerance and vulnerability were taken up as key categories (Karl 2021) in their complex interrelatedness as relevant in pastoral care, the attitude and role of pastoral care workers would also be modified. This would also have urgently needed consequences for the training and continuing education of pastoral workers, especially priests, and the respective concepts of prevention. Moreover, a comprehensible and verifiable quality of assurance of pastoral care would be desirable—by the way, a genuine task for bishops. Vulnerability has to be thought of as an aspect in the larger structure of pastoral relations and church structures, in which vulnerance is inevitable. The task for praxis in this context is how people and situations that are marked by vulnerability and vulnerance are professionally related in a pastoral manner.

In theological discourse as well as in practical pastoral fields, reflection on the power dynamics and the potential for abuse in pastoral care settings is needed, both in formal and material terms. It is an institutional, ecclesial, and theologically relevant phenomenon (see Wirth et al. 2022). Pastoral care is the care for human and creaturely life; it realizes the foundational pastoral mission of the church to be with and alongside people, under the condition of strengthening, comforting, liberating, and healing. Many of the people to whom the worst happened in the context of pastoral care later experienced offers of pastoral care as places of healing and reconciliation. The difference was that the persons affected experienced God as a liberating and healing resource, the sacraments as effective signs of this healing, and the pastoral care workers, by whom the persons affected were cared for in a healing manner, knew about their own limitations, their vulnerabilities and the vulnerance of pastoral care situations. They did not abuse them for their own advantage, for their own gain of pleasure, or for the exploitation of the relationship of power and dependence. According to Andreas Stahl, pastoral care is an "action that seeks to support the shaping and mastery of life on the basis of the Christian faith" (Stahl 2021, p. 266). To do this, it is necessary to face one's own vulnerance and the vulnerance of social/pastoral contexts in which one finds oneself. This is one of the basic prerequisites for pastoral care to live up to its liberating dimension and for abuse by adults in pastoral care to be effectively prevented or sanctioned.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

[1] The so called MHG study (see Dreßing 2018; Dressing et al. 2021) explores the extent of sexual abuse of minors by members of the Catholic Church in Germany. It was the first comprehensive study to examine this extent in a European country.

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Reproductive Abuse in the Context of Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church

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Abstract: In a significant number of cases, clerical sex offenders impregnate their victims and force them into hiding, abortion, or adoption. This phenomenon is referred to in this paper as *reproductive abuse*. Clearly, most victims of reproductive abuse are adults, but even among minor victims of clerical child abuse, between 1 and 10 percent may have experienced reproductive abuse. On the basis of pertinent studies, this paper explores archival material on several dozen allegations of reproductive abuse in the context of clergy sexual abuse of minors in the US Catholic Church. Besides some tentative estimates of the general frequency of the phenomenon, this paper offers a distinction of three different types of reproductive abuse and an analysis of the interplay of clericalist and secular misogyny, which appears to be largely responsible for the silencing of victims as well as for the impunity of perpetrators and leads to the invisibility of this phenomenon, despite the high importance attributed to reproductive issues in the Catholic context.

Keywords: reproductive abuse; reproductive justice; sexual abuse of adults; sexual abuse of minors; clergy sex abuse; coerced adoption; abortion; clericalism; misogyny

Citation: Reisinger, Doris. 2022. Reproductive Abuse in the Context of Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church. *Religions* 13: 198. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030198

Academic Editor: Annemarie C. Mayer

Received: 4 February 2022
Accepted: 21 February 2022
Published: 24 February 2022

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1. Introduction

Regardless of the specific context and even though reproductive abuse clearly "intensifies the effects of sexual violence" (Duggan and Jacobson 2009), it is hardly ever prosecuted by criminal law (Altunjan 2021) and, in many disciplines and contexts, it is still a surprisingly under-discussed topic. This applies not least to research on clergy sex abuse (CSA). While reproductive abuse has been addressed before, mostly in the context of war crimes (UN Secretary-General 2018), sex trafficking (Lederer and Wetzel 2014) or intimate partner/domestic violence (Moore et al. 2010; Coyle et al. 2015), this paper is the first to explore reproductive abuse in the context of CSA in the Catholic Church systematically. Even though research on CSA in the Catholic Church has virtually boomed in recent years, the number of victims who were impregnated by their clerical perpetrators has not been surveyed in any of the major studies, globally.[1]

Like every form of abuse, reproductive abuse unfolds in an interplay of power and vulnerability between perpetrators and their victims. Vulnerability is often identified primarily by susceptibility to suffering. Particularly in legal contexts, a very narrow understanding of it usually prevails. But when seen through a philosophical lens, the concept is actually more complex and ambivalent (Gilson 2013; Butler et al. 2016). Being vulnerable for humans essentially means being "susceptible to be affected by incidents and/or conditions beyond their control" (Haker 2020, p. 139). Thus, it also refers to humans' affectability and openness to the world and to one another as part of the human condition and this makes the concept much more ambivalent than the negative connotation suggests (Gilson 2013).

The specific term *reproductive vulnerability* is sometimes used in medical contexts to denote risks to (female) fertility. I will use the term *reproductive vulnerability* here with a broader and slightly different meaning to denote the susceptibility of a person's reproductive system to being affected by incidents beyond their control. In general, humans can

control their own reproductivity only to a limited degree, and in this sense, all humans are reproductively vulnerable. One may call this a form of ontological vulnerability. While both male and female reproductive systems are vulnerable in this sense, living with a body that can become pregnant is being vulnerable to a higher degree and in a particularly ambivalent way. On the one hand, it promises the unique experience of conceiving and bearing children. This intimate closeness is perceived by many as maximally gratifying and meaningful. On the other hand, being able to become pregnant means being susceptible to a whole range of specific forms of suffering. This applies to physical ailments such as period pain, endometriosis and adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes up to child loss and maternal mortality (see WHO (World Health Organization) 2019). Specifically for adolescent girls aged 15–19, "pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death globally" (WHO (World Health Organization) 2019, p. 48).

Whereas in medical discussions, the term *reproductive power* mostly refers to success in procreation (of various species or populations), in the context of this discussion, I will use the term *reproductive power* as referring to the power to control reproductive life. This control can take place through laws, social or moral norms (Buller and Schulte 2018) or direct personal influence. When persons hold enough reproductive power to make their own reproductive decisions freely, this may be called *reproductive justice* (Chrisler 2012; Ross 2017). However, in many societies, a system of *reproductive injustice* prevails, that forbids those who are particularly reproductively vulnerable to make their own reproductive decisions freely. Regularly, their needs and points of view are not systematically taken into account by those who hold reproductive power, often resulting in restricted reproductive autonomy and adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes for girls and young women, many of them mothers (Freedman and Isaacs 1993; Cook et al. 2003; Traina 2018).

It is one thing for a person to be vulnerable on an *ontological* level because of biological and technical contingencies. It is quite another thing for a person to be vulnerable on a *moral or structural* level by being denied the moral right to exercise the degree of reproductive control and self-determination that is biologically and technically possible, by virtue of a political and legal system, resulting in *reproductive injustice*. And it is yet another thing, when an individual third person claims a right to control another individual's reproductive life directly, in their place, regardless of their will and wellbeing. I will call that *reproductive abuse*.

2. Prevalence of Reproductive Abuse in the Context of CSA in the Catholic Church

2.1. Most Victims Are Adults

As a matter of statistical probability, most victims of reproductive abuse at the hands of Catholic clergy are adults. On the one hand, most of the fertile years of a person's life–and thus the years of life in which a person is most at risk of experiencing reproductive abuse—are beyond the age of majority (Nichols et al. 2006). On the other hand, clerical sexual misconduct mostly involves adults. The John Jay Report on the "Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors" (Terry et al. 2011) states that most sexual behavior of priests concerns adults. Richard Sipe estimates that "four times as many priests involve themselves sexually with adult women, and twice the number with adult men, as priests who involve themselves sexually with children" (Sipe 1994, p. 134).

Unfortunately, numbers, case studies and sources on sexual abuse of adults at the hands of Catholic clergy are still relatively scarce (Chibnall et al. 1998; Sands 2003; De Weger and Death 2017; Reisinger 2018; Haslbeck et al. 2020), whereas research on CSA involving minors has boomed recently, producing a wide range of numbers and data that include evidence on cases of reproductive abuse. For this reason, this study must limit itself to cases involving minors, but there is no doubt that these cases can still shed light on dynamics that will certainly be the same or very similar in cases involving adult victims.

2.2. Number of Minors Affected Is Likely in the Five-Digit Range

While some of the minors who experienced reproductive abuse in the context of CSA in the Catholic Church are boys[2], in all likelihood, it is adolescent girls who are most affected. Regarding the number of girls sexually abused by Catholic priests, the percentage of female victims varies from 16.5% (Deetman et al. 2011) to 35.4% (McClellan et al. 2017). In one representative study, participants who reported CSA in the Catholic Church even were "mostly female" (Witt et al. 2019, p. 9). On average, about one-third of all minor clerical abuse victims are female and about one-third of them are post-pubescent.

Of the offenses examined by the German MHG study, 34.9% involved girls, of whom one-third were older than 13 when they were first sexually assaulted (Dreßing et al. 2019). According to Witt et al., 6% of female victims of Catholic priests reported penetration of the vagina/anus. And according to the John Jay study, 11.9% of female victims alleged penile penetration.[3] On the basis of these numbers, a first tentative estimate could be that approximately between 1% and 10% of all minor victims of CSA may also be victims of reproductive abuse.

If we assume this percentage, the total number of underage victims of reproductive abuse at the hands Catholic clergy is probably at least in the four-digit range in countries with a population between 70 and 80 million (Witt et al. 2019; Rapport de la Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l'Église: Les violences sexuelles dans l'Église catholique, France 1950–2020 2021), and possibly in the five-digit range in a country such as the US, which has a much larger population. The total number of adult victims of reproductive abuse at the hands of Catholic clergy is possibly four times as high. These are, of course, nothing but estimative approximations. For more substantially reliable statements, targeted surveys are needed.

2.3. Archival Evidence

Another indication of the relatively high prevalence of reproductive abuse in the context of CSA is the frequency with which it appears in archival material. Hardly any of the studies on abuse in the Catholic Church that have been conducted so far on the basis of archival material specifically address or systematically examine reproductive abuse. Generally, pregnancies of victims as a result of the abuse are hardly mentioned in them. Unfortunately, the publicly available archival and data material is also limited. This study is therefore confined to documents from the world's largest independent archive on clerical child abuse in the Catholic Church in the United States (BishopAccountability.org). All of the cases examined below are drawn from this context. The study therefore reveals only a small part of the problem. However, it can be justifiably assumed that there are similar cases all over the world.

A simple search of the only partially digitized records of BA's archive for the keywords "pregnancy" and "abortion" yields dozens of cases. Even when restricted to only those allegations of reproductive abuse, in which, besides the particular incident and the year it occurred, also the name, incardination and age of the respective perpetrator as well as the age of the victim can be specified, and the victim being underage at the time she was first abused, the number of finds is still remarkably high (see Table 1).

Most of the priests involved in these cases are confirmed serial abusers of girls. In many cases, there are indications of further pregnancies or abortions, most of which cannot, however, be sufficiently traced on the basis of the available material and, therefore, are not included in this table or study.

Table 1. Reproductive abuse cases documented in Bishop Accountability's archives.

Type	Age of Perpetrator at Time Abuse Began	Age of Victim at Time Abuse Began	Age of Victim at Incident	Year Abuse Began	Year of Incident	Incardination/State
insemination (not leading to a lasting pregnancy)	32	16	17	1958	1958	Boston MA
	30	15	25	1972	1982	Minneapolis MN
	40	9	13	1990	1994	El Paso TX
pregnancy ending in abortion	40	16	16	1960	1960	SJ */Buffalo NY
	26	12	22	1952	1962	Burlington VT
	33	13	16	1963	1966	Covington KY
	38	16	16	1967	1967	SJ */Fairbanks AK
	33	10	13	1969	1973	Philadelphia PA
	36	15	18	1970	1973	Belleville IL
	48	15	18	1973	1976	Santa Fe NM
	34	14	14	1977	1977	Santa Rosa CA
	47	13	16	1975	1978	SJ */Fairbanks AK
	32	14	16	1978	1980	Orange CA
	30	11	14	1980	1983	El Paso TX
	43	13	17	1980	1985	Scranton PA
pregnancy ending in childbirth	27	17	18	1956	1957	Greensburg PA
	28	16	17	1965	1966	Cincinnati OH
	32	16	19	1973	1977	AA */New York NY
	29	17	18	1978	1979	Phoenix AZ
	53	14	15	1981	1983	OMI */Galveston-Houston TX
	46	17	18	1987	1988	Scranton PA
	47	17	18	1988	1989	Scranton PA
	30	15	16	1988	1989	Bridgeport CT
	32	17	18	1997	1998	Los Angeles CA

* SJ = Jesuits, AA = Assumptionists, OMI = Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

3. Types of Reproductive Abuse

3.1. Indifference

Reproductive indifference can be defined as: *undermining another person's reproductive self-determination through carelessness*.[4] Sexual perpetrators who are guilty of this kind of indifference do not necessarily want to hurt or exploit the reproductive life of their victims—they simply do not bother to protect it. When they vaginally penetrate their victims while not using a reliable form of birth control, they risk impregnating them.

In most sources on cases that involve sexually abusive priests, references to forms of birth control are rare. Sometimes there are hints that priests used condoms or even had a vasectomy. However, in cases that eventually ended in pregnancies, the preferred birth control method of priests, if there was one at all, seems to have been withdrawal. When a girl named Rita Milla is asked by Los Angeles auxiliary bishop, John J. Ward, how she knew who of the priests abusing her was the father of her child, she replied among other things that one of them "withdrew himself prior to ejeculation saying that he knew how to protect himself" (Ward 1984, p. 37). Another case involves a girl who had been sexually abused by Father Miguel Luna, a priest in the diocese of El Paso. He abused her from age 9 and repeatedly vaginally penetrated her from age 12 to 17 in the 1990s. In a criminal trial, she describes how Luna used to pull out and come in his hand. But when she is asked if there was a time that he ejaculated inside of her, she replies that he did, and "more than once" (Reporter's Record 2019a, p. 111). She goes on to describe a particular instance, when she was 13 years old: "He goes no—he told me this in Spanish, he goes check yourself because if you become pregnant—he told me you can't have it because it wouldn't make me look—meaning him—look good in the eyes of the church" (Reporter's Record 2019a, p. 112).[5] She further states that she did not become pregnant, but had been extremely concerned she would. Other victims of Miguel Luna had been less lucky.

For victims, the mere fear of being pregnant and the accompanying uncertainty, that often lasts over a period of weeks, can be extremely stressful. In one case, a teenager had been abused by Father Gerard E. Creighton from age 16. She wanted to become a nun and

Creighton abused her until shortly before she entered a convent, when she was 17 in 1958. In a letter, her attorney states years later: "As a result of this abuse, [name redacted] entered the convent grieving and broken in spirit, seized in emotional pain and grief. She felt as though the shame of her deeds was transparent and visible. She was terrified that she was pregnant" (Orenstein 1998, p. 436).

Even if it turns out that the victim is not pregnant after all, the fear of being in that state can lead to decisions that change their life course dramatically, such as dropping out of education. In a memo from July 26, 1977, the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Francis J. Statkus, records a conversation he had with a woman and her daughter. The girl had just graduated high school and enrolled in college, together with a friend. She wanted to talk to the chancellor on behalf of that friend who had confided in her that she "had sex" with Father Nicholas Cudemo, feared she might be pregnant and had dropped out of college. Referring to the fear of pregnancy, Statkus drily notes: "However, that condition does not exist from the latest information" (Statkus 1977, p. 15).

3.2. Coercion

Reproductive coercion can be defined as: *overriding the reproductive autonomy of another person in order to assert one's own needs at their expense*. Catholic priests who impregnated their victims usually put their own reputation above the victim's bodily autonomy and health and sometimes even above the life of their victim and their (unborn) child. They try to end or conceal the pregnancy, at any cost, and regardless of the will and needs of the pregnant person.

3.2.1. Abortions

Judging from the available archival material, the immediate reaction of most clerical perpetrators who learn about their victims' pregnancy is to persuade them to have an abortion. Many of the priests are actively "assisting" in the procedure by paying for the abortion or by bringing their victims to an abortion facility.

In many cases, it is evident that the abortion serves above all the priest's reputation. An unusually plain statement of this priority may be found in the case of Luna, who allegedly told one of his victims she could not keep the child because it would not make him "look good in the eyes of the church" (Reporter's Record 2019a, p. 112). However, in almost all cases, it is clear that the protection of a priest's reputation is the main driving motivation, and often the only motivation, for the abortion. In some cases, were they not so abhorrent, one could say that this reaches almost satirical dimensions: When one of Nicholas Cudemo's victims, named "Ruth" by the Philadelphia Grand Jury Report, was testifying before the Grand Jury, not only did she recall how "Cudemo took her for an abortion of a fetus she conceived from his rapes sometime before she started high school in 1973", but she also remembered that in doing so "he was mad because he was 'very pro-life'" (Philadelphia Grand Jury Report 2003, p. 130).

In order to protect his reputation, the Jesuit James Poole did not only drive one of his victims to an abortion but, on top of that, even to a false accusation. Poole had an extraordinarily long history of sexually abusing girls, most of it taking place in Alaska. Among the Alaskan girls he abused was Rachel Mike. Her family was poor and starving. Her parents being alcoholics, she suffered the same addiction, and in addition to that, she was suicidal at a young age. She was 14 turning 15 when Poole sexually abused her. In February 1978, she realized she was pregnant because of this abuse. An abortion could not be carried out without her parents' consent. Decades later, she described in a videotaped deposition how Poole convinced her to blame her own father for the abuse in order to divert suspicion from himself and convince her mother to tacitly sign the abortion papers: "the way Father Poole was trying to tell me what to say—what to, you know, say about my dad, what, you know, what he done to me even though he never did nothing to me, put him down to make Father Poole look good and out of the way." She also talks about her own inability to stand up to this lie: "I was like brainwashed by Father Poole not to say

anything, that I can't say nothing. He probably look at me as a dumb little Eskimo girl that can't say nothing because I was scared" (Superior Court of the State of Alaska 2005, p. 89). So, she said, she told everybody involved that her father had raped and impregnated her, including her own mother, who signed the papers for the abortion (Superior Court of the State of Alaska 2005, p. 73).

In the pre-Roe era in the US, abortions were illegal and often life-threatening procedures. In that period, some perpetrators went so far as to take their victim to another country, where abortions were legal at the time. One example of this is Joseph A. Browne, called "Jay". In 1963, the 32-year-old priest became a counselor at an orphanage in Fort Mitchel, Kentucky. According to a lawsuit brought forth in 2003, Browne made contact with a 13-year-old girl living at the home. He bought her alcohol and he began to abuse her. At some point, the girl realized she was pregnant and "Father Brown arranged for an abortion". He took her to an unnamed country where the abortion was performed (Associated Press State & Local Wire 2003).

Other victims underwent illegal abortions in the US and only narrowly escaped death. One of them is a woman who was allegedly raped by the Jesuit Vincent P. Mooney, then rector at Canisius high school in Buffalo NY, when she was 16 in the late 1950s. Some time after the rape, she discovered she was pregnant. In an interview, she later remembers: "The shame was immense." She had to tell her mother, who insisted that she needed to have an abortion. It became a life-threatening intervention: "I hemorrhaged, I started bleeding out and it almost killed me" (Specht 2019). She only survived, she said, because she was transferred to a hospital where a doctor managed to save her life.

In the 1950s in a parish in the diocese of Burlington VT, a priest named Benjamin Wysolmerski began to abuse a 12-year-old girl. Decades later, in April 1991, she wrote to the diocese to report this abuse. And some weeks later, on April 30, 1991, she sent another long letter to the diocese—this second letter was addressed to Wysolmerski. In it she describes the sexual abuse she suffered, the effects it had on her life and she also mentions an abortion: "I am hurting because you paid for my abortion in 1962—a priest paying to destroy two people! (. . .) I am hurting because of that abortion. I am hurting because I nearly bled to death on a dingy mattress in a rooming house in Weston, Vermont, because of that abortion– paid for by you. In those days abortions were not only illegal, they were life-threatening. The coat hanger did not hurt nearly as much as my soul. For three days I laid in a pool of my own blood with no one to take care of me, and you had the nerve to call me a whore. Two people died when that baby was aborted, 'Father,' the child to be and me" (Name Redacted 1991, p. 152).

Even after Roe v. Wade, when abortions in the US were legal and medically safe, for victims of sexual and reproductive abuse, they often were still traumatic. Most of them were exposed to risk factors such as "perceived pressure from others to terminate a pregnancy", "lack of perceived social support from others" or "feelings of stigma" (Reardon 2018). Living in a Catholic community where they were sexually abused and, on top of that, exposed to involuntary insemination by a Catholic priest, followed by the discovery of having been impregnated, and ending up either being actively coerced into having an abortion or being effectively without anything that resembled a free choice, for many of the affected women and girls, the abortion turned out to be another traumatic experience on top of previous others. One of the girls who had an abortion and said she suffered from depression as a consequence is Susan Martinez-Sandoval. She had been abused as a high school student in Albuquerque from the age of 15 by a priest called Robert Kirsch in the 1970s. When she became pregnant after years of abuse, she had an abortion and after that "felt traumatized about the abortion (. . .) very depressed and thought of suicide", according to the court's Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law (Second Judicial District Court County of Bernalillo 1993, p. 2174).

In other cases, it appears as if victims chose to have an abortion, seemingly without external pressure, while the actual pressure they were under, generated by the perpetrator's callousness and the victims' living conditions, could not in fact be worse. In 2019, another

victim of Luna testified in the already mentioned criminal trial in Texas. She said she had been first abused by him when she was 11, in 1980, and had had an abortion at age 14. In her court hearing, she describes how Luna reacted when she told him that she thought she was pregnant: "A. He had asked me what I was going to do. Q. And what did you tell him? A. I told him I wasn't going to have the baby and he told me just to have the baby and I could give it to him. Q. And what did you say to that? A. I told him that if I was going to have this baby, I was going to keep it. Q. Did you say anything else? A. I told him I wouldn't put that child through the humiliation of knowing that it was conceived by rape and by a priest" (Reporter's Record 2019b, p. 70). She, too, felt traumatized by the abortion. She said she still felt guilty and had never forgiven herself, and that she speaks to the baby she lost, even now three decades later "all the time" (Reporter's Record 2019c, p. 83).

Sometimes, the pressure to abort does not appear to be the main traumatic experience, but more like a kind of crystallization point that brings victims to fully realize their situation. This results in a shock, especially when victims had been made to believe they were in a "relationship". Among others, this is described by Lori Haigh, who was sexually abused by Father John Peter Lenihan from age 14 to 17 in a parish in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. She had long believed the priest, who was twice her age, to be her "first love". But when she eventually became pregnant in 1980, he insisted she should have an abortion. The Los Angeles Times reported on this case in 2002 and quoted a former friend and classmate of Lori Haigh, Shannon Moser, who remembered "Haigh in tears, talking on the phone in a mutual friend's bedroom. When Moser asked another friend what was wrong, she was told that Father John had gotten Haigh pregnant and was telling her to get an abortion. Moser didn't believe the story until Haigh held up the phone and she recognized Lenihan's distinctive Irish brogue" (Lobdell 2002b). More than twenty years later, the bishop of Orange, in whose diocese Lenihan had been incardinated, apologized to her and the dioceses of Los Angeles and Orange agreed to pay a USD 1.2 million settlement. During a press conference after the settlement, Lori Haigh said she was so desperate back then that she tried to commit suicide, "cutting her wrists with a butcher knife" (Lobdell 2002a).

3.2.2. Pregnancies and Births under Adverse Conditions

Attempts to pressure victims into abortions did not always succeed. In some cases, victims resisted their perpetrators' pressure. In other cases, attempted abortions failed. In others again, perpetrators shied away from an abortion, but coerced their pregnant victims into hiding. Documents from such cases shed light on the severe consequences these pregnancies and births had for the girls, young women and babies involved.

An example of how bad conditions of giving birth can be when victims of reproductive abuse are coerced into hiding is the already mentioned case of Rita Milla. She was 16 years old in 1980, when a priest working for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Santiago L. Tamayo, began to abuse her and introduced her to other abusers. She ended up being abused by a group of seven priests. In 1982, she discovered that she was pregnant and later claimed that one of the priests told her to have an abortion (in a memo to Cardinal Manning from 1984, Tamayo is said to deny this allegation; Rawden 1984), but she refused. In order to keep the pregnancy a secret, Tamayo sent Rita to the Philippines seven months before her due date. Her parents, who were unaware of their daughter's pregnancy, were made to believe she was there for a study visit. The plan was for her to deliver the baby and leave it in the Philippines.

However, Rita received too little money from Tamayo to feed herself and got stuck in awful conditions. Scared of what might happen to her, she wrote a letter to Tamayo that she never sent, but kept and later presented at the Los Angeles Superior Court in October 1987: "I'm close to falling in a state of depression. There are times that I cry all day without any reason (. . .) And you better start doing something to help me or else I'm going home. And for the baby's own safety I'm going by August. I don't have to put up with your shit any longer. I'm here because hell will be raised with you when people find out how I got pregnant. But if you won't help me then I won't help you. You just better have a good

explaination to give to my parents before they see me 7 months pregnant. I really don't want to do it that way but you leave me no choice. I refuse to stay here where so many things can go wrong. And if something does go wrong it will still be hell for you. Imagine explaining to my mother that I died during childbrith. Don't think it's an exaggeration" (Milla 1983, spelling as in the original).

Rita did not leave the Philippines. She stayed, gave birth to a daughter and took her back to the United States. Later, she filed a suit that named the seven priests and the Archdiocese as defendants. Gloria Allred was her attorney. An outside lawyer named John P. McNicholas, hired by Cardinal Mahony, followed the trial. In an internal communication about the court case, McNicholas summarizes what had been said about Rita's situation, as she was approaching her due date: "She described a very difficult pregnancy and delivery. (. . .) She received inadequate care. (. . .) She did not receive regular checkups, had only one urine test, her weight and blood pressure were rarely taken, she lost weight (approximately 20 pounds by her fifth month) and suffered from extreme dehydration. She threw up during her entire pregnancy. Sometimes she threw up blood. She had headaches and occasionally saw spots and sometimes felt like she was passing out. (. . .) On October 12, 1982 [Rita, name redacted in the document] was taken by C-Section at Provincial Hospital in Laoag City by Dr. [redacted]. [Rita, name redacted in the document] had gone into a coma from eclampsia" (McNicholas 1987, p. 149).

When teenagers give birth, this has usually a heavy and long-lasting impact on their life and future, including physical and mental risks associated with teenage pregnancies, as well as social risks for themselves and their children. This can be seen, among many others, in the case of a young woman, who was first abused by Father Joseph DeShan, a priest in the diocese of Bridgeport, when she was 15 years old. In September 1989, two months after her 16th birthday, she became pregnant and eventually gave birth to a child that she raised on her own. She had dreamed of going to college and had wanted to become a police officer or join the military, all of which seemed utterly impossible now. When she came forward about ten years later, aged 28, she said in an interview: "I'm angry (. . .) I feel anger because I got pregnant, because I haven't done anything in life that I wanted to do" (Rich 2002).

Not only the young mothers, but also the children born and raised under these circumstances mostly face a gloomy future. This is tangible in a case of two women in Alaska, who came forward in October 2005, and claimed that a Jesuit named James E. Jacobsen had sexually assaulted and impregnated them in the 1960s. They gave birth to his sons. The women and children suffered from social and emotional distress. One "child was born in August 1966 and in his early years thought his mother's husband was his father. But rumors and teasing about the possibility the priest was his father dogged him" (Demer 2005). One of the women said she suffered "emotional distress, loss of self esteem, disgrace, humiliation and lost affection from her husband". The children "grew up without knowing their biological father, without child support and without his support and guidance" (Demer 2005).

Priests who father children not infrequently refuse to pay child support, forcing their victims to fight for years and even decades. When a woman in Arizona, named Sharon Roy, became pregnant by Father Patrick J. Colleary, who had allegedly raped her in 1978 when she was 17, he told her "to have the baby adopted, or get an abortion". But she kept the child and raised it. When she asked for financial support for the child, Colleary and the diocese refused. She came back in 1994, asking the diocese for help in supporting her child. But the diocese refused to supply child support, while it kept the child's father on the diocese's payroll, despite "continued complaints of abominable sexual behavior". It was only in 1995, when Roy filed for child support with the Department of Economic Security's Child Support Enforcement Administration in Phoenix, that the Diocese "quietly garnished $400 a month from Colleary's wages" to support his child. In an interview with the Phoenix New Times in 2002, Roy said: "It is awful dealing with them. They intimidate you to the nth degree, make you feel like you're the bad person" (Nelson 2002).

3.2.3. Coerced Adoption

Another way to cover up priestly fatherhood is to persuade the mother to give the child up for adoption. Coerced adoption in the Catholic context is mostly associated with Irish Mother and Baby Homes (Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes 2021). But during the Post World War II period, in the so-called Baby Scoop Era, it seems to have been fairly common in the United States as well. Single, middle-class teenagers and women, who either could not or would not marry the man who impregnated them, had few other options than so-called maternity homes. These homes are described by Marcia A. Ellison as "total institutions where neurotic pregnancies could be cured by separating single mothers from their children" (Ellison 2003, p. 326).

In the context of CSA, coerced adoptions very likely went along with other forms of abuse. Besides sexual abuse and sexual trauma, they may involve many or even all of the above mentioned forms of reproductive abuse, such as coerced insemination, attempted coerced abortion, hiding and giving birth in traumatic or life-threatening circumstances, and even compulsion to lie in order to protect the reputation of the perpetrator.

There is one example in the diocese of Manchester NH. In the winter of 1948/1949, a priest named John Thomas Sullivan showed particular concern for a poor girl who had no parents. He found her a job, monitored her bank account, and secured her an apartment. An account of what happened then is given in a heavily redacted document that is entitled "Custody" and in all likelihood was part of an application for guardianship that the diocese filed on behalf of the girl: "residents in the building report that there had been a close association between Father Sullivan and [name redacted]. During the third week in June, [name redacted] nauseated daily in the morning and was given assistance by residents of the building and on 6/26/49 was hospitalized at the Claremont Hospital (. . .) as a result of an abortion attempt. She was two months pregnant and had not miscarried. She was in great pain and (. . .) was admitted under an assumed name (. . .)" (Document Entitled Custody 1949, p. 212). According to this same document "Father Sullivan (. . .) has in his possession an affidavit signed by [name redacted] on 7/2/49 and witnessed by Father Hubert Mann absolving Father Sullivan. A statement from it reads: 'Father Sullivan had nothing to do with the condition in which I was and he did not counsel the abortion'" (Document Entitled Custody 1949, p. 212).

However, other sources in the same file make it clear that he had, in fact, a great deal to do with it: On December 14, 1949, Jeanette H. Melton, Executive Secretary of The New Hampshire's Children's Aid Society, informs Michael J. Hurley, the Chancellor of the diocese of Manchester, that the petition for guardianship was granted and that the girl had been "admitted to the Florence Crittenton Home on 10-14-49 and on 10-27-40 was delivered of a premature baby, [redacted] weighing 2 pounds 4 1/2 ounces. Both [redacted] and the baby were in serious condition (. . .) for some time it seemed unlikely that the baby would survive" (Melton 1949). On January 16, 1950, Mrs. Melton writes again informing the Chancellor that the baby was "gaining rapidly. We hope to get word soon that he can leave the hospital. It distresses us that these costs are so high" (Melton 1950a). On February 24, she writes to the Chancellor to ask a question that relates to Father Sullivan: "Will it be possible for you to obtain the information about the father which we shall need if we make adoption plans?" She remarks: "The baby is thought to resemble the father strongly." And admits: "At this point the mother is not ready to surrender the baby for adoption, but we are anxious to make progress in collecting information bearing on adoptability" (Melton 1950b). Finally, in a letter dated September 15, 1950, Melton informs Hurly that the child whom she describes as "a solemn, distant baby", "went to an adoption home on September 7" (Melton 1950c).

As for Sullivan, he was suspended twice in less than ten years for the same reason. When he sought admittance into other dioceses, the bishop of Manchester, Matthew F. Brady, sat down in late 1957 and wrote no less than a dozen letters in which he warned bishops of neighboring dioceses: "I feel that every inquiring Bishop should know some of the circumstances that range from parenthood, through violation of the Mann Act,

attempted suicide and abortion (. . .) a new diocese would only mean new pastures" (Brady 1957).

There is another case of coerced adoption around 15 years later and 900 miles west of Manchester. According to a lawsuit filed by a woman in 2004, she was sexually abused as a 16-year-old high school student in 1965 by Father Norman L. Heil, a priest incardinated in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. When she became pregnant, Church officials made her leave high school and move to a private Catholic institution for pregnant teens. She was warned not to reveal the name of the child's father "under any condition". Additionally, she was massively worked on and put under pressure, to give the child up for adoption. She did not want to do that, but Father Heil and an unnamed religious Sister insisted. Allegedly, the nun warned her "the Church would not baptize her child unless she put the baby up for adoption" (Horn 2004). She finally gave in. In 2004, almost forty years later her lawyer, Marc Mezibov, stated that "his client recently spoke to her daughter for the first time and may meet with her" (Horn 2004).

3.3. Violence

Reproductive violence can be defined as: *using the reproductive vulnerability of a person to torture or intimidate them into submission*. In contrast to *indifference* and *coercion*, the violence of the act is fully obvious and this is intended by the perpetrator. This form of reproductive abuse is mostly witnessed in the context of war crimes (UN Secretary-General 2018), and occasionally in intimate partner violence (Moore et al. 2010; Coyle et al. 2015), but it also occurs in the context of CSA.

In 1970, Father Raymond F. Kownacki was assigned to a parish in St. Francisville in Illinois. Among his parishioners was a devout family with nine children, one of them a 15-year-old girl named Gina. Father Kownacki employed her to clean the rectory. According to a complaint filed by Gina in 1995, one time when she vacuumed his bedroom in the fall of 1970, he raped her for the first time. "Father Kownacki then advised Gina that he loved her and that he needed her love, that she should trust him." When he was transferred to another parish 50 miles west, he "provided financial assistance" to her parents and convinced them that Gina needed a better education, which she could get in the high school in his new parish. In the summer of 1971, Gina moved to Kownacki's new rectory, where she, then aged 16, was expected to do the housekeeping, cooking and laundry, all while attending high school. Kownacki continued to abuse her sexually.

In December 1971, Gina met a boy, whom she began to date. She fell in love with him and in January 1973 decided to have intercourse with him for she "wanted to experience sex with someone she cared about rather than someone who disgusted her". After some time, Gina realized that she was pregnant. Since Kownacki had told her he had a vasectomy, she believed her boyfriend to be the father. She met the boy who "took her to a doctor who confirmed the pregnancy. He then promised to marry Gina and care for her and their baby".

When Gina told Kownacki that she was pregnant from her boyfriend and going to marry him, Kownacki "flew into a rage". He began to beat her and "screamed at her that if he could not have her no one would". He said, "there was no way she could have a baby." Then, he made her drink "a potion that he had mixed which he told her was a guinine mixture used in Central America to abort babies". After drinking it, Gina began feeling very tired and laid down. Kownacki then removed her slacks and underpants, "inserted his entire hand into Gina's vagina and wrenched and squeezed her uterus. Gina passed out." When she woke up, she found herself lying in a pool of blood. She got up and got home and shortly after, miscarried. She was taken to a hospital in Mt. Carmel, Illinois, where she was "informed that if she had not been brought into the hospital when she was, she would not have lived" (Complaint at Law, Gina Trimble Parks and Douglas Parks vs. Reverend Raymond Kownacki and the Catholic Diocese of Belleville, in the circuit court St. Clair County, Civil File No. 95L308, Illinois 1995).

4. Analysis: Layers of Misogyny

After the establishment of basic definitions of various forms of reproductive abuse in the first part of the paper, the biggest challenge that remains is to adequately understand the phenomenon in its specific context. A proper analysis will have to explain why reproductive abuse in the Catholic context has been all but invisible so far, and why there has been so little action or even research on it, despite the particularly high value that is placed on reproductive issues in Catholic doctrine.

One possible explanatory model might be the redoubled impact of misogyny in this particular context. Reproductive abuse is closely linked to a patriarchal, sexist and misogynistic logic that is widely accepted and normalized in the secular sphere as well as in the Catholic Church. This logic assigns a subordinate place to women and girls in relation to men and distributes rights and obligations unequally between the sexes (Manne 2017; Manne 2020). In this logic, female sexuality and reproductivity are subordinated to male interests and, in some cases, this can mean that a man's sexual needs or reputation are given greater weight than the dignity, health and even the life of a woman, adolescent girl or a baby. According to this logic, girls' and women's reproductive vulnerability does not result in more rights, but in more obligations for them. Consequently, women's reproductive vulnerability and their reproductive abuse are at most invisible and irrelevant to the law makers' eyes, and in case they surface at all, they are easily considered women's very own liability. In a nutshell: A system of *reproductive injustice* enables and obscures *reproductive abuse*, and this happens *simultaneously* in secular society and in the Catholic Church. It is this mutual interpenetration of religious and secular misogyny that works like a stealth mechanism for reproductive abuse committed by Catholic priests.

As far as misogyny, reproductive violence, injustice and abuse in the secular context are concerned, I refer to works by Altunjan, Buller and Schulte, Chrisler, Cook, Duggan and Jacobson, Manne, Moore and Ross. In what follows, I limit myself to some basic observations about reproductive injustice in the Catholic Church.

4.1. Reproductive Injustice in the Catholic Church

Catholic women live in a double subordination to Catholic priests: as women, they are subordinate to men, and as lay people, they are subordinate to clergy. On top of this double gender hierarchy, there is an extreme power imbalance between those who hold reproductive power in the Catholic Church and those who are particularly reproductively vulnerable.

4.1.1. Exclusion of Reproductively Active Persons from Government and Legislation

Unlike any other international religious entity, organization or state, in the Roman Catholic Church, only permanently celibate men meet the requirement to become members of the clergy, and occupy leadership positions (cc. 1024 i.c.w. c. 129 § 1, cc. 1041, 1042 CIC 1983). Only they can be ordained as priests and can exert jurisdiction (*potestas regiminis*). All legislation, jurisprudence and administration are tied back to the clergy. This means whoever can become pregnant and whoever is or plans to be reproductively active are excluded by definition from government and legislation in their Church. As a consequence, the group of people who set the rules for the reproductive life of Catholics, and the group of Catholics who can become pregnant or are married to a person who can become pregnant, are as neatly separated as they can be. In addition, these two groups—clergy and lay people—are in a clear relationship of superiority and subordination according to the Church's constitution, which demands strict obedience and accountability from the bottom up (cc. 212 § 1, 273 CIC 1983), but only moral responsibility from the top down.

4.1.2. Increasing Importance of Reproductive Issues in Catholic Doctrine

From the beginning of the 20th century, it has been of increasing importance to the celibate male leaders of the Church to create and enforce rules for the reproductive behavior of Catholics. The importance of the "question of human procreation" not only

in the Catholic moral system but also in the political action of the Holy See can hardly be overestimated (Radford Ruether 2008; Beattie 2014). Various popes have placed this issue at the heart of major teaching and legal documents. They give precise guidelines about who may perform an act which is "suitable in itself for the procreation of offspring" with whom, when and how. The most prominent among these documents are Pope Pius XI (1930), Pope Paul VI (1968), and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1987). They regulate in painstaking detail which methods of birth control and which forms of intercourse and insemination are permissible. Summarizing this teaching, only heterosexual spouses are allowed to have sexual intercourse. Any sexual act must be open to the transmission of new life. Any sexual act outside of marriage, and any form of so-called artificial contraception and especially abortion, are considered a grave sin.

These texts suggest that reproductive abuse would be harshly punished in the Catholic Church. But that is not the case. Partly because the very concepts of reproductive autonomy and reproductive abuse are alien to the logic of these documents. Partly because the much-invoked dignity of mothers and the sacredness of unborn life as presented in Catholic doctrine do not result in guaranteed and enforceable canonical rights for mothers and children. Not least, decisions as to whether and who is prosecuted and punished for an illegitimate pregnancy or for an abortion, and who is absolved and on what grounds, are ultimately reserved to male clergy. In cases of reproductive abuse, all of these factors work to the disadvantage of victims, as can be seen in exemplary cases.

4.2. Misogynistic Mechanisms in Dealing with Reproductive Abuse

4.2.1. Burden Shifting

In theory, the strict teaching on reproduction applies equally to all members of the Church. One could even say that it especially applies to priests, because they are not even allowed to be reproductively active. In practice, however, there are incentives for priests who do not want to carry the burden of celibacy to put it on the women and girls they impregnated and on the children they fathered. For in the logic of canon law, a violation of celibacy mostly remains a personal matter of conscience for a priest as long as it does not become a public *scandal*. For if "the act is not known to others (and therefore, ipso facto is not scandalous), these facts weigh against imposing any canonically penal consequences" (Kochansky and Herrmann 2004). That means, as long as a priest hides his fatherhood, it usually has little consequences for him. Hence, the common urge felt by priests to conceal pregnancies they caused at all costs, which results in all the more drastic implications for the involved woman or girl and (unborn) child.

Even though, in some places, there may be particular canonical rules for alimony payments that must be paid for priests' (secret) children, these regulations are usually not made publicly known and, on top of that, are not reliably implemented. Sometimes, priests who impregnated girls even receive extra help from their superiors to avoid child support, as in Rita Milla's case. When she came to the chancery office on July 19, 1983 and said she "wanted the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to force Father Tugade to assume his responsibilities", she was told that he was not "now assigned in this jurisdiction but had moved in January of 1983 to Monterey, California, under the jurisdiction of Bishop Thadeus Shubsda" (Ward 1984, p. 36). She was not told, however, that it was the Archdiocese that had suggested to all seven priests who had abused Rita "that they leave their assignments until such time as publicity and the trial have subsided (. . .) with the knowledge of His Eminence, Cardinal Manning", according to an archdiocesan document dated May 3, 1984 (Archdiocese of Los Angeles 1984, p. 28).

Not only is the burden of financial responsibility for priests' children routinely handed over to the victims of reproductive abuse, even the burden of sin is. Lori Haigh recalls how Father Lenihan drove her to the bank: "He gave me the money and said, of course, that he couldn't come with me for the abortion", which is a grave sin. However, he "didn't seem particularly concerned about the status of my soul," she said (Lobdell 2002a).

Not only clerical perpetrators, but also parents and family leave pregnant women and even girls alone and literally chase them away. Among others, this was experienced by Nilda Lopez, who had been first abused when she was 16 years old in 1973 by Father Louis J. Rios in the Archdiocese of New York. Rios began to abuse her after she had confided in him that her father was abusive. Eventually, she discovered that she was pregnant. In an interview, she recalls how Rios offered her money "from the church collection plate" and told her to have an abortion. But she decided not to have an abortion, even though her own family disowned her: "It was real hard. I had to lie to get welfare. My father threw me out of the house because I wouldn't tell him who the baby's father was" (Saul 2004).

4.2.2. Dismissal

Notwithstanding all Church rhetoric about the dignity of mothers and the sanctity of unborn life, the often immense burden, pain, responsibility and suffering of pregnant teenagers and women who undergo reproductive abuse at the hands of Catholic priests are usually outright ignored and dismissed by members of the clergy.

Rejection can be carried out in a spontaneous yet bureaucratic manner. Like in the already mentioned memo by Chancellor Francis Statkus, who limited himself to noting that a pregnancy did "not exist from the latest information" (Statkus 1977, p. 15), but saw no reason to do anything about the serious consequences that the fear of pregnancy had in the life of the young victim. Other times, dismissal is much more deliberate. An example of this is the case of the Jesuit James Poole. When Rachel Mike came forward in 2004 with an abortion allegation, the provincial superior of the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus, John D. Whitney, immediately knew this allegation was particularly serious. He notes: "The advice to have an abortion would require dismissal from the Society and the clerical state, as it is a latae sententiae offense" (Whitney 2004). According to canon law, any person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication latae sententiae, that is by the very commission of the offense (c. 2350 §1 CIC) 1917, c. 1398 CIC 1983, CCC 1992, p. 2272). There is even a special rule (c. 985 n. 4 CIC) 1917, c. 1041 n. 4, c. 1044 §1 n.3 CIC 1983) that applies exclusively to priests: Men who have assisted in the procurement of a completed abortion become irregular, that is, excluded from receiving priestly ordination or irregular for the exercise of orders. This means priests who are found guilty of this offense can no longer perform their priestly duties, unless they are judged worthy of a dispensation. Once their participation in an abortion has become publicly known through court proceedings, the irregularity can only be dispensed by the Apostolic See in Rome (c. 1047 CIC 1983, see Demel 1995). Since this was such a far-reaching matter, instead of investigating the accusation himself or writing to Rome, Whitney decided to do nothing about it. He writes: "While not impossible, this assertion will need further proof." And under the heading "Actions" he then adds: "Since Poole is already under the strongest restrictions possible within the Society, I cannot do anything further" (Whitney 2004).

Other times, the suffering of pregnant teenage girls is dismissed in an almost random fashion. It may take the form of blatant mockery, as in the case of Rita Milla. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times in 1991, Santiago Tamayo, the priest who was the first to sexually abuse Rita, and who later left the priesthood and apologized for the abuse, recalled how he confronted the other perpetrators after he had learned about Rita's pregnancy: "I asked them who was the father and they just laughed," he recalled "they weren't going to do anything about it" (Morrison 1991a, p. 193). Other times, a teenager left pregnant by a priest is treated as if it were a common and irrelevant matter. An example is the case of a homeless teenager in Houston who became the victim of Anthony Hernandez Gonzalez, a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, called "Father Tony". She was 14 years old when he first approached her in 1981. He told her he "was going to go talk to the pope so the pope would actually be the one doing our wedding," she later recalled (MacCormack 2008). But he never returned from an alleged trip to the Vatican and left the girl he had impregnated alone. When she reached out to Fr. James Ward, a fellow Oblate priest and the pastor of the parish where Gonzales was assigned, Ward replied: "Fr. Tony gets a lot of

girls pregnant. He is not here" (Doyle 2008). The girl was left to give birth and raise a baby by herself, while Gonzales was transferred to Canada where he met his next victim.

At times, the suffering is dismissed by an intentional distortion of the factual situation. That is the case when perpetrators and their superiors act as if sexual encounters between a female teenager and a Catholic priest twice her age were normal heterosexual "relationships", for whom both "partners" were equally responsible. In almost all cases involving female teenagers, perpetrators use this framing as a grooming strategy. Cudemo's victim "Ruth", who was only 10 when he first abused her, explained to the Philadelphia Grand Jury how he did that: "He would say, 'Well, I really better drive you right home, because if I don't, I'm going to kiss you. (. . .) And you know, kind of like I didn't say anything, and then, you know, he would pull over and kiss me; (. . .) he would always warn me first, which I didn't know at the time, but it was sort of like his way of making me feel responsible" (Philadelphia Grand Jury Report 2003, p. 129). When victims believe themselves to be in a relationship, they not only feel responsible (and guilty) for the abuse, but also, they often have internalized misogynistic ideas about heterosexual relationships. It is not uncommon for female teenagers and young women to perceive unwanted sexual acts and even reproductive coercion as something they have to put up with when they are in a heterosexual relationship (Harned 2005; Wilson and Miller 2016). When Lori Haigh was asked why she couldn't tell her parents about the abuse, she replied that she "was afraid of getting Lenihan in trouble. She thought somehow she was doing a good deed for the church by providing Lenihan a sexual release. She thought 'the needs of many outweighed the needs of me'" (Lobdell 2002a). Even when victims of reproductive abuse comply with unwanted abortions or adoptions, the internalized obligation to protect the priest and the supposed greater importance of his reputation in relation to their own physical and mental wellbeing is usually at least a contributing factor. Rita Milla said in retrospect in reference to the priests who had abused her, "I almost died protecting their reputation" (Morrison 1991c).

Even bishops frame sexual abuse of female teenagers as "relationships", as becomes clear among other things in a letter by bishop James C. Timlin of Scranton, dated September 6, 1988. Timlin had been informed by March 1988 at least that a priest of his diocese, Father Robert J. Brague, had been sexually involved with a high school student. In August 1988, the sister of the girl had reached out to Timlin to inform him that her sister was pregnant. She also informed Timlin that Brague had been sexually involved with at least two other girls. Timlin responded to this by writing: "Father Brague and your sister have a long, difficult road ahead. What has happened is their responsibility and certainly Father Brague will take care of his obligations" (PA Grand Jury Report, p. 812).

The framing of sexual abuse of female teenagers as love affairs is also taken up by secular media. An example is the widely publicized case of Rita Milla who was aged 16 when 44-year-old Tamayo first abused her in 1978. A newspaper article on Rita Milla's case, published in the Los Angeles Times in 1991, presents Rita Milla and Santiago Tamayo as "once priest and parishioner, and for a time lovers" (Morrison 1991b). It is also worth noting that Rita Milla's account was first met with disbelief by the secular public. After she filed the suit in 1984, even friends fell away and relatives did not believe her. That changed only after Tamayo himself stepped forward and corroborated her story.

4.2.3. Victim Blaming

It is not unusual for offenders as well as superiors to turn to victim blaming, insults, threats or retaliation. For example, priests claim they had actually been seduced by their victims. The aforementioned Father Gonzalez, instead of denying the allegations, insisted in his deposition that it was the homeless 14-year-old girl who "initiated their sexual relationship" (MacCormack 2008). And when Cudemo took "Ruth" for an abortion, he "blamed the young girl and questioned how she could be so stupid as to become pregnant" (Philadelphia Grand Jury Report 2003, p. 130). When Norman Heil's victim, a high school student, had been sent to an institution for pregnant teens, the nun who pressured her

into adoption told her "the pregnancy was her fault and she should 'suffer in silence'", according to the suit the woman brought in 2004 (Horn 2004). In spring 2002, one day after he was convicted of sexual abuse, Father Don Kimball blamed his victims, saying in a CNN interview that the clerical collar made him attractive to women: "I wasn't prepared for putting on that uniform, walking out into real life and discovering the number of women who were coming on to me" (Kovner 2002). Kimball was a serial abuser of teenagers as young as 13, at least one of whom, aged 14 at the time, said she had become pregnant and had an abortion arranged for by him.

Sometimes, superiors share in this victim blaming and take action not against the clerical offender but against the victim. On Feb 16, 1984, days after Rita Milla had filed her complaint, Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Juan Alfredo Arzube commented on the case on TV, allegedly reproducing the words of a friend of one of the accused priests: „This girl has had very bad actions even with altar boys. She is a person of bad reputation." His comment then was included as an exhibit in the trial (Kmex Channel 34 1987). In the case of the teenager in Bridgeport who became pregnant by Father Joseph DeShan shortly after her 16th birthday in 1989, Joseph DeShan was granted a leave of absence by his bishop when he revealed the "relationship" and began a new life as an elementary school teacher in New Jersey, with no record of sexual misconduct. The experience of his victim was quite different. She said that only "two days after she told DeShan she was pregnant (. . .) she was called in to see Monsignor William Scheyd, a top aide to [Bishop Edward Michael] Egan, and was told that she was fired from her evening receptionist's job at the Bridgeport cathedral. After that, no one from the diocese contacted her or offered assistance, and no law enforcement authorities ever inquired about her sexual relationship with a priest twice her age". About 13 years later, in a joint statement, the dioceses of Bridgeport and New York claimed they did "not know DeShan had fathered a child until he petitioned for laicization" in 1994, they speculate the girl had been 16, which is the age of consent in Connecticut, and they quote DeShan as saying at the time that he had a "monogamous relationship with a woman" (Rich 2002).

Even family members of victims may engage in victim blaming and threats. In the criminal trial against Miguel Luna, one of his victims recalled how Luna had sexually penetrated her for the first time, when she was 12 in 1993. After that, she said, she confided in her mother. But her mother only looked at her and said, "Just don't get pregnant because your father will kill you" (Reporter's Record 2019a, p. 67).

4.2.4. Clericalist Himpathy

The Church's widespread failure to take responsibility, let alone show compassion toward victims of reproductive abuse, is matched by equally high levels of compassion toward clerical perpetrators. In abortion cases, the enormous discrepancy between top Catholic officials' indifference towards female suffering and their compassion for clerical perpetrators becomes especially palpable.

It is worth recalling that according to Catholic doctrine, abortion is considered the most heinous crime imaginable, the deliberate killing of an innocent child in the womb (CDF 1974; Pope John Paul II 1995; CCC 1992, pp. 2270–75). Therefore, the Church's Magisterium is ready to place enormous burdens on girls and women. It forbids even emergency contraception, considered an abortifacient, and makes it "unavailable in most Catholic hospitals, even when this hospital is the only one available in the area and the person requesting emergency contraception is not a Catholic" (Radford Ruether 2008, p. 190). This prohibition is extended even to rape victims in civil conflict zones. Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, there is no trace of an official ecclesiastical exemption that would allow emergency contraception in extreme cases, for example to nuns who were gang-raped during the Congo War in the 1960s (Townsend 2016) or for refugee women of Kosovo in the 1990s (Radford Ruether 2008). Girls and women are expected by the Church to accept pregnancies as a result of war rape and carry them to term in the midst of violent conflicts, even at the risk of their own lives. As a result of this uncompromising teaching,

even victims of reproductive abuse feel guilty after an abortion. One of Luna's victims, who had an abortion when she was 14 in 1983, testified in court in 2019: "There's times I cry myself to sleep and I ask this child to forgive me for what I did because it wasn't the baby's fault." And she recalls: "When my children were going through confirmation, they asked us parents to go watch a video that they were going to show the kids and it had to do with abortion. That was probably the hardest thing I've had to do, because it just brought back all the memories." When she was then asked by the Assistant District Attorney if she had forgiven herself, she answered "I don't think so" (Reporter's Record 2019c, pp. 81–82).

However, the factual and legal situation is quite different for priests who participated in abortions. As we have seen, in theory, they are not only automatically excommunicated, but additionally become irregular as a result of the act. However, in practice superiors are reluctant to impose these penalties. Even if they are imposed, an absolution from the excommunication and on top of that a dispensation from the irregularity are easily granted, and the offender can continue his priestly ministry. In the whole process canon law does not require any involvement of the perpetrator's victim.

Probably one of the most revealing cases in this regard is that of bishop James C. Timlin of Scranton and Father Thomas D. Skotek. In 1986, Timlin learned that Skotek had made his 15-year-old victim have an abortion. On 9 October 1986, the bishop wrote a letter to Skotek, who had had to resign as a consequence of the matter and was sent to St. Luke's Institute MD. In the letter, Timlin expresses his sincere sympathy with Skotek, who apparently found it difficult to accept these measures: "This is a very difficult time in your life, and I realize how upset you are. I too share your grief. How I wish it were not necessary to take this step. With the help of God, who never abandons us and who is always near when we need Him, this too will pass away, and all will be able to pick up and go on living. Please be assured that I am most willing to do whatever I can to help" (PA Grand Jury Report 2018, p. 286). Another letter suggests that Timlin kept this promise by personally interceding in Rome for Skotek, so that he could return to active ministry. On 20 January 1989, Timlin wrote to Cardinal Luigi Dadaglio, Major Penitentiary at the Apostolic Penitentiary in Rome: "It has come to my attention that a priest of this diocese has been rendered irregular as a result of having assisted in the procurement of a completed abortion. Conscious as I am of the severity of the crime he admits to, I nevertheless judge him worthy of consideration for a dispensation from this irregularity." And as if to excuse him, he adds: "The priest in question undoubtedly acted out of fear and panic. He had impregnated the girl he assisted in procuring the abortion" (PA Grand Jury Report 2018, p. 288). Skotek was "rendered regular" again and returned to priestly ministry. In April 2002, he was removed again from ministry, as required by a new Church policy. Only months later, Timlin publicly cited Skotek "as a good example of why he opposed applying the new policy in all cases".[6] He said, Skotek had "performed well without complaint" since the "incident" and "many parishioners have expressed support and praise for Skotek" (Guydish 2002).

5. Conclusions

The main contribution of this paper is to shed light on cases of reproductive abuse in the context of CSA in the Catholic Church, including involuntary insemination and pregnancies, coerced abortions, adoptions, and births under adverse conditions. Reproductive abuse possibly affects between 1 and 10 percent of underage victims of Catholic clergy sex abuse, and significantly more adults. It is statistically relevant and should be included in all studies and surveys of sexual abuse, not least in the Catholic context. Based on the reproductive justice framework and Manne's approach to misogyny, this paper helps to further explore the Catholic Church's handling of these cases. The common disregard for the suffering of victims of reproductive abuse and the routine absolution of clerical offenders may appear paradoxical in the light of Catholic teaching on reproductive issues, but they are the logical consequence of a clericalistic doctrinal and legal system to which not only the concept of reproductive autonomy is alien, but which moreover ignores any but

the male clerical perspective. Therefore, it lacks the logical prerequisites to even understand reproductive abuse as a criminal act to the detriment of individuals, let alone deal with it appropriately.

Funding: This research received no external funding apart from a small stipend offered by the Cushwa Center to the Fellows of its Gender Sex and Power Project.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study is exclusively file-based. It did not involve humans or animals.

Informed Consent Statement: The study is exclusively file-based. It did not involve humans or animals.

Data Availability Statement: The study did not report any data. References and in almost all cases links to original documents quoted in the paper are listed below.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank all colleagues in the Cushwa Center's Gender Sex and Power Project for their support and particularly for the many valuable comments and the collegial discussions at the meetings of the research group. My special thanks go to Terence McKiernan, whose impressive knowledge of the archives and detailed feedback provided invaluable support.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 In general, pregnancies of victims of CSA are hardly mentioned in studies on CSA in the catholic church. There is only a general remark in the Australian Royal Commission's Report that some survivors alleged they "became pregnant after being sexually abused as children by people in religious ministry such as church elders, religious brothers or priests. In some cases we heard that this led to miscarriage. In other cases we heard that it led to forced adoption, abortion or marriage." (McClellan et al. 2017).

2 In the Netherlands, there are allegations of forced castrations: "The Dutch parliament has called for an investigation into reports that Catholic clerics ordered castrations of boys in the 1950s in an attempt to cure their homosexuality." (Voice of America 2012) (Vijselaar et al. 2015) and in the US there is an allegation that a nun became pregnant when abusing a minor (Associated Press State & Local Wire 2004; Barry 2004).

3 Penile penetration can of course also take place in such a way that it cannot lead to pregnancies, e.g., as penetration of other body parts. Vaginal penetration could have occurred with the finger or objects. Formulations like these and the absence of questions regarding explicitly penile–vaginal penetration and birth control methods make it clear that reproductive abuse and possible pregnancies of victims have not been in the scope of studies on CSA so far.

4 In this section, I essentially follow the stage model of abuse (negligence, coercion and violence) that I first developed in relation to spiritual abuse (see Reisinger 2019).

5 The transcript contains an error at this point (it reads "because it would make me look"). I have therefore corrected the quote to match the audio recording of the trial, which clearly says "wouldn't".

6 With this Timlin refers to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, a set of procedures established by the US Bishops' Conference in June 2002. It required "that for even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor-past, present, or future-the offending priest or deacon will be permanently removed from ministry" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2002, p. 8).

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Article

Vulnerability, Vulnerance and Resilience—Spiritual Abuse and Sexual Violence in New Spiritual Communities

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Abstract: In February 2017, Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, acknowledged in an interview that some 70 "new spiritual movements" were under investigation for abusive behavior committed by their founders. The number of cases that remain undetected is probably large. This article uses the example of these communities to analyze the precarious tension between vulnerability, vulnerance, and resilience. It draws on Céline Hoyeau's excellent study of those founders of new spiritual movements in France who were later exposed as abusers. It also presents my research on the sacred in its dangerous connection to the victimizing sacrifice. My basic thesis is that exploring the link between vulnerability and resilience is not enough. Rather, vulnerance needs to be systematically included in the analyses. This new approach opens up a more complex understanding of abuse, cover-ups, and disclosure. It can tackle both the vulnerant resilience of the perpetrators and the voluntary vulnerability of survivors in disclosing abuse.

Keywords: vulnerability; vulnerance; resilience; sexual and spiritual abuse; sacrifice; the sacred; non-survivors; spiritual communities; "other-power"; vulnerability paradox; expenditure paradox

Citation: Keul, Hildegund. 2022. Vulnerability, Vulnerance and Resilience—Spiritual Abuse and Sexual Violence in New Spiritual Communities. *Religions* 13: 425. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050425

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 21 March 2022
Accepted: 4 May 2022
Published: 8 May 2022

1. Introduction

The abuse of adult women and men is rampant in the Roman Catholic Church (Haslbeck et al. 2020). We can state this because the access to power that the church usurped (for a long time and still today) in general over the love lives of adults is an abuse of power (Keul 2021c). Banning the use of condoms despite AIDS and other dangers, subjugating sex outside of marriage or within the priesthood to confession[1], and even outlawing and anathematizing same-sex love—these and similar practices are abuses of the power that clericalism (Dreßing et al. 2018, p. 13; Leimgruber 2022a) has acquired in recent centuries and applied, at times, with brute force. The phenomena that are the subject of this Special Issue are located and made possible against this wide background. This background cannot be illuminated, but it should be kept in mind if we are to understand the complex dynamics that make sexual violence and its cover-up possible in the first place. Spiritual abuse and sexual violence in "new spiritual communities" are part of this system.

2. The Underestimated Power of Vulnerability and the Vulnerability Paradox

In the context of spiritual abuse and sexual violence, vulnerability is a decisive but often underestimated power. Many, partially non-transparent effects of power are operative here and demand a sharpened attentiveness. At first glance, the vulnerability of victims is easily perceived, but we should not underestimate the vulnerability of the supporters, witnesses, institutions, and even perpetrators. There is one's own vulnerability, but there is also the vulnerability of others—and both enhance each other. This also applies to institutions that tolerate sexual abuse when covering it up. Already here, the institution's own vulnerability exercises an unspeakable power that the concealment of sexual abuse by church leaders has revealed. Vulnerability has the power to enhance violence. What

the German discourse on vulnerability calls "Vulneranz" (Münkler and Wassermann 2012, p. 77; Keul 2021a, pp. 55–60) grows out of vulnerability. The new term "vulnerance" refers to the power to inflict harm. It means the special readiness to use violence, even explosive violence, in connection with vulnerabilities. In the case of cover-ups, this violence-enhancing power is volatile: it has shattered the church in recent years and has left it in ruins. Hedging strategies had the opposite effect—they led to destruction on a tremendous scale. How could that happen?

2.1. The Cover-up as Self-Protection: How Vulnerability Turns into Vulnerance

There is no doubt that ignorance, carelessness, and arrogance could be found among the leaders of the church in the cover-ups that took place. However, there was a stronger motive. Leaders tried to protect the Catholic Church—and thus their own religious community, as sacred for them—from any possible damage. They feared the damage that would result if the church was exposed in public as an institution that had brought evil into peoples' lives. The desire to protect one's own institution contains a potential for violence: one wounds the other to protect oneself from being wounded (Keul 2021a, pp. 105–12). Cover-ups as defense mechanisms harm victims of abuse, for example, by denying the crimes, excluding the victims from the community, accusing them of lying, placing them under suspicion. In a kind of preemptive strike, which would block the revealing of sexual violence, the survivors become the victims of further violence again. Both forms of vulnerance, abuse and cover-up, amplify each other, dealing immeasurable damage to survivors and non-survivors. In cover-ups, the vulnerability of one's own institution operates as an unspeakable, violence-enhancing power. In vulnerant self-protection, the incredible power of vulnerability is at work: violence is released not by an actual wound, but by a *feared* wound, and thus by vulnerability. In recent years, we have had to learn not only how destructive the abuse itself is but also the cover-up. Ann Cahill, a US-American philosopher from Elon University, makes clear how crucial "the shimmering moment of disclosure" is (Cahill 2021). At this point, the healing process could begin—or the spiral of violence gathers speed.

Victims of sexual violence and spiritual abuse experience this destructive power of vulnerability painfully in other ways as well. For them, the actual harm caused by the abuse and the cover-up, which affects both body and soul, is at the center. Their human dignity is assaulted, and they struggle to have their dignity recognized by themselves and others. Vulnerance is voracious and eats its way through one's entire life until, in the worst scenario, it pushes one to the brink of death. The damage does not remain in the present but extends into the future as well. This is where vulnerability once more comes into play. Violence continues to affect people even after the wounds have healed. A scar remains, marking one's own vulnerability, and that scar is a constant reminder that a new injury is possible. However, this too concerns a *feared* injury that one wants to avoid. That is why some victims rely on hedging strategies and construct protective walls around themselves. Others close to the victim are prevented from getting the chance to hurt them again. That is the reason victims sometimes keep others at a distance. The fear of being hurt blocks potential (social, financial, cultural, political, natural, artistic) resources for life. But it is precisely because they are victims of violence that they need attention, love, and, in particular, ecstasy (Kerstner et al. 2016, pp. 202–6). So, hedging strategies can become devastating for intensive relationships and sexual relations.

The correlation between vulnerability and vulnerance also functions in other everyday contacts. Because survivors want to protect themselves, they run the risk of blocking that which could contribute to their healing. Not only the wound itself, but the vulnerability—the vulnerability that the wound "embodies"—also exercises a devastating power. The lifelong effects of abuse have their origin in this violence-enhancing power of vulnerability. The absent is still present and plays an important role. The scar that remains makes what is absent present. The perpetrator has perhaps not lived near the victim for a long time, or the violent acts happened long ago. However, what is absent remains present—this is the core problem of

trauma. An intense, happy love relationship can stabilize a life and even aid its recovery and animate it—but it is precisely this what victims of sexual abuse may find impossible. Thus, the violence affects—of all things—those very resources that are necessary to overcome the injury. The suffering in the past proves to be so overwhelming that people can still feel its effects years later. As long as this vicious circle continues, the survivors remain the victims of sexual abuse. But fortunately, the destructive power of vulnerability can be reversed. This point will be discussed later.

2.2. Self-Protection through Cover-Up leaves the Church in Ruins: The Vulnerability Paradox

The vulnerance in abuse and cover-up does not stop with the primary victims. It cannot be contained in its destructive effects but tends to become volatile (unless people and communities vigorously resist it). In the end, what was initially intended as self-protection turns out to be self-destruction. Covering up the abuse disrupts the trust in the salvific mission of the church and thus in the church itself. This also applies to the "new spiritual communities". Their goal was "de faire émerger du neuf sur les ruines de l'ancien" (Hoyeau 2021, p. 64)—"to have the new rise up on the ruins of the old". Because of abuse and cover-ups, however, it was precisely the opposite they achieved. The effects of power reversed and accelerated the decline of the church. This shows what vulnerability research calls the "vulnerability paradox". This paradox deserves a closer look.

In the 1990s, security research established that ever-increasing security strategies, which are intended to avert damage in industrial societies, lead to even greater damage if the damage still occurs. This can be seen in the example of the power supply. A power failure at a crucial point could lead to chaotic conditions and violent outbreaks in well-secured societies within a few hours. This is paradoxical: the stronger the security strategies, the greater the vulnerability. Researchers dubbed this "the vulnerability paradox" (Steetskamp and Van Wijk 1994, p. 4). It states that hedging strategies in the event of damage increase the damage (Keul 2021a, pp. 25–27).

This paradox occurs in many contexts. It has become particularly visible in the church in recent years. Church leaders used every means available to prevent the disclosure of abuse and thereby protect the church from harm, and the means became more and more drastic. The Munich study on abuse and cover-up, carried out in January 2022, shows this in an exemplary way (Westpfahl et al. 2022). Clerics were relocated and then relocated again; files were manipulated or even destroyed; more and more money was paid out; deliberate concealment and small untruths grew into big lies. At the end there was even a discussion in Germany as to whether Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, who was not telling the truth, was lying (Deckers 2022).

But disclosure could not be prevented or stopped because sexual violence is a violation of human rights. In the long run, people in democratic cultures are not willing to accept such crimes, and violations of human rights were exposed, often with the help of journalism. What then happened—from the point of view of the cover-ups—is the damage event: what was absolutely necessary to keep secret became public. Not only the abuse but the cover-up itself was exposed. It was at this point that the vulnerability paradox kicked in. The vulnerance generated in the system became volatile and targeted the system itself.

One just needs to think about this briefly: if the abuse had not been covered up but had been consistently punished, made known and discussed publicly, the damage to the survivors would have been limited. Also, while the Catholic Church would have been damaged, that damage would not be as abysmal as it is the case currently. The enormous loss of credibility that church institutions have experienced in recent years and that challenges all members of the church, has resulted from the cover-up of abuse. The destruction increased exponentially. In Germany, this can be seen most clearly in the Archdiocese of Cologne, where the number of people leaving the church rose enormously in 2021 due to a lack of investigation into abuse and cover-ups (Jansen 2022). In the USA, since 2004 numerous dioceses have had to file for bankruptcy due to high compensation payments. If the church leaders had stopped the abuse early by disclosing it instead of

covering it up, the damage would not have been nearly as great. Cover-ups of abuse leave the church in tatters.

The processing of abuse and cover-ups requires complex analyses of the plural dynamics between vulnerability and vulnerance. This also includes deeper questions: Why is the church ready for security strategies that cause serious injuries? Why does it bring evil when it promises to bring salvation? This is where the category of the sacred comes into play. People and communities want to protect what is sacred to them at all costs. This connection between the sacred, protection strategies, and vulnerability is the focus of what follows. I will explain the problem by using the example of the "new spiritual communities", in which adults also suffer spiritual abuse and sexual violence.

3. Vulnerance in Spiritual Communities: The Destructive Power of the Sacred

Many of the faithful and bishops, as well as popes, of the Catholic Church have set their hopes since the Second Vatican Council on "new spiritual communities"[2] that promised an entirely different spirituality and more communicative closeness and vitality, a spirit of community and physicality as well as a special contact with the sacred. But in recent years it has come to light that, of all people, several *founders* of such communities committed abuse of power and sexual violence themselves.[3]

In these communities, vulnerance was also directed against adults, especially women. Are these regrettable, isolated cases? Or is it a regular pattern in the system? Is it, in the midst of spirituality, about great power, unpaid sex and immense amounts of money? Is spirituality a principal tool here?

3.1. A Church in Crisis, Especially Susceptible to the Abuse of Power, Sexual Violence, and Their Cover-Ups

Several fundamental questions arise in this new field of research, which first appeared in theology and interdisciplinary research and whose extent could only be foreseen. In France, at any rate, Céline Hoyeau presented a first, very well researched study in 2021 on power and abuse by the founders of the "communautés nouvelles", which also examined historical backgrounds and theological connections (Hoyeau 2021). She proves that this is not at all a matter of individual cases but a systemic problem. In her book, *La Trahison des Pères—The Treason of the Fathers*—she looks at how it could end in "la chute des étoiles" (ibid., pp. 19–52)—"the fall of the stars". The height from which they fell is determined by the height the founders were raised to previously through combined forces. Hoyeau understands this exaltation in the context of the loss of power and authority that the Catholic Church underwent in the second half of the twentieth century. In a time of increasing secularization, rising competition with non-Christian religions, and a drastic decline in priests, the "new spiritual communities" appeared to be a new kind of panacea for saving the church. Church leaders let themselves be dazzled by the numerous successes of the movements. In the midst of all their uncertainties, the faithful longed once more for a clear explanation of doctrine, intensive experiences of God's nearness, and sacred liturgy.

This analysis goes beyond France. The same problem can be seen in Germany, although it has only been discussed occasionally so far. In October 2020, Alexandra Teuffenbach published her research on the founder of the Schoenstatt movement, Father Josef Kentenich (1885–1968), who was accused of spiritual abuse and sexual assault (Teuffenbach 2020). Shortly thereafter, it turned out that the "Catholic Integrated Community"—in which Joseph Ratzinger was extremely involved for years up until his time as pope—, —was permeated by spiritual and human abuse; the community had to be dissolved by Cardinal Reinhard Marx on November 20, 2020 (Erzdiözese München-Freising 2020; Benz et al. 2020). In 2021, "Totus Tuus—Neuevangelisierung" in the diocese of Muenster was dissolved because of spiritual abuse, lack of insight into its mistakes and the unwillingness to change behavior (Bistum Münster 2021). Using her own life story, Johanna Beck demonstrated in 2022 the susceptibility to abuse present in the "Catholic Guides and Scouts of Europe (KPE)", a youth organization in Germany and Austria that sees itself as part of the charismatic

movement and also as a training organization for the "Opus Sanctorum Angelorum" (Beck 2022). Some bishops are specifically supportive of the KPE because of its strict anti-gender policy. Though no analysis has been carried out for Germany as a whole to date, spiritual communities function in similar ways, and it is to be feared that, as in other countries, this is just the tip of the iceberg. To prevent further victimizations, it is necessary to make this iceberg visible and to subject it to interdisciplinary research.

According to Hoyeau, a deceptive hope for a "church spring" arose that led to the abyss because it blinded the church to the dangers that are associated with such movements. The supposed signs of hope of the church that shone afar should not be allowed to fade. These projects, which fit so well into the traditional or even traditionalist forms of the Catholic faith, could not be allowed to fail. Pope John Paul II "knighted" them (Hoyeau 2021, pp. 92–96). The fixation on the numerous successes wrapped the founders of the communities in a protective cloak that gave them all possible and impossible freedoms. Therefore these founders, who made the eyes of so many people light up, could not, by definition, be vulnerant criminals. The communities themselves also showed them unconditional trust, gushing admiration, and limitless veneration, because the founders embodied the hope of salvation that was directed at the communities and were almost deified for this. "Ces fondateurs [. . .] vont incarner non seulement une autorité spirituelle rassurante, mais aussi une nouvelle manière de croire, qui donne place à l'èmotion, à l'àffectivité, à la tendresse, au corps, à l'accueil de sa vulnérabilité" (Hoyeau 2021, p. 87)—"These founders [. . .] will embody not only a reassuring spiritual authority, but also a new way of believing, which gives way to emotion, to affectivity, to tenderness, to the body, to welcoming its own vulnerability."

Hoyeau's analysis suggests that, in times of crisis or even of decline, church institutions become especially susceptible to the abuse of power, sexual violence, and their cover-up. Do times of crisis therefore promote a special interest in a *concealed* vulnerance that should be covered up and suppressed? This question brings my own research on the underestimated power of vulnerability into play. In my studies on the theme "Vulnerability, Vulnerance, and Self-expenditure", I researched three examples of volatile vulnerance. It turned out that they occurred in periods of decline (Keul 2021a, pp. 379–420). In addition to the case of the Catholic Church, there was also that of the serial child killer Gilles de Rais (1405–1440), and the case of sexual violence and its cover-up at the Odenwald school, a state boarding school in Hessen (Germany). Gilles de Rai was not only one of the cruelest criminals in European history, but he was at the same time an extremely pious soldier in the army of St. Joan of Arc (Bataille 1991). The Odenwald school, with Gerold Becker as a charismatic leader and the main perpetrator, was a "Lighthouse of Reform Pedagogy" (Keupp et al. 2019), even though the pedagogical concept had weakened considerably over the years. In all three cases, vulnerance exploded through abuse and cover-up when the institution was in decline. For Rais, it was feudalism; for the Oldenwald school, it was reform pedagogy; and for the Catholic Church of the present, it is the loss of power and authority in the second half of the twentieth century.

The phenomenon is striking in all three institutions. One can conclude from this that institutions in times of crises and decline are susceptible to abuse and cover-up, especially when a charismatic leader is involved. This also happens with non-church institutions and even political movements that have charismatic leaders and are susceptible (Bataille 2019). Hoyeau's analysis reinforces the thesis of my study with respect to the church, which is at issue here. This connection is telling with respect to the theory of vulnerability and vulnerance. The decline leaves the Catholic Church in Europe wounded. The loss of disciplinary power and actual authority in church and society, an exodus en masse from the Catholic Church, a chronic lack of people, dwindling financial resources, the faded and scratched sheen of earlier times—all this damages and at the same time exposes the institution in its vulnerability. Because the vulnerability of institutions becomes visible in this way, it places its hope on leaders who come with grand promises of salvation and seem to protect the institutions. The institution should no longer be critiqued because it

already feels damaged and wishes to prevent further injuries. Forbidding criticism and the ideology of closing ranks are part of the safeguards that they set in place by means of rigid exclusion mechanisms. These mechanisms testify to fear in the inner circle and make it submissive. If the victims of abuse begin to resist and to speak about the abuse, they become part of the condemned section of the movement and thereby lose their voice in the system. In this way, vulnerance, which grows out of abuse, increases even more through cover-up and "blaming the victim". The system, which does not wish to see the vulnerance of the perpetrators, thus becomes vulnerant in a double sense.

It is precisely these defensive mechanisms, however, that turn the church into a ruin. It becomes susceptible to abuse through the suppression of criticism and covering it up because these actions offer the perpetrators protection. The uncritical belief of the institution in utopian promises of salvation leads to the tragic opposite—in the first place, for the victims. As soon as the cover-up becomes public, it robs the church of its credibility and thus of what it needs to be able to convince people of its stated salvific significance. Thus, the damage that the vulnerability paradox describes occurs: the safeguards that should protect the institution and de facto the perpetrators turn against the church itself and reduce it to ruin.

3.2. The Dangerous Power of the Sacred: Human Sacrifice

In times of crisis and decline, accordingly, special care is needed with respect to promises of salvation that, in the end, serve to conceal the rampant vulnerance in the institution. Such promises of salvation are in turn intrinsically connected with the holy. In her study, Hoyeau argues that the sacred plays a special role in abuse in spiritual communities. Communities whose founders were abusers (Marie-Dominique and Thomas Philippe, André-Marie van der Borght, Ephraim, Thierry de Roucy and Jean Vanier) had made the "Retrouver le sens du ‚sacré'" (Hoyeau 2021, pp. 77–82)—the "Recovery of the sense of the sacred"—their main task. Hoyeau emphasizes those charismatic priests who were quite popular in their spiritual communities and enjoyed high prestige, but were later exposed as guilty of abuse.[4] They were to lead the believers to the sacred and allow them to experience it more intensively in the liturgy as well as in their own lives. Hoyeau's approach to the sacred is instructive. Because, from the perspective of the theory of religion, it can be stated on the one hand that their salvific promises stand at the center of the communities and thus what is sacred to them. On the other hand, it is especially relevant for abuse and its cover-up that there is a close connection between the promise of salvation, the sacred, and the victimizing sacrifice.

This thesis requires an explanation. Regarding the concept of the sacred, in my research I expand on two theories of religion that understand the sacred in a formal sense and not with respect to content. Thus, Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) determines three dimensions of the sacred, namely "tremendum, fascinosum, augustum". It is about the incipient experience of a mystery that transcends language but at the same time inscribes itself "als ein Wirkendes, Waltendes" (Otto 1917)—"as an active, ruling force"—in human life. There is something incomprehensible about it that astonishes, even causes people to tremble and deeply frightens them, so that on the one hand they want to avoid it or even flee from it: *tremendum*, "eine 'Furcht', die mehr als Furcht ist" (ibid., p. 15)—"a 'fear' that is more than fear". On the other hand, it is something one is fascinated by, it is irresistibly attractive: *fascinosum*, "das nun mit dem abdrängenden Momente des tremendum in eine seltsame Kontrastharmonie tritt" (ibid., p. 33)—"that now enters into a strange 'contrast-harmony' with the daunting moment of the tremendum". And the sacred is something that not only affects single actions, but "sein Dasein selber" (ibid., p. 53)—"one's existence itself": *augustum*, a value that must be recognized unconditionally and gives orientation to life, "zugleich sittliche Verpflichtung und Forderung" (ibid., p. 54)—"simultaneously a moral obligation and a requirement"; and something to which one may devote oneself fully or even submit (Christian: election, vocation) because it lets life shine and happiness in life depends on it.

In turn, Georges Bataille (1897–1962) defines religion as "the search for lost intimacy" (Bataille 1989, p. 57) and analyzes experiences of the sacred at that point where "l'effervescence"—a flaring up of life—happens. The advantage of these approaches to religion lies in the fact that they are equally applicable to both religious communities and secular institutions, such as the above-mentioned Odenwald school. Experiences of the ambivalent sacred are not limited only to people who belong to a religious community (Keul 2021a, pp. 195–253).

What is sacred for people and communities, what represents a larger value for them, and to whose higher service they dedicate themselves, is worthy of unconditional protection: it should not be harmed and must be protected against damage. The willingness to sacrifice is generated from this soil. Whoever dedicates themselves to the service of the sacred, as people in these spiritual communities do, is willing to make sacrifices for this sacred—time, money, personal commitment, rigid restrictions on sexuality, proven friendships, even one's own children under certain circumstances,[5] and much more. Such sacrifice entails a loss that, on the basis of participation in the sacred, focuses on gaining something greater. Loss contains a hurtful element of victimization, without which there is no sacrifice (Keul 2018, pp. 108–14). It is from this that the ambivalence of "fascinosum et tremendum" arises. There's a price to be paid for dedicating oneself to serving the sacred. People want to bring a sacrifice to the sacred. But the more sacrifices one makes, the more sacred that which is held dear becomes. "In the etymological sense of the word, sacrifice is nothing other than the production of *sacred* things. From the very first, it appears that sacred things are constituted by an operation of loss" (Bataille 2019, p. 119). The (victimizing) sacrifice and the sacred nourish each other. That is how highly destructive sacrificial spirals emerge that draw people and institutions into the abyss.

The fact that the victimization included in a sacrifice does not always involve one's own life resources aggravates the issue. It quite often harms other people when, for example, a founder sets restrictive rules for the members that he himself does not adhere to. The victim element of a sacrifice can be brought about voluntarily by others, but it can also be demanded or forced under great pressure. The argument of the sacred is suited for this par excellence. Whoever submits themselves to the service of the sacred is ready to make a victimizing sacrifice for this.

In abuse and its cover-up, this connection between the sacred and the victimizing sacrifice functions in multiple ways, even today.

(a) In connection with acts of abuse: Charismatic priests such as Marie-Dominique Philippe are the high priests of the sacred on which the church, following Pope John Paul II, places its hope. They come specifically with promises of salvation that correspond exactly to the hope of salvation which both the faithful and the church leaders have. Because they dominate the range of the sacred in masterful fashion, they embody this sacred and thus become sacrosanct. When the charismatic founder of Arche died in May 2019, Thomas Isler headlined an article in the "Neuen Züricher Zeitung NZZ": "Jean Vanier war ein Heiliger seiner Zeit" (Isler 2019)—"Jean Vanier was a Saint of his Time"; not much later, his spiritual abuse and sexual violence against women came to light. The perpetrators remain unchallenged, even in the event of budding rumors, and they can also rely on the protection of the system and seem invulnerable from the point of view of the victims. Their resilience is high as long as they manage to prevent the disclosure of their vulnerance through even more vulnerance. Their resilience thus arises from two sides: through the vulnerance they themselves exert and through the vulnerance of the system that protects them. With good reason, the resilience of the perpetrators in a system that protects them can therefore be called vulnerant. This works particularly easily in a community that gathers around the sacred. To attack the high priest is to attack the sacred. Finally, in this logic, the charismatic perpetrators obtain every right to demand (human) sacrifices. Here the reciprocity of the sacred and the sacrifice is at work. The fact that a spiritual community becomes a bubbling source of money in this way is less of a problem here, although it is important.

Even the abuse itself can be a victimization that occurs in the wake of a sacrifice (victimizing sacrifice). For the sake of the founder on whom all their hope rests, the malicious damage done to the victim appears negligible. In abuse, the sacred of the community mingles with the eroticism of the perpetrator and increases the damage. The possibility of inflicting violence on the members who live in openness and vulnerability, via their bodies and eroticism, is an experience of power and can become a special aphrodisiac for the perpetrator. Through the added violence, he acquires the "effervescence de la vie", which belongs to the realm of the sacred. In the sacred itself, eroticism and religion are combined in violent fashion.[6] The invulnerable high priest creates human victims when he shamelessly takes advantage of their increased vulnerability. His infectious power of persuasion, charm, and the vitality that he radiates are also nourished by the malicious side of the sacred.

(b) Among members who look away (guilty bystanders): The sheen of the sacred blinds the members who belong to the community, and because of that they do not want to and cannot see what is happening in their own ranks. Hoyeau calls them "l'entourage". Instead of the members sacrificing the sacred that enthralls them, they abandon the victims of the perpetrator's vulnerance. The *fascinosum* character of the sacred makes it difficult to withdraw from the spell and to view reality clearly. The members have dedicated themselves to the service of the spiritual community, bring sacrifices themselves, and thus belong to the chosen, who will allegedly save the church. They also experience the "effervescence de la vie" of the sacred that approaches them in the liturgy and makes them flourish, and they do not want to give that up. Being chosen is an experience of hidden power. Members who look away do not want to trade this for that experience of the vulnerability, lack of power, insecurity, and fear that accompanies the exposure of abuse.

(c) Among the victims of abuse themselves: Active members of a spiritual community have an increased vulnerability with respect to abuse, for the spiritual guidance requires that people open themselves up unreservedly. But that openness is also accompanied by an increase in vulnerability. If a perpetrator exploits this openness, he can thus all the more easily carry out a surprising attack. This is what makes abuse in spiritual communities so perfidious. The victims cannot protect themselves because they have opened themselves up completely and therefore have no protection. This connection between spiritual guidance, vulnerability, and openness allows us to understand why nuns in orders or women in spiritual communities cannot defend themselves in the beginning against assault or even rape. In all their openness, the victims themselves are caught in the spell of what appeared to them, until that point, to be sacred. They believe the promises of salvation made by the spiritual community. Because they consequently include themselves among the chosen and thus experience the power of the sacred at first in an invigorating way, they are caught in its spell. They experience it as a great enrichment of their lives when they belong to a strong community, experience recognition, enjoy prestige and allegedly come into direct contact with the Holy of Holies. A special connection to the high priest of a community reinforces the consciousness of being chosen. With this, however, the willingness to sacrifice also increases. That is extremely dangerous because the willingness to sacrifice hides the danger of victimization. The abuser can gradually exploit this willingness to sacrifice, which increases the vulnerability of the members again and again. He can always demand more. That leads to a tipping point of vulnerance, where what was initially a strength becomes a weakening of one's self-awareness, where, instead of flourishing, a life begins to be destroyed, and where an initial experience of power leads to powerlessness that constantly increases. Because one's own election involves something that is sacred to them themselves, it is only with difficulty that adults can extricate themselves from a vulnerant relation with a perpetrator.

(d) In the cover-up of abuse by church leaders: With their promises of salvation that they would save the "Holy Mother Church" in a situation of a threatening decline—and in many places they still are[7]—spiritual communities are institutionally untouchable. "Sauver L'Église"—"Saving the Church"—is the title of the second chapter of Hoyeau's

book (Hoyeau 2021, pp. 53–107). This describes both the self-awareness of the communities and the hope that many bishops place on them. To safeguard these desired signs of hope and not to permit any damage, the willingness of bishops and popes to cover up victimizations increases. They do not want to look too closely, do not carry out any inspections, and even permit fundamental rules for spiritual guidance to be suspended. The founders almost attained a position of omnipotence in which they could commit abuses with impunity, without meeting any resistance or actual church control. The vulnerability of the church that was increased by the crisis releases vulnerance into the system and increases it exponentially.

(e) In the systematic cover-up by the religious community: Furthermore, to be able to believe the promises of salvation made by the charismatic renewal, the terrible truth should be kept hidden. Even if the victimization is not targeted but *only* accepted, this victimization occurs actively through icy silence, a paternalistic laugh, an aggressive defense, arrogant ignorance. It is denied that there is vulnerance in the system, or it is trivialized or whitewashed because it concerns something sacred that is to be protected unconditionally. If victims make sexual and spiritual violence by a founder or a charismatic leader public—be this only internally in the community—they call into question the sacred that the high priest embodies. Thus, to protect the sacred at the center of the community, no (victimizing) sacrifice is too great. That is the heart of the gruesome truth: people become human sacrifices in the cover-up of sexual and spiritual violence; they are victimized to protect the sacred.

4. Vulnerability as Agency in the Resilience of Survivors: The Creative Power of the Sacred

What is sacred to people and their communities can produce destructive effects of power. Those who are victimized in spiritual communities suffer this destructive power. At first, they are enthralled by this sacred and cannot break free of its power that grips them in such a devastating way, even though they desperately want to escape. This is what women in particular keep saying: they could not actively defend themselves against the obvious vulnerance of the perpetrator when this perpetrator belonged to the realm of what they viewed as sacred. The book *Erzählen als Widerstand* (Haslbeck et al. 2020)—*Telling as Resistance*—provides numerous examples of this. The victims experience the "tremendum et fascinosum at the same time", and it is about the "augustum", about whether and how life can succeed in the midst of this suffering. The "fascinosum" in Rudolf Otto's definition of religion means to be spellbound, enthralled, or even bewitched by something. Yet, people do not have to succumb to this destructive, malevolent power. Is there perhaps any way at all to turn the destructive into the creative so that the power of the sacred becomes a power that leads to life? Can it help stop the violence and even strengthen the resilience of victims? As will be shown below, dealing with vulnerability is a decisive factor here.

4.1. Breaking the Silence—Reconstituting Faith—Overcoming Victimization

A key phrase in the resistance to violence one has suffered is "breaking the silence". Mary Hallay-Witte and Bettina Janssen coined the term "Schweigebruch" in German for this (Hallay-Witte and Janssen 2016). Hoyeau demonstrates that such a breaking of the silence is particularly difficult in spiritual communities if the perpetrators are "maîtres spirituels". The spiritual masters are also "maîtres de l'emprise"—"masters of domination"—masters of power, influence, and manipulation (Hoyeau 2021, pp. 109–61). For the victims as well, they are first of all the masters, vested with divine authority. Whoever attacks the founder attacks Christ because the founder allegedly makes the immediate access to God they hoped for possible. He is "'le visage concret' du Christ pour les membres de sa communauté" (ibid., p. 138)—"'the concrete face' of Christ for the members of his community". This places an unconditional silence about the abuse upon the victims in the space of the sacred that the community wishes to protect. Every child, woman, and man who breaks this

silence must face in a major effort the rejected part of her or his own life story, which is scarred by painful memories along with shame and feelings of guilt.

Whoever breaks the silence goes beyond the state of victimization. A person becomes a victim of violence and suffers a severe injury when something happens over which they have no control. During such an assault, people are passive, weak, without any power, humiliated, silenced—they are victimized. This is anything but easy. Not only for spiritual communities, but it is especially true of the latter that what is required is to push out of one's head those doctrines that the perpetrator had perhaps implanted over the course of years. To resist this is an extremely hard struggle. However, this struggle, this battle, can be won only if it is fought. The alleged authority of the perpetrator and the newly acquired authority of the victim cannot coexist peacefully. The one places the other in question.

A specific aspect of abuse in spiritual communities consists in the closed character of a perfidious belief system that leaves the victims no way out. This closed system knows of only one way to believe—all others are demonized. A bitter insight coming out of abuse and cover-ups is that such faith in spiritual communities has strengthened the resilience of the perpetrator but has weakened the resilience of the victim. As long as the cover-up system functions, the perpetrator is safe because the faith protects him. However, the faith of the victim is shaken, torn, wounded to the core.

Victims can, for good reason, thus turn their backs on the Christian faith. At the same time, many do not want to do that. Johanna Beck is an impressive example of this, precisely as well as the "Gottes-Suche" campaign.[8] After Beck at first sought distance from the Christian faith, she became interested again after a few years and tried to rediscover her faith. That there was hardly any support from the church for this until now is a serious gap in her processing. But that may be no coincidence. A church that could provide such support has to surrender to the broken faith that the system of abuse and cover-up imposes on the victims. The church would have to ask why certain forms of faith, practices, and, not least, beliefs protect the perpetrators and increase their vulnerant resilience on the one hand, and hurts the victims and weakens their resilience on the other. Processing in Europe is not at that point yet.

Regaining one's wounded, broken faith can be a way to move beyond the passivity of victimization and thus overcome one's role as victim, a role imposed by the perpetrator. One must not only allow one's faith to be destroyed; instead, one must actively practice destruction. The destructive beliefs have to be ejected from the mind, the heart, the body. Survivors thus serve a theological resistance that is of great value for the church as a whole. "Mach neu, was dich kaputt macht"—"Making new what destroys you"—that is what Beck chose to call her book (Beck 2022). A renewal of one's Christian faith is only possible for those who have traveled this road. Beliefs that break when faced with abuse and cover-up are broken and can no longer be put back together. There is no going back to a time before the survivors speak.

Incidentally, academic theology itself is not unaffected by vulnerance, which is widespread throughout the religious system. Theology had already experienced cracks and breaks before the reports of abuse, but now the creeping erosion is steadily transforming into a rockslide because of new discoveries time and again. Entire landscapes of theology, which were considered to be the pinnacles of humankind, tumbled into the abyss of spiritual, sexual, and inhumane violence. What does it mean if speaking of grace serves to conceal the lack of grace in the perpetrators? To what extent can the concept of election be used if it is a decisive factor in abuse in spiritual communities? How can we move beyond the utopian formatting of ecclesiology, which conceals the vulnerance in the system and thus contributes to the cover-up? One answer from theology is: Do not avoid it! (Reményi and Schärtl 2019). To engage it, however, needs the voices of those who have suffered abuse and cover-up. It needs what has, in the meantime, come to be called in Germany "das besondere Lehramt der Betroffenen "—"the special Magisterium of the abused" (Schüller 2021).

4.2. The Expenditure Paradox: As Survivors Use the Agency Potential of Vulnerability

When survivors begin to speak, they dare to do something extraordinary. Although they are already wounded, they voluntarily make themselves even more vulnerable. Breaking the silence is not only exhausting, it is also risky, because it can hurt again and increase traumatization. In spiritual communities, survivors take a particularly great risk. They not only have to fear exclusion religiously and socially, but also from family. Spiritual communities are often structured through families whose members are part of the community as a unit. In this precarious situation, survivors rightly attack what is sacred to the community, and this is where the increased risk in spiritual communities lies. Nuns and monks who suffer abuse sometimes have a family as a retreat where they can find strength; if the family is a member of the spiritual community, however, no retreat can be found there, only increased danger.

4.2.1. Resilience through Increasing Vulnerability: The Expenditure Paradox

A person who is wounded often responds with protective and defensive strategies. She isolates herself perhaps, distances herself, withdraws, and makes herself as invulnerable as possible. Defense mechanisms are essential for people who have been hurt. Survivors nevertheless break the silence—and thus something paradoxical occurs. They have already been wounded often. Despite that, they do not seek protection and safety but take the risk of being wounded again. The philosopher Michel Foucault calls such behavior, in another context, "contre-conduite"—"counter-conduct". Here, it concerns "the struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others" (Foucault 2007, p. 201; see Odysseos et al. 2016). In their disclosure of abuse and cover-ups, the survivors are responding to a power grab by the perpetrator or perpetrator organization with a surprising "counter-conduct". Taking this risk into account, a risk that is connected with a feared loss of life, the danger of retraumatization, they hope to get their lives back. Beck expresses it as follows: "Und ich stelle immer wieder fest, dass auf eine oder einen sprechende(n) Betroffenen in der Regel mindestens eine weitere sprechende Person kommt, dass Darüber-Sprechen ansteckend sein kann, dass auch hier das Schneeballprinzip greifen kann. Je mehr Betroffene den Mut finden, zu sprechen, desto mehr können wir gemeinsam erreichen" (Beck 2022, p. 87).[9] Resisting together connects and strengthens the survivors.

However, at the beginning, it is unclear whether comrades can be found to fight this battle. What is needed is a willingness on the part of survivors to take risks in breaking through the vulnerance of the perpetrators and to resist the command to silence that previously masked the acts of abuse. When one is caught in the closed space of abuse, resistance appears to be impossible. In spiritual communities, the whole community perhaps, together with a church that seems to need this community, are opposed to the disclosure. Whoever leaves the community is isolated at first because close ties to others are cut. For good reasons, many victims struggle for a long time with the question of whether they are able to take the risky step of disclosure. If the vulnerance in spiritual communities is not publicly discussed, it becomes all the more difficult. A good example of this is found in the disclosure of the vulnerance of the founder of the Schoenstatt Movement, Father Josef Kentenich (1885–1968), by the church historian Alexandra von Teuffenbach, who documented the testimonies of ten victims (Teuffenbach 2020). The accusations are as follows: a humiliating leadership style that demanded subordination; sexual assaults that led to distress; the abuse of spiritual power that disempowered people; a personality cult that, by claiming "Vater darf das"—"Father is permitted to do this"—allowed the outrageously impossible. After the first media reports in October 2020, the current General Superior of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary responded promptly by placing the victims themselves under suspicion: "Die Glaubhaftigkeit von Aussagen sowie eventuelle Motive, die zu einer Aussage führten, bedürfen einer umfassenden Untersuchung"—"the credibility of statements as well as possible motives that led to such a statement need a full investigation" (Neumann 2020). The secular institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary brought a suit against the publication of Teuffenbach's work, but the Berlin court rejected the application

for an injunction a year later (katholisch.de 2020). If the members of the Schoenstatt had the power, they would have pulled the publication from circulation. Instead of taking the documentation seriously, they accused the victims instead. Such victim blaming makes it difficult for people who are possibly experiencing violence today to speak up. As long as there are attempts of this kind at the highest level, it is quite possible that the largest part of the iceberg is still beneath the surface. Not only the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary but other spiritual communities as well still have a long way to go obviously.

Given the need for protection and safety, everything argues against disclosure. Survivors have to deal with slander, libel, stigmatization, the withdrawal of affection, breaks in relationships, exclusion from the (spiritual) community. Right-wing media pillory victims who are not prepared to be silent. Given this problem, it is thus all the more astonishing that, again and again, there are those who are damaged who nevertheless find courage and speak of sexual violence, spiritual injury, and abuse of power. Doris Wagner and Johanna Beck are particularly well known in German-speaking countries (Wagner 2014; Beck 2022). The effort required is enormous. Nevertheless, the necessary strength often appears suddenly, despite everything and after a long struggle. The philosopher Rita Bischof describes such a surprising moment with the following words: "der Augenblick, in dem das von Knechtschaft gezeichnete Leben seine Fesseln abschüttelt und in einen Bereich eintritt, der durch die Gegenwart des Göttlichen hinreichend bezeichnet wird. Es ist dies eine Sphäre, in der das Unmögliche plötzlich wirklich wird: *impossible et pourtant là*"—"the moment in which the life characterized by subjugation shakes off its chains and enters a space that is characterized adequately by the presence of the divine. This is a sphere in which the impossible suddenly becomes real: *impossible et pourtant là*" (Bischof 1984, p. 12). Impossible, but nevertheless suddenly present. The victim transcends the law of the perpetrator in a sovereign act of self-expenditure. She sacrifices what appears to be the most important: safety, self-protection, not being wounded. She grows beyond her own boundaries and defensive strategies, and finally even beyond herself.

I call this the "expenditure paradox" (Verschwendungsparadox; Keul 2021a, pp. 420–35); it is a counter-movement to the vulnerability paradox. Whereas in the vulnerability paradox the damage increases because of the defensive measures one takes, in the expenditure paradox people are placing their hope on the surrender of security that increases one's own vulnerability, provides an advantage, and opens up life.

Victims emerge from their silent isolation when they open themselves up, speak, communicate, engage, and divulge something of themselves. Daring vulnerability is not easy for those who have been wounded. They have to sacrifice those defensive strategies that prevent participation in life itself. These strategies were initially important and valuable: they had a purpose. But it is precisely this aspect that must be given up, be "sacrificed" in the truest sense of the word, so that these people can once again take up communicative living. Survivors would like to cling to their defensive strategies perhaps, but they need to let them go. To break free from the grasp of victimization requires a self-determined sacrifice. And like every sacrifice, this one demands an offering as well. The discussion that Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) initiated with his "Essai sur le don" (The Gift) 1923/24 (Mauss 2022) on the social role of giving shows that dedication can be an active form of sacrifice in which someone, of their own free will, makes personal resources available for a higher purpose and offers them freely. This is by no means a sign of subservience but one of power. The voluntary risking of one's own vulnerability can be a sacrifice that actually leads one out of victimization and even strengthens resilience.

Many survivors rightly say that they run this risk because they want to stop the violence and prevent other victimizations. This 'for others' motivates them, and the survivors profit from it at the same time. That is a stroke of luck in breaking the silence: it can make people who risk it strong and enhance their resilience. When the victims leave the closed space and are heard, are supported by others, connect with each other, plan and carry out campaigns, guide research, and promote processing, then they emerge from the passivity imposed on them by the perpetrator. The experience of self-effectiveness

makes increased resistance possible. And this resistance can in turn strengthen their own resilience. Here, the opposite of a spiral of violence occurs.

This point is interesting from the point of view of vulnerability theory. In vulnerability discourse, one often—especially in natural and life sciences—finds a contrariety between "vulnerable, unsure, imperiled, weak, attackable" and "resilient, sure, strong, durable, safe" (Keul 2021a, pp. 91–96). However, in the case of a successful "breaking of the silence", resilience can even grow out of increased vulnerability if it is risked voluntarily and with good reasons. Making themselves vulnerable can set people free and release resilience. Vulnerability is not just suffered here, and it does not automatically weaken the victim. On the contrary, it can be used actively and brought into play by conflicting forces. Vulnerability has agency potential (Keul 2021b, pp. 85–140).

Judith Butler and her colleagues come to a similar conclusion in the volume *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Butler et al. 2016), with research on political resistance movements such as "Occupy Gezi" (Istanbul, Turkey, 2013). They speak of vulnerability as "one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance" (ibid., p. 1). Butler formulates this actively in her contribution and calls such behavior "the deliberate exposure to harm" (Butler 2016, p. 20). From my perspective, there are also those who commit themselves collectively to the processing of abuse and the end of a vulnerant system, a resistant movement. *Erzählen als Widerstand* (*Telling as Resistance*) is the German title of a book that tells the stories of 23 women who suffered as adults from abuse and cover-ups (Haslbeck et al. 2020).

At bottom, resistance is bound up with voluntary vulnerability and is not even conceivable without it. If survivors break their silence, they utilize the agency potential of vulnerability. Resistance promotes openness, exchange, intensive communication, even if is a matter of finding support. At the same time, such openness is open to attack from many sides. Precisely spiritual communities that see themselves as the saviors of Catholicity and believe that the Holy of Holies is in their midst—the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary call their first chapel in Vallendar the "Urheiligtum" ("Original Shrine"), a name that documents their claim to spiritual power—run the risk of becoming particularly vulnerant. Whoever exposes themselves against such a community increases their own vulnerability and can expect new vulnerance. However, only such self-expenditure that dares much can serve the resistance that puts an end to vulnerance.

4.2.2. The Sacred as the Driving Force: The Precarious Triad of Vulnerability, Vulnerance, and Resilience

Wounded people do not usually take such risks, which increase one's own vulnerability, lightly. A good, even deeply convincing, reason is needed to travel this path that may entail new victimization. These reasons can be very different: because one wants to spare others this kind of suffering; because one wants revenge on a perpetrator; because one wants to save the foundational idea of the spiritual community; because one has fallen in love and this love requires opening; because one wants justice for oneself and others; and many other reasons. These very different reasons are interconnected, however, insofar as they refer to something that represents a higher value or embodies a larger cause that is worth the sacrifice.

People are prepared to increase their own vulnerability if it has to do with something that is sacred to them: this is the core of sacrifice (Keul 2021a, pp. 267–98). That also obtains for people who tell the truth about abuse and cover-ups. They place themselves and their life resources at the service of something higher, such as "Justice for the Victims". The power of the sacred that, until then, had a victimizing effect, can then be turned around and pointed in a completely other—namely life-opening—direction. In this case, taking the risk strengthens resilience, which is also decisive for survivors. Admittedly, this does not guarantee a way out. "Voluntarily making oneself vulnerable" involves sacrifice. Survivors must give up their own protection and defensive strategies that they have maintained perhaps for years. This is also part of the expenditure paradox: the way out of victimization is through sacrifice.

Sacrifice: one is willing to give some resources for a higher cause, thereby risking injury or the loss of something. Here one is active. But the gift can come from one's own resources or from those of others. In both cases, one displays strength, power, and is assertive: one is capable of sacrificing something or someone. So, sacrifice also includes a potential victim because one gives something away; one risks making oneself or someone else vulnerable.

From a Christian theological perspective, what is decisive here is whether one sacrifices one's *own* resources or demands sacrifice *from others*, solicits it or even forces it, like the abusers do. However, the vulnerance initiated by perpetrators can also reach, via the survivors, those close to the survivors and those who want to support them. The vulnerance implanted in the system spreads easily. Some victims attempt to escape from the loss of life they have undergone by sacrificing other people to the goal of their own quality of life. This can happen either intentionally or not. Others are sacrificed unintentionally: when possible supporters are pulled, for example, into the spiral of victimization—families, close relations, or spiritual communities. Resignation, desperation and anger are contagious; they have a destructive potential that also affects the lives of others. The victim hopes for a better life, but in the end the spiral is accelerated when others are also drawn into the vortex. The vulnerability paradox can also appear among victims if their increased need for security leads to boundaries and protective measures that hurt other people and come back on the primary victims like a boomerang. Another example is revenge—open revenge or perhaps even hidden from oneself. It increases violence. Deep wounds can potentiate vulnerance in a number of ways, eventually becoming explosive (Keul 2021a, pp. 344–420).

The MHG study, "Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen durch katholische Priester, Diakone und männliche Ordensangehörige im Bereich der Dt. Bischofskonferenz" ("Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests, Diacons, and Members of Male Orders in the Area of the German Bishops' Conference") proposes "understanding cases of abuse in the context of constellations of vulnerability and resilience" (Dreßing et al. 2018, p. 63). In my view, this does not go far enough. What is the point of establishing that someone has a high resilience if it is not clear whether this resilience is caused by vulnerance? Within a protective system, abusers have a high resilience that can be restored via a constantly increasing vulnerance against their victims. Researching the duality of "vulnerability and resilience" entails the danger that both terms will be constituted as counter terms. Vulnerability is thus something that must be reduced, and resilience is something that is to be increased. The result is a zero-sum game that nonetheless falls short and does not cover the complexity of vulnerability. On the one hand, what is lost from view is that vulnerability can be used in a way that promotes life; thus, in solidarity where people freely share their own resources, they increase their own vulnerability, and thereby open up life. On the other hand, it is lost from view that resilience can also be increased by vulnerance—and who wants to promote the resilience of abusers, murderous assassins, or warmongers?

To grasp the complexity of the powerful effects of abuse, cover-ups, and processing, I therefore propose that not only vulnerability and resilience be systematically included in the analysis but vulnerance as well.

There is an immense complexity in these three elements. First of all, the vulnerance of the perpetrators and the covering-up institution is also present in spiritual communities. The effects of vulnerance are enormous and, for the most part, are still unknown. How many victims are not survivors? Not all victims survive. We do not know how many of them have committed suicide (Dreßing et al. 2018, pp. 143, 229f, 291f). There are indications of a higher suicidality among the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary (Teuffenbach 2020, p. 232). But victims can also die from accidents as a result of carelessness. If someone is subjected to higher vulnerability and responds with internal doubt, a feeling of low self-worth, and constant resignation, her ability to protect herself often declines. The risk of an accident increases. Via her life story, Beck demonstrates convincingly how quickly it can come to death without any direct intention—she survived one such situation only by a hair. If she had ended up under the train, no one would have suspected that this death had to do with

vulnerance she had suffered earlier in a spiritual community (Beck 2022, pp. 57–59). With direct and indirect suicidality, one goes beyond the vulnerance of the perpetrators and the cover-up to a violent act that the victim commits against herself in a tragic way.

4.2.3. From a Christian Point of View: Where the Other-Power out of Vulnerability Becomes Effective

In the triad of vulnerability, vulnerance, and resilience, both the vulnerability paradox and the expenditure paradox play a crucial role. We focus on the latter in this final section and supplement it from a Christian perspective. How can the risk of vulnerability develop into strength and resilience? The apostle Paul already experienced this possibility. After his conversion, Paul ran the risk of vulnerability himself by renouncing his own vulnerance and thus discovered a special power. When he complained to God about a wound he had suffered, the famous "thorn in the flesh", God encouraged him with the answer: "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). This expresses the Christian belief that when you dare to be vulnerable, there is a completely different power at work than the power that comes with violence. This power cannot be produced but only received as a "mercy", a gift, in resisting vulnerance. It takes effect where people break spirals of violence by relying on openness and vulnerability instead of isolation and vulnerance. This "other-power out of vulnerability",[10] as I call it, has no weapons and needs no weapons because it does not rely on violence. It awakens life, uplifts, and inspires. It knows no church boundaries and does not adhere to hierarchies. Christian faith starts with this "other-power".[11] It is found in human vulnerability that leaves the unprecedented grip of vulnerance behind. Only those who, in the name of humanity, dare to be wounded can experience this totally different power.

The "other-power" that moved Paul long ago is being rediscovered today in the resistance movement against abuse and cover-ups. This is where people thrive by taking the risk of disclosure and thus bring their own vulnerability into the play of conflicting powers. They do this to put an end to vulnerance, to prevent further victimization, and to establish justice for themselves and others. Through their resistance, they erect a sign of humanity and thus open up space for the "other-power out of vulnerability". They join forces in order to be able to survive this risk together. People today do not necessarily have to believe in God to rely on Paul's power of life. The decisive factor is resistance to vulnerance that spreads through abuse and cover-ups and is slowed down by daring one's own vulnerability. When one commits oneself to resisting vulnerance, and this is done in a self-giving mode, with dedication, passion, and perhaps together with others, life-giving power begins to flow out of the vulnerability.

The significance of this new discovery goes beyond the resistance movement. It reminds the church of what it is supposed to stand for, even though it does the opposite when engaged in cover-ups. In addition, the new discovery also has far-reaching relevance for society: It makes a serious difference in the turbulence of the present time as to whether a society is convinced that its own strengths can only be secured by hurting others, or whether such a society knows that creativity, strength, and resilience can grow out of vulnerability. The resistance movement against abuse and cover-up represents the latter.

5. Conclusions

(1) In times of crisis and decline, spiritual communities (such as the church at large) are particularly vulnerable to abuse and cover-ups. For communities that promise to stop the decline become sacrosanct, and the church places its hope in them and constitutes them as something sacred that must be protected, even if this protection victimizes individuals. Taking advantage of the special, and also spiritual, vulnerability of members (children, young people, adults) who believe the sacred is in their midst, this vulnerance resides in the community and grows exponentially.

(2) The sacred plays a special role in abuse and cover-ups in religious communities because it creates a willingness to sacrifice. The sacrifice can come from one's own life

resources. However, it can also be demanded or even forced from the life resources of others (e.g., other members of the community). Sacrifice thus creates victimizations that are trivialized in the community—ignored, denied, covered up, and thus intensified.

(3) The bottomless victimization that the willingness to make sacrifices has led to in spiritual communities leads them and the church as a whole into the vulnerability paradox: the strategies that should serve to protect the church leave it in ruins instead. Instead of more security, the interaction between abuse and cover-up causes increased damage.

(4) A particular problem is the vulnerant resilience of the perpetrators. As long as people who, as founders of a community, embody the hope of the church are sacrosanct, the resilience of perpetrators increases through the violence they inflict on their victims. This vulnerant resilience is reinforced by the faith of the community, and at the same time this faith inflicts the most serious injuries on the faith of the victims. Once the system of abuse and cover-up is exposed, it will hasten the church's decline.

(5) Vulnerability research on abuse and cover-ups shows that operating within a binary code of "vulnerability and resilience" is not enough. Rather, it is necessary to analyze the dynamic tension between vulnerability, vulnerance, and resilience. Without a systemic approach to vulnerance, the fact that perpetrators can increase their resilience by using violence is overlooked.

(6) The disclosure of abuse and cover-ups by survivors highlights a counter-movement to the vulnerability paradox: the expenditure paradox. In the "shimmering moment of disclosure", survivors do something paradoxical. Deeply wounded, they leave safety behind and increase their vulnerability to put an end to vulnerance. They thus convert the destructive power of the sacred into a creative power. The act of expenditure releases that other-power that Paul already experienced in his wound, the famous "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7). The survivors counter the vulnerant resilience of the perpetrators with a resilience that grows out of the other-power of vulnerability.

Funding: This research was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)—Projektnummer 389249041.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Notes

1 The pastoral theologian Ute Leimgruber correctly states: "Das Institut der Beichte ist mit einer erhöhten Vulneranz behaftet" (Leimgruber 2022b, p. 194)—"The institution of confession is fraught with increased vulnerability".

2 This is also revealed by the titles of German-language publications that express the euphemism towards the "spiritual communities" (see, for example, Hegge 2005; Poblotzki 2019; Thull 2017). Abuse and cover-up are not an issue here.

3 This seems to be a global problem, as the the following statement of Braz de Aviz shows: "Sono circa 70 le nuove famiglie religiose sulle quali abbiamo messo la nostra attenzione. Abbiamo fatto delle visite e alcuni stanno rivelando dei casi davvero preoccupanti, con gravi problemi di personalità nei fondatori e fenomeni di plagio, di forte condizionamento dei membri psicologici. Ci sono fondatori che si sono rivelati dei veri padroni delle coscienze." (de Aviz 2017)

4 Marie-Dominique Philippe (1912–2006), a major figure in Hoyeau's study because of years of abuse of women, was a Professor of Philosophy and Dogmatics for almost twenty years at Le Saulchoir, a college of "Nouvelle Theology." This theology was considered the most innovative of its time in Europe. What this abuse means for this theology is not yet clear, but it is imperative that it be researched.

5 When child abuse occurs in spiritual communities, parents who believe in the sacredness of that community tend not to believe their own children but the perpetrators and the institution covering it up. Instead of questioning what was previously sacred to them, they abandon their own children to the vulnerance of the perpetrator and the community.

6 The July 2018 "Pennsylvania Report" provides numerous examples of this: "Another priest, grooming his middle school students for oral sex, taught them how Mary had to 'bite off the cord' and 'lick' Jesus clean after he was born. It took another 15 years, and numerous additional reports of abuse, before the diocese finally removed the priest from ministry" (Grand Jury 2018, p. 5).

[7] Despite the greatest concerns from many sides, also because of unresolved spiritual and sexual abuse, the German Bishops' Conference (DBK) recognized the KPE on December 9, 2021, as a private canonical association; this happened clandestinely without any press release by the DBK and first had to be made known by other media. The driving force was the bishop of the diocese of Augsburg, who believes in KPE's promise of salvation and, after its recognition, was able to firmly locate the movement in his diocese (Bistum Augsburg 2022).

[8] www.gottes-suche.de is a platform for women and (since 2019) men who have experienced sexual violence and use the resources of the Christian faith for living with continuing trauma.

[9] "And I have observed again and again that, in general, one victim who speaks is joined by at least one other victim speaking about the abuse, that speaking about it can be contagious, that the snowball principle applies here as well. The more victims find the courage to speak the more we can achieve together"

[10] Sarah Coakley speaks of "power in vulnerability" but does not use the term to refer to challenges such as abuse (cf. Coakley 2002, p. 5). She advocates making oneself vulnerable in spirituality before God. She does not see that it can also be liberating to make oneself vulnerable before other people, as happens when we act in solidarity.

[11] The reason for this is provided by the theology of the incarnation: God herself takes the risk of vulnerability when God becomes human. In Jesus, God comes into the world as a highly vulnerable child and thus exposes herself to physical, social, cultural, and religious vulnerability as well as human vulnerance (Keul 2017). The church ascribes salvific significance to this act of voluntary vulnerability.

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Article

Narrating and Remembrance in the Face of Abuse in the Church

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Abstract: Contrary to the priority of protecting the institutional Church and its clergy, prevailing for decades and centuries, today the testimonies of victims of sexual abuse are increasingly being heard. This article focuses on autobiographical accounts of women, published in recent years, who as adults suffered from sexual and spiritual violence within the Catholic Church. It analyses characteristics of spiritual and sexual abuse, identifies specific constellations and a misogynistic theology. Complementary to this, traumatic experiences of flight and expulsion, as described by the theologian Katharina Elliger, are examined. Thus, this article describes the meaning of narrating one's traumatic experiences for the authors themselves and suggests collective remembrance as an appropriate reaction of the Church and the society.

Keywords: sexual abuse; spiritual abuse; abuse of adult women within the Catholic Church; trauma; narrating; remembrance; communicative and collective memory; Silesia

Citation: Heyder, Regina. 2022. Narrating and Remembrance in the Face of Abuse in the Church. *Religions* 13: 348. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040348

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 2 March 2022
Accepted: 9 April 2022
Published: 12 April 2022

1. Introduction

"Stories that count" is the leitmotif and creed of the Independent Commission for the Examination of Child Sexual Abuse in Germany, founded in 2016. The stories told by victims are the primary source for understanding the "extent, nature, causes and consequences" of sexual abuse of children and young persons (Unabhängige Kommission 2019a, p. 21; see Gemeinsame Erklärung 2020). Every publication of the Independent Commission appears under this title, and the first report on its work during the years 2016–2019 was supplemented by a second volume with testimonies by victims from various contexts (Unabhängige Kommission 2019b; see Unabhängige Kommission et al. 2022).

In January 2022, the Commission launched an online portal with stories of people who have experienced sexual violence in families and institutions. The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has also published around 4000 short stories about the fates of victims: "The purpose of the narratives is to give a voice to survivors, inform the community and ultimately help make institutions safer for children." In Europe, for example, the French CIASE places the testimonies of victims at the centre of its own work: "Libérer la parole, entendre les victimes, recueillir les témoignages est au cœur des missions de la commission" ("Liberating speech, listening to victims, and collecting testimonies is at the heart of the commission's work"). CIASE also publishes some narratives of victims. Internationally and interdenominationally, such narratives are booming today—after all, they are the only way to know what happened and its consequences, to uncover structural dangers and to acknowledge the injustice empathetically and in solidarity. Those affected give their testimonies in order to clarify and prevent abuse.[1]

In the Roman Catholic Church, the testimonies of victims of sexual abuse are increasingly being heard. This is nothing less than the beginning of a cultural change, because for centuries and decades, until the recent past, the protection of the institution and its clerical personnel was consistently placed before the interests of victims (see Elliott 2020; Langlois 2020). Moreover, hermeneutical and testimonial injustices (Fricker 2007) make it difficult to speak; the well-educated perpetrators who belong to the inner circle were and are more likely to be believed in the same inner circle than those affected.

The accounts of victims thus represent an epistemological necessity for analysing any form of abuse, since predators are careful not to leave any traces and force their victims to remain silent about the deeds rather effectively. Among those in charge within the Catholic Church, there often has been or still exists complicity with the perpetrators: files were destroyed in accordance with canon law (cf. can. 489 § 2 CIC) or protocols were not even drawn up, in violation of canon law, or were not passed on to the competent higher authorities.

Abuse leaves profound and lifelong scars on the victim, whose mental and sexual integrity has been infamously violated. The fact that abuse is fraught with shame and guilt makes it even more difficult to talk about what had happened; victims telling their stories often struggle for every single word. Yet every single survivor's story broadens the understanding of the traumatising experience of abuse and prepares the ground for further stories. From a scientific perspective, it makes sense to consider various reports and narratives on abuse and to put them in context with those files that are now being evaluated and at least partially published in the course of the expert reports on abuse in individual countries or dioceses. Even if the aspect of a teleological self-construction within autobiographical accounts must always be taken into account, the results are very clear: abuse is frighteningly stereotypical.

This paper stresses the significance of narrating, both for the victims themselves as well as for the Church as a community of memory and narration. On the one hand, the analysis is based on narratives by women who experienced spiritual and sexual abuse as adults—published in the volume "Erzählen als Widerstand" (Haslbeck et al. 2020). On the other hand, the article refers to publications by the Catholic theologian Katharina Elliger (1929–2019), who reflected on her memories of flight and expulsion from Silesia and their contemporary impact in two books (Elliger 2004, 2015). Elliger's account is chosen from many reports on flight and expulsion from Eastern Europe because she tells of various episodes that have a clear connection to a Catholic community of memory. The common thread of these texts is the narration of traumatic experiences and the ethical appeal to the reception within a specific community.

2. Rendering the Unbelievable Believable

> "I noticed that all those who had stayed here told their stories, but there was silence about 'the horrific'. Perhaps, like me, they were still afraid of a dam bursting that could tear away the survival constructions. I always had to be careful that my memories did not resurface too intensely, so that I could keep control over them. I still felt I had to justify myself for what I had experienced. How could I make the unbelievable believable? Wouldn't my experiences be immediately put into perspective? I still felt as if my fate was worth nothing. In any case, the fear of hurting reactions and the incomprehension of others was still so great that I too preferred to say nothing. For if the injustice suffered was not seen and acknowledged, it often hit me even harder than the injustice itself." (Elliger 2004, p. 212)

The theologian Katharina Elliger, born in 1929 in Bauerwitz in Upper Silesia, describes how she reflected on the occasion of a trip to her homeland Upper Silesia in 1999 on her own remembrance (and its repression) of flight, deportation and expulsion, which she had experienced as a young woman from 1944 onwards. In 2004 she published the impressive autobiographical volume "Und tief in der Seele das Ferne. Die Geschichte einer Vertreibung aus Schlesien" ("And Deep in the Soul the Faraway. The Story of an Expulsion from Silesia"). The first, event-historical narrative strand spans from "everyday life as a child" during the war to the "time afterwards." A second narrative sequence is devoted to "two journeys to Silesia," which she undertook in 1987—abandoned after a few days—and in 1999. For a long time, Elliger had "blocked out Silesia out from her memory" (Elliger 2004, p. 201) and avoided contact with expelled persons, had disposed of material objects of remembrance and concealed her past because she had already experienced immediately after the war that

her speaking provoked incomprehension, misunderstanding or accusations of lying. It was only some 40 years after the traumatic events, at the age of almost 60, that she consciously reintegrated Silesia into her identity: "In 1986 [. . .] I broke the spell and for the first time declared without necessity on the cover of a book that I came from Silesia. This meant a lot of courage, but now I was free enough to stand by my origins" (Elliger 2004, p. 201).

The passage cited above belongs to the narration of the 1999 trip and Elliger's associated reflection on individual and collective memory. On this occasion, Elliger stayed several nights with sisters from Silesian-Polish congregations who had been subjected to inconceivable suffering at the end of the war. Her hosts recounted these events meticulously, sometimes with precise dates, but they could not talk about "the horrific:" the abuses, rapes resulting in death, and murders, mostly committed by Russian soldiers. The fear of intrusion and loss of control was too great. "All the women and girls around her had been raped," Sister Josefa told her (Elliger 2004, p. 210s). Yet Sister Josefa's personal fate remains hidden in the general narrative. Rape is the shame-ridden taboo within trauma.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the basic data on forced migration from the East were well known. Nevertheless, the individual fates of expelled refugees, just as those of Holocaust survivors, had no place in the communicative and collective memory of the German society until the 1980s (see Kuropka 2017). According to Kien Nghi Ha, this "consensual silence" of society is a "dominant articulation of power" and prevents individual fate from being given meaning (Ha 2006). The "unbelievable" remains misunderstood and unbelievable because a social and intellectual resonance space is missing.

Those who tell their story, construct an identity and claim meaning for their own experiences. Telling one's traumatic story is a way of regaining agency, and at the same time of making oneself vulnerable once more: the narrators depend on being believed; they hope for resonance and for belonging to a community with their respective concrete stories. Those who remain silent, as Elliger did for a long time, also construct an identity—dominated by the fear of hurtful reactions that reinforce the injustice suffered a long time ago.

Katharina Elliger's reflections coincide, often even down to the choice of words, with those found in the volume "Erzählen als Widerstand" ("Narrating as Resistance. Reports on spiritual and sexual abuse of adult women in the Catholic Church," Haslbeck et al. 2020). A total of 23 women write about spiritual abuse, sexual abuse and abuse of power that they themselves suffered as students, as parish members or pastoral workers, as family women or as members of a religious order. After years and more often after decades, they break the spell and report what happened to them, some for the first time.

Several authors share with the readers their reflections on why they are now speaking about the long-hidden. By narrating the hurtful events, they integrate this part of their personal story—in the double sense of integrating a traumatic experience into their own biography and interpreting their own biography: "To tell what I have experienced helps me to solve my confusion [. . .]. I begin to trust my own feelings again instead of believing the interpretations by the men of the Church. By telling my story, my experiences become a real and living part of my life" (Althaus, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 40). The authors break away from the manipulative interpretation of their lives by the perpetrators, which are to be found in every single contribution within this book; there is not a single text in which sexual abuse is not linked to spiritual abuse. Additionally, the authors work out a new freedom. Katharina Hoff, for example, writes about her motivation to narrate that for her this creates the possibility "to accept these terrible experiences [. . .] as part of my life and to identify with the young woman I was at that time. [. . .] It seems equally important to me to distance myself all the more clearly from what happened to me and to no longer allow it to have power over me. [. . .] I am accompanied by the words of Jesus: 'The truth will set you free.' (Jn 8:32)" (Hoff, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 107). As for Elliger, so for the authors of "Erzählen als Widerstand," freedom is at the same time the precondition and the result of telling one's story, and being "free" is often an integral part of the authors' self-image.

3. Realms of Memory and the Hope for Resonance

> "I went back to our cemetery [. . .] To the left of the entrance, the Russians shot by the German escort soldiers on the Death March from Auschwitz had been buried in a mass grave. Nothing, no trace of them anymore. [. . .] Back in Bauerwitz I finally wanted to see the church, but it was locked. The priest still lives in the house of the choir rector. He finally let himself be persuaded to unlock the church for us. [. . .] When I asked the priest—I tried in Latin because of the language difficulties—if I could see the church book with my baptismal register, he replied that church books have only existed since 1946. His clear lack of interest annoyed me. What I did find, however, to my delight, was a memorial plaque in honour of our prelate who had baptised me." (Elliger 2004, pp. 220, 228s)

Unsurprisingly, the cemetery and church in Bauerwitz are significant and overlapping "sites of memory" (lieux de mémoires, see Nora 1984) for Katharina Elliger. Elliger's commemoration in the cemetery is solidary and concrete; she remembers the Russian prisoners murdered on the Death March from Auschwitz. This is compassion according to the understanding of Johann Baptist Metz, the recognition of the concrete other and the injustice he has suffered—an injustice that continues when the traces of his suffering are destroyed (Metz 2006; Haker 2017). Just like the mass grave from the last year of the war, the old church books are missing. The parish priest's terse statement that they were only available from 1946 reminds Elliger, without her having to say it at this point, of the reorganisation of the Catholic Church in the Oder-Neisse areas, which the Polish Cardinal Hlond had ruthlessly enforced from 1945 onwards by unlawfully forcing German officials out of their functions and replacing them with Polish administrators. With his information and demonstrative lack of interest, the priest not only denies Silesian Catholicism as such a significance worth remembering, but also Elliger's traumatic loss of her homeland. Elliger, on the other hand, had hoped for a response to her history in this place: a recognition of the injustice that had happened to her and a recognition of her ideational right to a homeland and roots. Neither the pastor nor Elliger herself would have denied that the church in Bauerwitz is a site of memory for expulsion and the loss of homeland in multiple and transnational respects—for the Silesian expellees; for the Silesian Catholics who remained in Poland and who had to accept the ban on their mother tongue in 1945, including the practice of religion; for the new inhabitants of Bauerwitz who had resettled from eastern Poland and for whom the church perhaps became the most important place of refuge. Conflicting communities of memory refer to this place, the ambiguity of which can only be adequately responded to through remembrance and compassion for the concrete suffering and injustice.

The victims of sexual abuse still have to reckon with the fact that there are no "church records" for the deeds, but all the more strategies to ward off the stories of survivors. The strategies of the perpetrators and the defence mechanisms of the environment correspond to a large extent: denial ("it never happened"), minimisation, doubts about the credibility of the victim, victim-blaming, solidarity with the perpetrator ("such a good father," "such a good sister"), denial of responsibility ("the hand of evil") or denial of relevance (see Kühner 2007). When the victims tell their stories, they make themselves vulnerable anew. The female abuse commissioner of a male religious order, e.g., told Ellen Adler "that abuse of adult women could not exist." She "must also understand the religious order; they are like a family and protect each other" (Adler, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 31s). She is indifferent to Ellen Adler's individual fate, while implicitly demanding understanding for the cover-up by the community. The victims remain "the others" and are often implicitly thought of as not belonging to the Church. Frequently the victims are met with disinterest, which hurts them anew, silences them and isolates them: "I simply could not believe that a member of an order could so shamefully abuse the enormous trust I had placed in him and be so cruel to me. So I fell silent again. This also applied later to the behaviour of his confreres. I could not believe that one could lie so flatly and that they did not care at all that a fellow brother had destroyed a human life. [. . .] Through all this,

I lost my faith in God. [. . .] For me, that also means no longer having a foundation for my life" (Eiche, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 63).

Like many victims, the two women quoted have sought a response where they have been harmed, but the behaviour of the religious communities is defensive. Ellen Adler's accusation is a priori dismissed because the abuse commissioner has no categories for dealing with the abuse against adult women. Adler's allegation is seen as implausible, reinforced by the piquant reasoning that the accused "is not attracted to women" (Adler, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 31). Her narrative is not meant to gain any meaning for the community; resonance and compassion are excluded from the outset. In dealing with the abuse suffered, the women are thus just as isolated as in the original abuse situation itself; they once more experience an asymmetry of power as well as depending on the community's reaction. The former nun Momo Eiche describes how the abuse shattered her basic convictions ("shattered assumptions" are a well-known consequence of trauma).[2] In religious contexts, these acts not only—following a classic definition of psychotraumatology—permanently shake "self-understanding and understanding of the world," but also fatally affect faith and trust in God. If spiritual abuse is a strategy for initiating sexual abuse, then the traumatic event is not only a "man-made disaster," but also, as I would like to call it, a "God-made disaster." Thus, the perpetrator also assured Momo Eiche: "This is quite pure, quite clean. God wants to help you with it, but no one can know. This remains our secret" (Eiche, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 59).

Trauma is always a loss of belonging. Elliger and the authors of "Erzählen als Widerstand" show how this belonging is at risk when they tell their stories. This belonging could at least partially be regained by a compassionate surrounding, willing to listen to the stories of survivors and to make their suffering part of the communicative and collective memory.

4. Acknowledging the Injustice Done

> "According to Hans the Poles had the right to bring their culture with them and live according to their ideas, because they now owned the country. Somehow Hans was right, and yet I suddenly had the impression that he understood the Poles better than me. [. . .] I don't have Hans' neutral perspective. [. . .] Sometimes I wished for someone to confirm that everything has really taken place and to acknowledge how bad it has been. Instead, these endless attempts to make myself understood to other people and yet ultimately being alone with it." (Elliger 2004, p. 231)

Past injustice cannot be undone and it is difficult to properly communicate it. Katharina Elliger naturally recognises the right of the Poles to the territories east of the Oder-Neisse line, which had been confirmed as the state border by West Germany and Poland in 1970 and finally by the Two Plus Four treaties in 1990. What she hopes for is not a neutral perspective but one of solidarity—an acknowledgement of the terrible events. Instead, she repeatedly experiences that the burden of making herself understood is placed on her and that these attempts at communication continue to isolate her.

In "Erzählen als Widerstand," Susanne Gerlass describes similar oppressive situations when she tries to have her experience of sexual abuse examined. She sees herself confronted with a Church that she compares to a "doorless and windowless fortress" (Gerlass, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 87s). In the unequal struggle between institution and victim, her perspective cannot penetrate the walls of this fortress. The representatives of the institution entrench themselves behind church walls and use eloquent images for this: "waves of news about abuse" or "waves of indignation, anger and bitterness" crash against the thick walls of the "church fortress" (Zollner 2022, p. 43s). The victims, such as Susanne Gerlass, do not find the hoped-for "fair and sensitive treatment," or "good and empathetic treatment" (Gerlass, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 88).

All research agrees that the recognition of the injustice as injustice, both by one's close environment and by society (see Stahl 2019), is constitutive for overcoming trauma. Judith Herman is convinced that victims of sexual violence need to share their traumatic

experience with others in order to regain trust in the world—and thus their belonging to a community. This can only be achieved if communities and society acknowledge the traumatic event and take action—an action that also includes the integration of the repelled trauma into the community's history (Herman 1992, pp. 51–73).

Maybe the most comprehensive way of action and social recognition in the face of trauma is remembering the injustice done, that is, integrating the repelled trauma into the community's history and thus mirroring at a societal level what individuals do when coming to terms with their trauma. This will go beyond the trauma work of professional therapists. Since memory is always transmitted within a community and formed by consensus, it establishes social belonging. Uncovering and coming to terms with abuse necessarily leads to the question of what role individuals played in the events: Were they perpetrators, victims, bystanders? Victims who break the silence always shake the self-perception of a group and disturb existing social connections, because the identity is also formed in listening or not to such stories. Narratives produce competing communities of memory—in families and organisations, in congregations and in communities, in the Catholic Church as a whole. Many faithful may remember, e.g., positive experiences with a priest who was exceptionally committed to youth work or with a charismatic religious sister. The new, dark narratives do not fit into these memories. For Christian communities or the Church, it cannot be a solution to give in to the temptation of collective amnesia. Not only would it blind them to future abuse, but the price would be paid by the once more isolated victims. Part of the credibility of the Church is to publicly acknowledge the injustice done and the credibility of those who have been wronged. As with the case of Katharina Elliger, this will not undo the injustice done, but it will enable the victims to find a different place within the community.

5. "Hermeneutical Injustice" to Adult Victims of Sexual and Spiritual Abuse

In one respect, narratives of traumatic events in the context of forced migration differ significantly from reports of sexual abuse; even if the individual tragedies were faded out, the forced migration of millions of Germans from the East took place under the eyes of the world public and was part of the collective knowledge in the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR. This is not the case with sexual abuse, which occurs in secrecy and is tabooed both by the perpetrators and society or Church. "Who would have believed me?" is a question that victims ask in unison. If the victims are adult women, this question is even more pressing. Some doubt that sexual abuse of adults can exist at all, others insinuate that the women concerned could have said no. Too often, the environment or those responsible have no understanding of the psychodynamics, constellations and characteristics of the abuse of adult persons. In the following, a definition will therefore be proposed in order to prevent hermeneutical injustice. According to Miranda Fricker, this injustice, like testimonial injustice, is not intentional but structural: individuals have less chance of adequately expressing their own experiences and consequently of being believed if there is a hermeneutical lacuna with regard to their experiences (see Fricker 2007, pp. 147–52). Fricker illustrates this with the concept of sexual harassment, which was formed in the 1970s and enabled women to make their experiences intelligible. Hermeneutical injustice reproduces on the linguistic level the discrimination experienced.

To apply this concept of hermeneutical injustice to the topic of spiritual and sexual abuse, the term "spiritual abuse," which has been used in the Anglo-Saxon world since the 1990s (see Oakley and Humphreys 2019), was not widely received in the German-speaking world until much later. In Germany, with its still-denominational publishing landscape, it was initially in evangelical and Protestant-oriented publishing houses where corresponding publications appeared (see Wilbertz 2006; Tempelmann 2007). In the Roman Catholic Church, it is thanks to Doris Wagner's publication of 2019 that the term "spiritual abuse" is present and has become an interpretative resource for the victims—due to the heuristic quality of the term (Wagner 2019; see Kerstner et al. 2016; Timmerevers and Arnold 2020). Essentially all publications on spiritual abuse work with narrative examples, because the

conceptualisation is based on experience. Already here, an essential difference between narratives from the Protestant churches and those from a Catholic context should be hinted at: Catholic examples are often more concrete because the Roman Catholic Church is larger and thus actors are less easy to identify (or, if the perpetrators have already been sentenced, may be identified).

"Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church" has so far been a powerful frame, which makes one think primarily of boys and male adolescents as victims and at the same time of male perpetrators. In fact, unlike in all other contexts, around two-thirds of the victims within the Catholic Church worldwide are male. Girls and, even more so, adult women, on the other hand, have long been considered neither as victims nor as perpetrators. In addition, while with children and adolescents the criterion of age is sufficient to clearly define sexual acts as abuse, with adult victims a qualification of the acts, constellations and contexts is necessary to distinguish consensual from abusive interactions. Victims will only be believed if there is at least a basic understanding that spiritual and sexual abuse of adults does exist and which characteristics of the offence are to be assumed. A new conceptualisation and definition are therefore a matter of "hermeneutical justice" for adult victims. Two considerations will be outlined in the following—a description of criteria for when to speak of sexual and spiritual abuse of adults, and the constellations in which this abuse takes place.

5.1. Sexual and Spiritual Abuse of Adults—Terminology

The 23 reports in "Erzählen als Widerstand" can serve as a basis for a grounded theory of the phenomena of spiritual and sexual abuse. Sexual abuse occurs when perpetrators act against the sexual self-determination or integrity and against the will of the person concerned (non-consensual)—when they use physical, psychological or emotional violence and exploit their position of power and authority. Analogously, spiritual abuse is acting against the spiritual self-determination and the will of the persons concerned, involving violence and coercion and taking advantage of positions of power and authority. In "Erzählen als Widerstand," perpetrators have, for example, forbidden specific devotional practices (against spiritual self-determination), encouraged the accompanied female to make life decisions such as ending an engagement and joining a community (against their actual will), forbidden the free choice of confessor or forced them to celebrate the Eucharist in a confined space on the morning after the rape (violence and coercion) and, as superiors, undermined the separation of forum internum and forum externum (a position of power and authority).

5.2. Constellations

A common thread running through the accounts in "Erzählen als Widerstand" is that abuse happens where needs and distress or longing are greatest. The mourning for a loved one, the exhaustion of a doctor after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic or an unhappy marriage make one just as vulnerable as the longing to realise one's life's dream, for example, by applying for a professorship, the longing for spiritual experience or a life in a religious community. Religious contexts differ from other contexts only insofar as specific "promises of healing" are effective in each case. This reflection represents a paradigm shift from many legal texts and ecclesiastical norms that take an essentialist approach, trying to identify vulnerable persons. My argument is that in specific biographical constellations, each persona can be vulnerable. Vulnerability thus is considered not as a deficit, but as a form of affectability, which may be perceived as threatening (e.g., hunger or illness) or as a resource (e.g., love, the experience of resonance) (see Bieler 2017; Rosa 2016). For the identification of sexual abuse in particular, it can therefore be decisive to look not only at the above-mentioned definitions but also at specific constellations of offences.

Initial constellations in cases of continued abuse: Sexual abuse is present when the beginnings of a sexual "relationship" are characterised by asymmetries in power, e.g., in professional contexts, but also in spiritual guidance. A previously good cooperation or relationship of trust between spiritual companion and accompanied person always becomes

abusive through sexual interaction. Initial constellations can also be characterised by a particular biographical vulnerability of the person concerned, as is the case, for example, with grief, loneliness, exhaustion or in the phase of entering a religious order or seminary. In these constellations, as in psychotherapy, the responsibility for sexual abstinence lies always with superiors, supervisors or accompanying persons.

One-time abuse: When women were violated once, this usually occurred in specific pastoral situations such as confession, bridal exams or retreats. It may be assumed that the acts were carried out by multiple-perpetrators.

Spiritual abuse in connection with sexual abuse: It is a specific characteristic of sexual abuse in the Church that spiritual abuse serves as a grooming strategy and reinforces the asymmetries between perpetrator and victim. Whenever spiritual justifications are supposed to legitimise sexual interactions, sexual abuse is to be assumed in principle—the spiritual manipulation is only expedient because the acts are directed against the sexual self-determination and the will of the persons concerned. While it has become self-evident today to speak of spiritual abuse as a grooming strategy in religious contexts, the reports of adult victims show a further point: spiritual abuse is furthermore on the one hand a performative strategy, for example when a perpetrator codes the sexual interaction as "praying together," and on the other hand a coping strategy, when the victim later receives absolution in confession or is asked to pray (see Pesneau 2020).

5.3. The Theology of Abuse

The reports in "Erzählen als Widerstand" show a further point: the spiritual or theological justifications differ depending on the constellations. In the case of vocational abuse or guidance abuse, to put it mildly, it is especially the love of God or Jesus Christ, the will of God and the obedience owed to God to which perpetrators manipulatively refer and which naturally create a resonance in the victims who are longing for a deeper relationship with God. Often enough, the perpetrators first diagnose a deficit in order to then declare the abuse as a therapeutic, healing or liberating means. "The novice master said that [. . .] I could not yet really recognise what gift God gives us with human closeness. [. . .] I learned a lot about obedience and the will of God, which had to be done instead of my will" (Ellen Adler, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 30). One person concerned is deluding herself about the "game of sexualised closeness in the context of spiritual guidance:" "God delights in people who risk love. [. . .] I tell myself that the physical closeness of this man has to do with the healing and liberating love of Jesus Christ for me. I create a spiritual superstructure to explain it all; and he allows this explanation, never contradicts it" (Edith Schwarzländer, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 169).

Where women, on the other hand, are the one-time victims of verbal or physical sexual violence, the perpetrators always refer to a misogynistic theological gender anthropology that devalues female sexuality or limits it to its reproductive function. The fact that these views were also partly culturally sanctioned does not make anything better. Characteristic places of offences are bridal examinations or marriage preparation, sermons for married women, confessions and retreats: The wife must "be obedient to her husband [. . .] if he wants something from his wife," Barbara Müller learnt at her bridal examination in 1910. She gave birth to 16 children, whereby the midwife decided three times during the birth for the life of the mother and against that of the child. After the Second World War, a missionary's sermon (re-)traumatises the over-60-year-old Barbara Müller. He takes advantage of the spatial staging and thunders from the pulpit over the heads of his female listeners, all married and mothers: "Please, what would it have been if the mother had died in childbirth? (. . .) That wouldn't have ruined the world either!" (Katharina Aufroth, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 45).

Assaultive confessional dialogues are a further occasion when women are marginalized and reduced to the duty to (frequently) give birth. Priests acted without any knowledge of the personal circumstances of the women's lives. Lisa Schäfer recounts an episode from the communicative memory of her family: when asked in confession, her mother

answered that she had one child. The Father reacted "excitedly:" "You must have more children! There should at least be another one on the way!" (Lisa Schäfer, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 161). Similar confessional dialogues, oscillating between pastoral power and voyeurism, took place countless times up to the 1960s and even afterwards; the confessors as potential victims of encroaching enquiries were, as it were, "interchangeable." Pope Francis has rightly denounced the exclusive moral fixation on the sixth commandment in confession as a dimension of clericalism (see Pope Francis 2019).

The authors of "Erzählen als Widerstand" not only report verbal sexual assaults, but also several brutal rapes—perpetrated during retreats or marriage preparation. With each account, the reader is haunted by the depressing suspicion that there could be other victims of the same perpetrator. Theresia Kiebler was on a retreat "when the priest and his sister came into the room. I had to lie down on the bed because they wanted to cast out this devil in me." The sister cheered the priest on as he perpetrated the rape—"Each time he kept going. Then they said a prayer, gave me a penance and disappeared in a flash" (Elisabeth Hägele, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 99). Saskia Lang is raped after her confession during marriage preparation. She had already been abused by a priest as a young woman and had come into contact with "patriarchal patterns of interpretation" of female sexuality: "Very early on in my life I have learned that the Church sees women as the source of sin. Again and again I was examined by a priest to find out where exactly this source was located. The priest used his penis as an object of examination and for my purification, because as a woman 'I needed that'" (Saskia Lang, pseudonym, in: Haslbeck et al. 2020, p. 116s). These internalised patriarchal patterns of interpretation weaken Saskia Lang's defence in the context of her marriage preparation, and it is fatal that perpetrators can rely precisely on the effectiveness of these misogynistic patterns. Apart from the last-mentioned argument, the woman as the source of sin (see Sirach 25:24; 1 Timothy 2:14), perpetrators usually find their justifications and practices beyond doctrinal or university theology as well as beyond canonical, moral and pastoral norms. They can nevertheless frighteningly easily perpetuate and instrumentalise a fundamentally misogynist theological tradition for the manifestation of power, the sexual exploitation of women and the cover up. An "unholy theology" or "dangerous theologies" legitimise the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience, often by recourse to biblical texts; they create an asymmetry of authority between clergy and laity, and between men and women; they disguise power and call it service (see Reisinger 2021; Striet and Werden 2019).

As a misogynistic theology, the tabooing of sexuality favours abuse as well. The authors in "Erzählen als Widerstand" write and speak—not unlike the women who experienced sexualised violence in the context of flight and expulsion—only in allusions or in a distant, matter-of-fact manner about "the horrific." In conversations, however, individual authors mentioned humiliating details of the sexual abuse that go far beyond the ideas evoked by the written contributions. The victims themselves suspect that their own inability to speak about sexuality first prevented them from warding off the act and saying no, and then prevented them from reporting the shameful assault or revealing its worst details. Church socialisation, which emphasised purity and chastity and declared everything a "grave sin" when it came to the sixth commandment, also played a part in this. Talking about sexuality—paradoxically only outside the confessional and instructions by priests—had the reputation of being unchaste. Even the call to chastity was a classic double bind; only those who knew what was to be avoided could have an idea of the concept of chastity—and necessarily had also developed an idea of the concept of unchastity. One could only know what chastity meant when one had already "sinned in thought."

6. Narrating

In the wake of the #MeToo movement that emerged in 2017, numerous other narrative contexts emerged in which predominantly women reported sexual violence—also in religious contexts. Under #SilenceIsNotSpiritual and #ChurchToo, numerous women from Southern Baptist Convention congregations who had suffered repeated domestic violence

raised their voices. When the women approached the pastors of their congregations in order to seek counselling, the pastors recommended that they continue to endure the abuse and remain in their marriages—referring to Ephesians 5:22–25. In France, numerous autobiographical works by former members of religious communities have been published in recent years and are regularly presented on the homepage of the Association d'aide aux victimes des dérives de mouvements religieux en Europe et à leurs familles (Association for the support of victims of deviant religious movements in Europe and for their families) (www.avrf.fr, accessed on 25 February 2022). Currently, there is undoubtedly a kairos for the public reception of such narratives. Through hashtags, websites, publications or public hearings, new communities of narrating are emerging today. They connect individual biographies, because "two or three witnesses" increase the likelihood that the victims will be believed and that investigations will be initiated. These narrative contexts also show that the abuse always follows specific cultural and denominational enabling logics. This is why an analysis of the systemic factors within a specific denomination is so indispensable.

7. Remembrance

Victims who speak about their experiences have the right to be listened to. Of course, like every person, they also have the right not to tell their story or to decide when to tell it and who should listen to it. These reports will necessarily lead to the conviction that victims are not an identifiable group alongside or beyond "the Church," but are members of the Church in the same way as all the faithful. How can a Church that includes victims and persons who have not been victimized, those in charge and perpetrators—to name only a few possible categories—respond appropriately to the narratives of the victims?

Victims who tell their stories question authority, knowledge and interpretive competences within the Church (see Sander 2021). By breaking their silence, they abandon the role assigned to them by the perpetrator, which was then consolidated by the cover-up of those in charge. These former "experts" have now become listeners and learners. Those in charge and theologians are confronted with a new, biographical knowledge that for a long time had no actual relevance in the theological system. Centre and periphery are measured anew. The wounded body of victims of sexual abuse (and of other victims of violence) becomes the unbendable locus theologicus (see Fuchs 2015, p. 70). A theology considering the narratives of victims is challenged to reformulate not only ecclesiology and the theology of ministry, but also the hermeneutics of the Bible.

How can a church respond appropriately to the narratives of victims of abuse? Today, the fact that sexual abuse happened in the midst of the Church is now part of the communicative and collective knowledge and memory of the Church and of society. This memory is more often than not an unwanted memory and does not only provoke different and vehement forms of defence, but often also divides communities and parishes. However, the Church can also perceive itself, in concrete congregations, communities and dioceses, as a community of remembrance and intentionally create resonance spaces for "stories that count." Remembering is then action; when the Church faces up to what has happened, comes to an understanding about its relevance as a community of solidarity in remembrance and bears witness to it, it will constitute its identity on the basis of "stories that count." This remembrance is action because it names the abuse and identifies the injustice as such. It may thus reconnect victims with the Church and with society. This remembrance could be the beginning of a fundamental change.

8. Conclusions—Encounter in Dobischau

> "I wanted to go on to Dobischau. That's where we had driven the cows before Maria's father took us home and saved us from deportation. [. . .] Suddenly, already at the end of the village, the view to the right widened and an unusually large estate spread out in front of us. That was it. Here the hundreds of cows had been standing with a few female herders and the armed soldiers. [. . .] Hans listened attentively to my story—scarse words, measured against my agitated

> feelings. He said nothing—what could he say? He could not take anything away from the force of these sudden memories. I had to endure them alone—but he was there." (Elliger 2004, p. 223s)

Katharina Elliger is uncontrollably assailed by memories of a traumatic event that she can only describe in scant words. Readers learn that she and her friend Maria were picked up by a Pole in their hometown of Bauerwitz and had to drive a herd of cows from there to Dobischau, seven kilometres away, together with other captured women. On a farm, the two girls were saved from deportation by Maria's father. The memories seem hardly communicable; Katharina Elliger has to "bear them alone" and at the same time is grateful for Hans' silent presence. He cannot do more for her; that is all it takes.

The mysteries of this episode are only solved in another volume published by Katharina Elliger in 2015: "Eingraviert. Reflektierte Erinnerungen an Flucht und Vertreibung aus Schlesien" ("Engraved. Reflected Memories of Flight and Expulsion from Silesia"). In this book she writes about another trip to Silesia in 2006, combined with memories of her homeland and of the events at the end of the war. Again she is drawn to the estate in Dobroslawitz, which is now referred to by the Polish name—"one of my darkest places of memory" (Elliger 2015, p. 16s). In Dobroslawitz, her companion Reinhard is interested in the events at the end of the war: "I couldn't explain it to him. He had never heard anything like it" (Elliger 2015, p. 18). "As if from nowhere," a woman approaches the travellers in this moment. The conversation between Elliger and this woman eventually reveals that this woman suffered the fate Elliger was spared; together with about twenty other women, she had to herd the cows from Dobischau to Russia, lived in a camp, did forced labour and was only released years later. She was one of only two women who survived the deportation and returned to Silesia.

Like the reports of victims of sexual abuse, Katharina Elliger's texts are written against her own silencing. Her words shall conclude this article:

> "I stared at her and could no longer move. I would have been there too … Suddenly the woman turned around and ran away. As she did so, she said: 'This is a miracle, this is a miracle!—No one believed me!'
>
> I could well understand the woman, because it had been the same for me. Ever since … ever since the class had laughed and the teacher had said: 'Imagination is also a talent', after I had told about the Death March as a war experience, ever since then I had fallen silent. […] From then on I told nothing more. But later I began to write." (Elliger 2015, pp. 18s, 26).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] See https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives; https://www.ciase.fr/mission-de-la-commission/; https://www.ciase.fr/auditions-de-victimes/. Grasroot projects are, e.g., the website "Everyone's invited" against "rape culture" https://www.everyonesinvited.uk/; the interdenominational project "Our stories untold," which is partly related to Mennonite contexts in the US and Canada (http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/) or a padlet initiated by the feminist theological group "tras las huellas de Sophía:" "Convocatoria: Violencias que padecen las mujeres dentro de la Iglesia católica" in occasion of 25 November 2021 (all websites accessed on 25 February 2022).

[2] Cf. the classical definition of trauma by Fischer and Riedesser as "ein vitales Diskrepanzerlebnis zwischen bedrohlichen Situationsfaktoren und den individuellen Bewältigungsmöglichkeiten, das mit Gefühlen von Hilflosigkeit und schutzloser Preisgabe einhergeht und so eine dauerhafte Erschütterung von Selbst- und Weltverständnis bewirkt" ("A vital discrepancy experience between threatening situational factors and individual coping possibilities, which is accompanied by feelings of

helplessness and defenceless abandonment, thus causing a long-lasting shattering of the understanding of the self and of the world") (Fischer and Riedesser 2020, p. 88).

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Article

The 'Great Whore' of Babylon (Rev 17) as a Non-Survivor of Sexual Abuse

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Abstract: The article aims to re-read Rev 17:16 amid the catastrophic patterns of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. Employing narratological methods as well as a close reading of the text, it is argued that Rev 17:16 can be coherently read as the violent sexual punishment of an anthropomorphic female character. Signals in the text point to God's involvement in this punishment and to its overall positive evaluation. Considering reader's realities in the context of sexual abuse and its cover-up, the article argues for the necessity of taking a positional stance while reading biblical 'texts of sexual terror'. Such a positional stance must have visible effects on a responsible reading and interpretation of the 'great whore's' story.

Keywords: Whore of Babylon; sexual abuse; sexual violence; female cities; revelation of John

Citation: König, Judith. 2022. The 'Great Whore' of Babylon (Rev 17) as a Non-Survivor of Sexual Abuse. *Religions* 13: 267. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030267

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber, Doris Reisinger and Aje Carlbom

Received: 1 March 2022
Accepted: 17 March 2022
Published: 21 March 2022

1. Introduction

Reading biblical texts is always challenging. Depending on the personal and collective context in which the process of reading and meaning-making takes place, the obstacles change. Reading a text is not independent of place, time, and the interpreter's characteristics and experiences. It is also not independent of the interpretive community of which the interpreter is part of.

This article aims to acknowledge the catastrophe of sexual abuse and its cover-up in the Catholic Church as an essential and fundamental context for reading and interpreting biblical texts today. This is not a theoretical issue. People who have been sexually abused are an integral part of the Catholic Church, an integral part of its parishes, an integral part of the scientific community.

Taking this into consideration, the paper will re-read the narrative of the 'great whore' Babylon in Revelation. It will ask if the character depicted in Rev 17 is city or woman, and it will ask how explicitly Rev 17:16 shows Babylon as a victim of sexual abuse.

Finally, the text will be discussed in light of the following question: can and should Catholic biblical scholars remain impartial in offering different interpretive possibilities while reading texts that speak of sexual violence? If not, then what does this mean for exegetical debates moving forward?

2. Method and Perspective

The perspective on Revelation will mainly be a narrative one. The text will be examined in close reading, taking seriously the intertextual ties between biblical texts. Questions of historical context are considered but are not the focus of this investigation. Instead, a modern reader's perspective that also takes up questions of power and gender relevant to this special issue's overall theme will be centralized.

3. The 'Whore's' Origins: Texts of Terror and Personified Cities in the Hebrew Bible

Countless characters inhabit the pages of biblical texts. They are old and young, beautiful and hideous, male and female, rich and poor, and everything in between. Biblical characters are born and die, they love and hate each other, they build and destroy. Yet,

within this plethora of biblical characters, there is a certain type of females which are special: many texts feature *cities* that are depicted as women, mainly in the prophetic corpus of the Old Testament (OT), but also beyond (Sals 2004, p. 29). In the OT, Jerusalem and Zion are most frequently mentioned in this way, but other cities are personified as females as well, e.g., Samaria, Niniveh, Tyre, and Babylon (Yarbro Collins 2015, p. 296; Vander Stichele 2009). Where the texts contain more than a passing remark about the personified cities, they are not only clearly anthropomorphized but also very distinctly gendered. The gender-specific descriptions of the female cities manifest themselves socially through gender-specific roles, such as bride, daughter, mother, etc. (Maier 2008, p. 2; Müllner and Thöne 2012, p. 14). As such, they do not only speak (Jer 2:25), eat, are not only washed and clothed (Ezek 16:9–13), and encouraged to sing and make music (Isa 23:16). They also (and prominently) give birth (e.g., Isa 66:7; Jer 49:24; Mi 4:9–10; Ezek 23:4) and are (or have been) wed(ded) (e.g., Ez 16:8; Hos 2:20; Jer 2:2).

Additionally, the personified cities are described in a very corporeal and sexualized way that is highly gender-specific and has frequently been described as pornographic (e.g., Yee 2003, pp. 6 and 133; Heussler 2021, p. 105; and already Setel 1985, p. 87; and Ben-Chorin 1986, p. 49). The texts do not only talk about the female cities generally growing up but talk about (menstrual?) bleeding (Ezek 16:9) and comment on the growth, size, or firmness of their breasts (e.g., Ezek 16:7; Ezek 23:3.8 and 21). They also repeatedly mention exposed female genitalia (e.g., Ezek 23:29; Isa 47:3; Nah 3:5; Hos 2:9[11]) (Exum 1996, p. 104; Grütter 2019, pp. 18–19).

The examples above are not chosen arbitrarily. While many texts speak about JHWH's covenant with the female cities and envision a plentiful future for them, they also figure in some of the most challenging biblical texts, veritable "texts of terror" (Trible 1984). Phyllis Trible had initially coined this phrase to tell the stories of four 'fully human' female biblical characters (Hagar, Tamar, the unnamed woman of Judg 19:1–30, and the daughter of Jephthah). It is, however, justified to also apply the term "texts of terror" to the textual worlds of at least some of the female cities, as, e.g., Irmtraud Fischer does (Fischer 2021, pp. 164–65). This is justified because they all share the common fate of being depicted as sexually assaulted and violently injured. While Phyllis Trible had been "wrestling with the silence, absence, and opposition of God" (Trible 1984, p. 2), storytellers, readers, and interpreters of texts such as Ezek 16, Isa 47, and Rev 17, as we will see, are confronted with God's active involvement in punishing female cities by means of sexual violence. In some texts, God can (and must?) even be called "an active perpetrator of [. . .] sexual violence against women" (Magdalene 1995, p. 327).

Historically, there is a long tradition of narrating and visually depicting cities as women. More broadly, a connection between women and *space*, in general, can be made out, which also applies to countries, land in general, or social collectives inhabiting space, such as nations (Maier 2008, pp. 27–28; Yee 2001, p. 375). At least from the 7th century B.C.E. onward, we find women wearing turreted or mural crowns, indicating such a connection (Maier 2008, p. 66). In the 3rd century B.C.E., we have multiple certain attestations of cities depicted as women wearing the above-mentioned mural crowns. A prominent example is the sculpture of Antiochia at Orontes from around 300 B.C.E. (Maier 2008, pp. 67–68).

To depict (and narrate) cities in the form of women could also stem from an early concept of female goddesses protecting cities (Yarbro Collins 2009, p. 125). This idea is attested in antiquity for a big geographical range, from the Middle East to Rome (Meyer 1996), but the extent of its influence on the Hebrew Bible's practice of female personification, especially of Zion and Jerusalem, remains debated (Maier 2008, p. 69).

Depending on the scholarly perspective, various hypotheses have been offered to further explain the female personifications of cities, lands, and peoples. Among them is the observation that "the wall of the ancient city-fortress may have suggested the encircling comfort and security of the womb or a mother's arms" (Yarbro Collins 2009, p. 125). Other scholars are not as optimistic and point out the vulnerability of women as a point of comparison (Müllner and Thöne 2012, p. 14). This common vulnerability of cities and

women becomes especially prominent in times of war, and its brutal practice of raping (mainly) the female inhabitants of conquered cities (Bail 1998, pp. 176–77; Poser 2019, pp. 282–83).

In the medium of biblical stories, it is, additionally, linguistically easy to bridge the gap between woman and city (Müllner and Thöne 2012, p. 14), as the grammatical gender of the city in Hebrew is female עִיר as it is in ancient Greek (πόλις *polis*), Latin (*urbs*), and consequentially, many modern European languages as well.

4. Revelation 17

4.1. The Whore's "Multi-Sourced Textual Body" (M. Fletcher)

Not only in the Hebrew Bible, but also in New Testament (NT) writings do we encounter female cities. Considering the wide distribution of the phenomenon in antiquity and the close intertextual ties between Hebrew Scripture(s) and the NT texts, this is not surprising. Revelation, especially, is suffused with allusions to OT texts; up to 30 percent of Revelation's text corpus is heavily influenced with OT motifs (Hieke 2015, p. 271). Prophetic texts play an especially prominent role among the various texts visible in the intertextual fabric of Revelation (Yarbro Collins 2015, p. 291). Thomas Hieke considers this to be so crucial to an appropriate interpretation of Revelation that he claims Revelation *forces* its readers to re-read other (and earlier) biblical texts to make meaning of Revelation itself (Hieke 2015, pp. 289–90). While it is up to the readers to succumb to this force, if they choose (and are able) to do so, the intertextual connections do open up a whole galaxy of possibilities for meaning-making in Revelation. This is also true for the 'Great Whore' Babylon (Rev 17:1) and her "multi-sourced textual body" (Fletcher 2014, p. 147). Among the texts making up this "multi-sourced textual body" are several OT texts featuring female cities, such as Ezek 16 (Fletcher 2014, pp. 147 and 150), Jer 50–51, and Isa 47 (Maier 2019, p. 222). Gail Streete does not focus on a (or several) specific intertext(s), but refers to "Israel as the adulterous whore-wife of JHWH [. . .] the scriptural prototype for the Whore of Babylon" (Streete 1997, pp. 7–8).

4.2. The 'Whore's' Body, Appearance, and Gender (Roles)

In Revelation, Babylon appears for the first time in Rev 14:8, where, as part of several angelic announcements, her previous destruction is stated: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (Rev 14:8a NRSV). In Rev 14, Babylon is not yet clearly identified in human form. She is, however, already linguistically marked female. Rev 14:8 continues: "She has given all nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (NRSV modified). While the verb 'give to drink', in the third person singular, could, in Greek grammar, be either male, neutral, or female, the 'fornication' (πορνεία *porneia*) is specifically *her* fornication (τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς *tēs porneias autēs*). After the announcements, the flow of the narrative turns to the one who is like a Son of Man, and his actions of harvest. In Rev 15, seven angels are introduced. They are given seven bowls, out of which they pour God's wrath in the form of seven plagues (Moloney 2020, p. 239). After the seventh bowl is poured out, an earthquake of monumental dimension shakes the earth, and the readers and listeners are told that the 'great city'—presumably Babylon—is split into three parts (Rev 16:19) (Moloney 2020, p. 250; Giesen 1997, p. 365 disagrees). V. 19b explicitly states that she receives attention from God so that she can be punished (lit.: given the cup of the fury of his wrath; Vander Stichele 2009, p. 109). One of the seven angels subsequently carries the seer John off to show him Babylon's fate. It is in this part of the Babylon narrative that the border between city and woman are most blurred. The adjective, 'great'—twice before applied to Babylon (Rev 14:8 and 16:9)—is now used as a description of the 'whore' whose punishment the seer (and with him the readers and listeners) are about to witness.

The 'whore' is described in a very detailed and corporeal way, even before she is actually seen by John. The angel tells John that the 'great whore' is *sitting* at many waters (Rev 17:1) and has had sexual intercourse. Rev 17:2 puts it less neutrally and speaks about the 'great whore' as one "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and

with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk" (NRSV). Even though her sexual activity takes a central position in the list of her transgressions, commentators up until today seem rather reticent in their phrasing. Francis Moloney, for example, talks, in his recent commentary, about the kings 'associating with' the 'great whore' (Moloney 2020, p. 257).

In Rev 17:3, finally, the character shown to John is explicitly referred to as a woman (γυνή *gynē*). Her bodily features become even more prominent in the verses 3–6 (Fletcher 2014, p. 152), as she is again stated to be sitting (this time on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns), clothed in exquisite crimson and scarlet robes, and accessorized with gold and pearls. She holds a golden cup in her hand. Her forehead bears a writing, and she is inebriated.

While Rev 17:7–15 describe and interpret the beast Babylon is sitting on in more detail, the attention of the narrative turns back to Babylon herself in Rev 17:16. John is told by the angel: "And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour the pieces of her flesh and burn her in fire." (NRSV modified).

4.3. The Whore's Punishment

The main question to be debated here is not whether the 'great whore' should be interpreted as Rome or Jerusalem. Regarding the second option, Francis Moloney has recently offered an interesting approach connecting the 'great whore' both to the women clothed with the sun (Rev 12) and to the bride of the lamb (Rev 19 and 21) (Moloney 2020).[1]

Instead, the case will be made that the punishment described in Rev 17:16 is—from the readers perspective—the forceful exposure, abuse, and killing of a female anthropomorphic character. Even though this has been argued by numerous scholars in the past (with different emphases; see, e.g., Sals 2004; Vander Stichele 2009; Pippin 2010; Fletcher 2014), it still does not seem to be firmly anchored in New Testament exegesis if the commentary literature is to be the judge of it. To list only some examples: Beale (1999) extensively discusses the description of the 'great whore' as a woman, where it concerns her garments and even lists the parallels between the 'whore's' punishment and the violence directed against the female cities of Jerusalem and Samaria in Ezek 16 and 23. However, as far as I see, the implications are not further problematized. Instead, the interpretation moves on to the economic forces represented by the 'great whore'. Berger (2017) does not seem to thematize the violent character of the text at all, formulating that "the destruction of Rome/Babylon is achieved through a peaceful consensus of Rome's enemies against Rome" (Berger 2017, p. 1201; transl. J. König). Moloney (2020) refers to the 'great whore' as 'woman' in his summary of Rev 17:16. In the interpretation, however, he focuses on explaining the woman's punishment with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and mentions the—in my opinion, quite virulent—problem of bodily and sexual violence against the 'great whore' only in a two-sentence footnote, where he attributes the debate to "contemporary sensitivities" (Moloney 2020, p. 269 n. 44).

Considering this, in my opinion, still inadequate treatment of the topic in some commentaries, the most important arguments for seriously considering the 'whore' as a female anthropomorphic character will be recounted here.

To what extent, and in what way, does Rev 17, 1–16 encourage the perception of bodily violence against and sexual abuse of a female character?

1. In addition to the very corporeal description of the 'great whore' already shown above, she is introduced to the pericope as a 'whore' (πόρνη *pornē*), and will be repeatedly called a whore (and 'mother of whores') after that (Rev 17:1.5.15. and 16). 'Whore' is not only grammatically female in Greek, but also a highly gender-specific term in biblical literature;
2. Rev 17:3 presents the character in question for the first time in the pericope outside of the angel's annunciating speech. What John sees (ὁράω *horaō*) in Rev 17:3 is a *woman*

(γυνή *gynē*). The character is subsequently called 'woman' four more times before the narrative moves on to describing her destruction (Rev 17:4.6.7.9);

3. It is uncontested that the text contains signals pointing to the hybrid character of the woman. Among them are intertextual allusions to OT scripture, the fact that the text calls the inscription on the woman's forehead a *mystery* (μυστήριον *mystērion*), and the verses Rev 17:7–15, in which the angel interprets several elements of the beast's earlier description to John. However, in contrast to the beast, Rev 17:7–15 does not offer any interpretation of the woman herself. Her name, attire, and cup are also not part of the interpretation offered in Rev 17:7–15 (Sals 2004, p. 69);
4. The woman is identified as a city in Rev 17:18. However, from a narratological point of view, it is significant that this identification happens *after* the description of her punishment in v. 16 (Fletcher 2014, p. 152). She is hated, left alone, made naked, dismembered, eaten, and burned *before* Rev 17:18a tells the readers: "The woman you saw is the great city" (NRSV).[2]

Michelle Fletcher concludes—rightly, in my opinion—that: "Therefore, it appears logical, however disturbing it might be, to argue that she is presented to the audience as a fleshly body, not just at the start [. . .], but right through until the end of her destruction" (Fletcher 2014, p. 152; contra Rossing 1999).

What does this mean for the 'great whore's' punishment announced in Rev 17:16? The angel first tells John that the beast and its horns will hate the 'whore'. Μισέω (*miseō*) is not a very frequent term in NT texts, but it does figure in all the gospels, several NT epistles, and four times in Revelation itself. Mainly, it refers to human characters or social collectives hating other human characters (e.g., Matt 5:43; Mark 13:13; Luke 6:22; Tit 3:3). Of the remaining four following elements of the 'great whore's' punishment, three can be read without any problems with referring to a human female character: The angel announces that the beast and its horn will make the 'great whore' naked (γυμνός gymnos), eat pieces of her flesh (pl. of σάρξ, *sarx*), and burn her (κατακαίω *katakaiō*) in/with fire.

Starting with the last expression, biblical texts mention various things that can be burned (κατακαίω *katakaiō*), e.g., sacrificial animals (Exod 29:14 LXX), idols of false gods (Deut 7:5 LXX), trees (Ezek 21:3 LXX), books (Acts 19:19), and also buildings and cities (Ps 73:8 LXX; Jer 21:10 LXX). However, of course, also human characters and, more specifically, women can be burned. In Gen 38:24 LXX, for example, it is suggested that Tamar should be burned (κατακαίω *katakaiō*) for 'whoring' (εκπορνεύω *ekporneuō*).

Where flesh (σάρξ, *sarx*) is mentioned in the plural-form in biblical texts, human characters are disturbingly often described as being eaten (e.g., Gen 40:19 LXX; Ps 78:2 LXX; Rev 19:18), sometimes even by other human characters (Lev 16:29 LXX; Mic 3:3 LXX). LXX (and later many NT) writings take up the Hebrew connotation of בָּשָׂר meaning not human 'flesh' in an abstract sense, but more specifically flesh that is still or was once alive (Klein 2017; Staubli and Schroer 2014 emphasize the dimension of impermanence and transitoriness of life connected to בָּשָׂר.

Finally, to be or to be made naked (γυμνός gymnos) is almost exclusively used as a term for undressed human characters in biblical texts.[3] To my knowledge, it is only ever used to describe a city where the city takes the form of a female anthropomorphic city, such as in Ezek 16 and 23.

The OT stories of the female cities can also provide background to what is done to the 'great whore' in Rev 17:16. Even though the 'great whore' is not depicted as JHWH's unfaithful wife in Revelation, other narratological characteristics are similar to the OT stories of the female cities. Ulrike Sals writes, with regard the OT texts: "From the point of view of the texts, the erotomania of the female city is always starting point, cause and stimulus for her behavior. Subsequently, her 'punishment' consists of violations of intimacy, such as exposing her nakedness, and of physical sexual violence, up to and including rape" (Sals 2004, p. 31; transl. J. König). Looking at Rev 17, the pattern is slightly changed. The text does call Babylon a 'whore' several times, but she is not depicted as an active seductress (Fletcher 2014). Rather, the text evokes the image of a powerful woman to whom

the "kings of the earth" (Rev 17:2) come to have sex and to be drunk. She does not move from the center of the narrated world in Rev 17, where she is sitting in power (Beale 1999, p. 854), until she is finally and forcefully destroyed. This does not mean, of course, that the text condones her sexual activity; this is clear from her repeated designation as 'whore', which especially the interpreting angel uses (Sals 2004, p. 71). Instead, sex is part of the way in which the female character has, in the past, exercised power—so, in the logic of the text, sexual violence must be part of her destruction.[4] Finally, the fact that readers will not interpret the nakedness of the 'great whore' as a voluntary state stemming, e.g., from her permissiveness, is induced by both the agency of the characters (1) and the order of narrated events (2). Rev 17:16 states clearly that the beast and its horns will make (1) 'the whore' naked (ποιήσουσιν αὐτὴν [. . .] γυμνὴν *poiēsousin autēn [. . .] gymnēn*) only after she has been hated and made desolate (2).

This leaves only one part of the 'great whore's' punishment to be discussed. What does Rev 17:16 mean when it talks about the 'whore' being made *desolate* (part. pass. of ἐρημόω *erēmoō*)? Etymologically, the verb is connected to the noun 'desert' (ἔρημος *erēmos*), which, in biblical texts, often signals dryness, emptiness, and uninhabitability (Bosenius 2014, p. 83; Riede 2012). Frequently, the verb refers to spatial entities, such as cities, lands, buildings, streets, etc. (e.g., Lev 26:43 LXX; Bar 4:12 LXX or Ezek 19:12 LXX). It is also used several times in connection to the OT female cities (e.g., Isa 49:17 LXX and Jer 3:2 LXX). Isa 60:12 LXX employs it to refer to social collectives (peoples and kings). Michelle Fletcher additionally observes: "Even when the subject is a city, the verb itself does actually have a wider meaning, not only of being desolate, but also of being depopulated" (Fletcher 2014). This argument is supported by the use of the adjective ἔρημος (*erēmos*) in reference to childless women in Isa 54:1, which Gal 4:27 cites (Fletcher 2014). Even if one does not want to follow Fletcher's reasoning all the way (she subsequently interprets the announcement of the 'great whore's' 'desolation' as a euphemism for sexual violence resulting in permanent infertility (Fletcher 2014, p. 160)), it is possible to also read the 'desolation' connectively to a female human character who is left alone.

5. Babylon as a Non-Survivor of Sexual Abuse, Or: Where Does the City End and the Woman Start?

5.1. Methodological and Hermeneutical Remarks

Is, thus, Babylon, the 'great whore', depicted in Rev 17:16 as a non-survivor of sexual abuse? Does Rev 17:16 announce the future stripping, dismembering, and killing (by fire) of a woman? Three important considerations:

Firstly, the term '(non-)survivor of sexual abuse' is, of course, modern terminology. Accordingly, limitations follow for applying it to a nearly 2000-years-old text such as Revelation. However, the extent of these limitations depends on the kind of questions asked about (and with the help of) the text. In my opinion, modern terminology is quite helpful—even indispensable—to talk about the impact of biblical texts on modern readers in various contexts. It can also have a heuristic value for debates in various fields of exegesis and biblical scholarship in general. An explanation of the term 'sexual abuse' remains necessary. Following the important remarks made by Reisinger and Leimgruber (2021), every sexual act which violates the sexual self-determination of an individual is considered sexual abuse. One of the definition's strengths is the fact that little insight into the motivation of the perpetrator(s) is needed—something that is often problematic in the contexts of analyzing biblical texts. It needs to be added, moreover, that Reisinger and Leimgruber (2021) stress the fact that sexual abuse is also possible without the use of force or violence. In Rev 17:16, clearly, sexual violence is an important factor.

Secondly, biblical texts are always multi-voiced and possess more than one valid interpretation. This is not only characteristic of any kind of text per se (Breytenbach [2000] 2020; Alkier 2020), but is also an insight which is especially important in the context of sexual and spiritual abuse. As several examples from the collected volume *Erzählen als Widerstand* (Haslbeck et al. 2020) show, the Bible can be quite violently deployed in

concrete events of abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. Part of this instrumentalization of biblical texts takes the form of a "push for interpretive authority which sets itself absolute in order to enforce one's own interests" (König 2020, p. 244; transl. J. König). As Katharina Hoff (pseudonym) writes: "Über die Interpretation von Bibelstellen, von Gebeten, religiösen Festinhalten und Ereignissen hat er [i.e., the abuser] mir immer wieder Gehorsam gegenüber Gott und Jesus abverlangt" (Hoff 2020, p. 105; insertion: J. König).

And thirdly, from a literary-theoretical point of view, it is important to state that the city does not 'end' and the woman does not 'start' at a specific, identifiable point within the text. Of course, there are arguments to be made for and against highlighting one or the other aspect of the female city, as I have done above. A substantial part of the argument depends on the signals the text gives us. Essentially, however, "personification is a special case of metaphor that results from interference between two semantic fields, in this case a space and a woman" (Maier 2008, p. 60). In the case of the female cities, the woman never exists completely without the city and the city is never purely wood and stone. Within this complex relationship between 'woman' and 'city' in metaphorical speech, several aspects are important for our context:

- Metaphors depend crucially on the figurative elements they use. To stay within Maier's terminology: It is highly relevant *which* semantic field is used in interference with the other; meaning is transported through this choice. In the context of the female city of Babylon, it is quite important that Rev 17 brings the semantic fields of 'woman' and 'whore' into interference with that of the 'city', because this interference adds specific characteristics to the readers' mental image of the city and highlights other characteristics of the city that might be there already (for more on the general process of meaning-making in the metaphorical female cities, see Maier 2008, p. 60). Which characteristics are added and highlighted depends on the readers' cultural context, their prior knowledge of similar texts, their personal experiences, and many other factors. With regard to socio-cultural aspects connected to the metaphor of female cities in ancient readers' perspectives, there are already many excellent discussions (e.g., Seifert 1997; Baumann 2006; Maier 2008; Maier 2019). For ancient and modern contexts alike, it is important that this highly complex process of transferring characteristics is inextricably connected with the specific semantic field(s) used, so that meaning cannot just be extracted by 'translating' figurative speech into non-figurative language. In the context of the synoptic gospels' parables, this has been discussed extensively: it makes a huge difference to speak about the unstoppable growth of the kingdom of God while using the semantic field of a spreading virus, the force of a tsunami—or the life cycle of a plant which bears abundant fruit. Similarly, it is relevant, if a city is personified as a 'woman' and 'whore', to depict a morally reprehensible and potentially dangerous entity (as, i.e., in the case of Babylon) or if it is personified as 'man' and 'tyrant'.
- Additionally important to note is the fact that metaphorical speech is not a one-way-street in which meaning is transferred from one semantic field to the other (Maier 2008, p. 61; Zimmermann 2004, p. 106). In our case, not only do the semantic fields of 'woman' and 'whore' influence the way readers think about the 'city'; rather, the way the meaning of 'city' changes in this process also changes the readers' subsequent images of 'woman' and 'whore'.
- This also shows that metaphoric speech actively involves its readers and/or listeners. While it is true for all forms of texts that readers have an essential role in meaning-making (Nicklas 2021, p. 116), in the case of metaphorical speech, the readers' involvement is even more prominent than in most other forms of written communication. Readers are required to actively bridge the difference between the different semantic fields that are brought into contact with each other in the text and to construct meaning from the newly formed connection (Zimmermann 2004, p. 135; Rivera 2015, p. 63). In the case of Revelation, the readers are also sometimes tasked with entangling the not always linear but quite complex relationships between the different semantic fields. While this process of reader involvement, typical to metaphorical speech, is fascinating

from a literary and narratological perspective, in the case of violent texts, it can also become problematic, as we will see in Section 6.1, below.

5.2. Babylon as Non-Survivor of Sexual Abuse

Keeping the above-mentioned methodological and hermeneutical remarks in mind, I argue that it is possible to read the 'great whore'—not only but also—as a non-survivor of sexual abuse.

That the 'great whore' does not survive the actions taken against her by the beast and its horns in Rev 17:16 is stated several times. Rev 18 is largely devoted to a lament over the destroyed female city made by the merchants who had been trading with her. Moreover, her final destruction is confirmed by an angel a few verses before the narrative turns to the jubilation about the lamb's wedding in Rev 19:7 (Sals 2004, p. 73). The angel throws a big millstone into the sea and emphasizes: "With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more" (Rev 18:21b NRSV).

To characterize the stripping of the 'whore' as sexual abuse, we shall first consider the question of self-determination defined above as a central characteristic of sexual abuse. As I have already argued, the stripping of the 'whore' in Rev 17:16 cannot be coherently interpreted as a self-determined act. The 'whore' is stripped. The sexual connotations of the nakedness are amplified by the frequent allusions to whoring resp the designation of the character as a 'whore'. Regarding the stripping per se, there are several current studies on the crucifixion of Jesus as sexual abuse that thematize forcible nakedness (Trainor 2014; Greenough 2020; Reaves et al. 2021). For example, in their introductory chapter, Reaves and Tombs urge: "the forced stripping and naked exposure of Jesus on the cross should be acknowledged as sexual abuse" (Reaves and Tombs 2021, p. 1). The same is true for the 'whore' of Rev 17:16.

5.3. Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence: Power and Punishment

Additionally, the forcibly induced nakedness of the 'whore' is accompanied by two other phenomena that have been discussed in the recent treatments of sexual abuse and sexual violence in Church contexts (e.g., Reisinger and Leimgruber 2021): power and violence.

Unfortunately for theologians, the punishment of the 'whore' is not only condoned by God but explicitly traced back to him in Rev 17:17, and again in Rev 19:2. He is named as the one causing the beast and its horns to abuse and kill the 'whore', by 'putting it into their hearts' (ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν *edōken eis tas kardias autōn*) to do so (Lupieri 1999, p. 278). Remembering that the female city Babylon is, earlier on, portrayed as a powerful royal figure, what J. Cheryl Exum writes regarding texts such as Ezek 16 and Isa 54 also sounds true for our example Rev 17: "physical abuse is God's way of reasserting his control over the woman" (Exum 1996, p. 112).

The 'whore's' destruction is not arbitrary but connected to her power. "As her epithet implies, she occupies a much greater proportion of the text than does any other female figure, whether good or evil [. . .]. The destruction of the Great Whore is the first of a series in which the most powerful forces of evil, including Satan, Death, and Hades, are overthrown" (Streete 1997, p. 155). Moreover, it might be noted that in the moment of her destruction, she is not 'great' anymore, just a 'whore' (Rev 17:16).

6. Possible Consequences for Reading Rev 17 as a Roman Catholic Scholar

6.1. Readers and Their Bodies, Genders, and Traumas

In the very beginning of this paper, I addressed the fact that there is no 'they' when focusing on survivors of sexual abuse and sexual violence in church contexts. Our parishes, university families, and scientific communities consist of survivors. That people with trauma resulting from sexual violence read biblical texts has, in all likelihood, been true ever since the texts were written; that it is true for today's Roman Catholic context is a certainty—it has been demonstrated by several quantitative studies showing the number

of people personally affected, and it has been demonstrated by several qualitative studies and survivor narratives which are enlightening on our way to changing the underlying structural problems. If we take this certainty into consideration, and turn again to Rev 17:16, we soon encounter a substantial problem. We realize that reading texts such as the narrative of the 'great whore's' destruction can not only be liberating (e.g., for those hoping for the overthrow of oppressive political powers as has been thematized in postcolonial exegesis; see, for example, Rosenberg 2017), but reading the 'great whore's' story also has a potential to be harmful, especially to readers who might identify easily with the 'whore'. J. Cheryl Exum emphasizes: "Female readers [. . .] are placed in a double bind. On the one hand we are asked to sympathize with God and identify with his point of view. To the extent we do so, we read these texts against our own interests. On the other hand, by definition, we are identified with the object that elicits scorn and abuse." (Exum 1996, p. 103). The focus on female sexuality and its vulnerability makes it especially hard for female readers to distance themselves from these depictions of violence (Fischer 2021, p. 164).

Problematic is, thus, not only the clearly gendered perspective that depicts a female character in a morally reprehensible way because of her sexuality. Problematic is also, and especially, the linking of the violent sexual punishment with its gender-specific context. Finally, the problem is furthered by the fact that the abuse and violence is initiated (although not executed) by God himself, and very clearly evaluated in a positive way in the text (cf. Rev 14:6–8; Rev 19,1–2).

6.2. Re-Thinking Interpretive Imperatives: Taking a Positional Stance

What follows if we want to keep valuing the immeasurable treasure the biblical texts are—not only as a literary and cultural testimony but also as the word of God? What follows if we do not want to just discard this word of God, which encloses all human experience and is without doubt also an indispensable spiritual resource for survivors of sexual abuse (Kerstner et al. 2016; König 2020; and the survivor narrative of Adler 2020)?

As a Catholic biblical scholar and, thus, as part of an interpretative community which must acknowledge the catastrophe of sexual abuse and its cover-up as an essential and fundamental context for reading and interpreting biblical texts today, it is not possible to remain 'neutral' (Haslbeck 2007; Stahl 2019). If one comes to the conclusion—as I have above—that a biblical text (1) can be coherently read and is, thus, likely to be read as depicting sexual violence and/or sexual abuse, and if (2) no textual signals can be identified that point to a disapproval of the violence and/or abuse, then it is the interpreter's responsibility to problematize this (Stahl 2019): depicting sexual abuse and/or violence in a way that condones it is not acceptable. Moreover, this assessment is not dependent on the moral status or gender of the victimized character.

What could be cornerstones for this problematization apart from a clearly formulated statement against sexual violence and sexual abuse? I propose the following:

1. To engage in discussion about a responsible way of reading 'texts of sexual terror' with survivors. Biblical interpretation must not be harmful (Alkier et al. 2021); as much is certainly true and must be recorded. More concrete steps towards what this means are necessary, and should be developed in dialogue with those of us most acutely in danger of being hurt. The many qualitative studies published in the last years should also be utilized;
2. No interpretive track must claim exclusivity. As was emphasized above, this is not only important considering the Bible's fundamental character as *text*, but an exclusive claim to interpretative authority can also be part of abusive strategies in cases of spiritual and sexual abuse;
3. Efforts should be made so as to not set different interpretative possibilities against each other, as has been the case in the past, e.g., with feminist and post-colonial biblical exegesis. Instead, the radical contextuality of interpreting biblical texts should be acknowledged. Talking about sexual abuse and sexual violence as a white person

from a warm and comfortable desk in Germany is, of course, just one perspective. Many voices need to be heard.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] Instead of contrasting the 'great whore' with other female characters in Revelation, as, e.g., Beale (1999) and others do, Moloney (2020) outlines a complete storyline with the development of one 'woman'-character that extends through the second half of the narrative from the woman clothed with the sun giving birth to a son in Rev 12, through the punishment and destruction of the woman in Rev 16 and 17, and to her restitution and eventual marriage to the lamb in Rev 19 and 21. The woman in question is identified as Jerusalem and explicitly connected to the OT tradition of the female cities whose turning away from God and worshipping of different gods is described as adultery (Moloney 2020, p. 259; see also Lupieri 2015, p. 315 n. 53, who links the 'great whore' at least with the woman of Rev 12). While Moloney makes an interesting proposition that certainly deserves careful attention and a more extensive discussion than can be given here, one could also voice doubt in several regards, of which only one shall be listed here: the destruction of the 'great whore' in Rev 17:16 does resemble the violent and sexually charged punishment of Jerusalem in texts such as Ezek 16:39–41. Moreover, in Ezek 16:40, the dismemberment of Jerusalem with swords does not prevent JHWH from restituting her in the end (Ezek 16:55) (and to renew the covenant with his wife who is not only brought back under the control of JHWH but also permanently made mute with shame (Ezek 16:62–63)). In Revelation, however, there does not seem to be such an event of reassembly of the female city. Moreover, her final destruction is confirmed by an angel just a few verses before the narrative turns to the jubilation about the lamb's wedding in Rev 19:7 (Sals 2004, p. 73). The angel throws a big millstone into the sea and emphasizes: "With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more" (Rev 18:21b NRSV). How the narrative moves from such total annihilation to marriage would at least have to be argued more extensively.

[2] To my knowledge, none of the above-mentioned textual details are contested with regard to textcritical considerations, with the possible exception of a variant reading of ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν (*hē mētēr tōn pornōn*) in Rev 17:5. Neither the critical apparatus of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th edition) and *Greek New Testament* (5th edition) nor Metzger (1994) show variants relevant to the argument. For the debate concerning whether the 'whores' in Rev 17:5 should be considered female or male, see Bachmann (2012).

[3] The exceptions to this rule include Job 26:6 LXX, with a reference to Sheol, yet another (personified?) space, being 'naked' before God, two references to nakedness in 1 Cor 15:37 and 2 Cor 5:3, where bodily resurrection is discussed, and Heb 4:13, where nakedness is used as a metaphor for the absence of deception and deceit.

[4] Possibly, there is a second example of such a connection in Revelation. In Rev 2:20, Jezebel is introduced into the narrative, another woman (γυνή *gynē*) accused of 'whoring'/'fornicating' (πορνεύω *porneuō*). After mentioning 'whoring' twice (πορνεία *porneia* and πορνεύω *porneuō*) in Rev 2:20–21, Rev 2:22 describes the first part of the punishment that the 'One like a Son of Man'—a Christ-like character—has devised for Jezebel: "Beware, I am throwing her on a bed [. . .]" (NRSV). In the commentary literature, it is suggested again and again that the bed (κλίνη *klinē*) can and/or should be read as a 'sickbed', even though the context of the verse does not offer any indication to sickness whatsoever. Conspicuously absent from the most-read commentaries is the suggestion that Rev 2:22 might allude to Jezebel being raped, a reading plausible not only in light of the sexualized language of Rev 2:20–22 and the OT background of the character (Streete 1997, p. 154), but also the connection between the bed (κλίνη *klinē*) and sexuality made, e.g., in Ezek 23:14, Tob 8:4, Song 1:16, or Sir 23:18, as well as in the scene interpreted as an attempt to rape Ester, in which a bed (κλίνη *klinē*) prominently figures, too (Est 7:8).

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Sex Offenses—Offensive Sex: Some Observations on the Recent Reform of Ecclesiastical Penal Law

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Abstract: In recent years, the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults in the Catholic Church has received much attention. This is also true of the related changes to ecclesiastical legislation. Less attention, however, has been paid to other aspects of the reform. The revised penal law of the Code of Canon Law, in any case, demands closer study from the point of critical legal studies. It is striking that while the reform focused on improving the legal protection of minors, it also had rather detrimental effects on the legal standing of women in the church. Reading the revised law, it appears that the reform missed the chance to improve the legal situation of the mostly female adult victims of clerical sex offenses and abuses of power. It rather spotlighted "female" offenses such as abortion in contrast to typical "male" offenses such as homicide, and it moreover criminalized women who attempt ordination. Thus, the regulations of the reformed penal law not only generally leave the systemic causes of abuse untouched, but also establish norms which reinvent or even exacerbate abusive structures. The latter finally sustain clericalism and reinstitutionalize gender inequality, commonly identified as factors fostering abuse.

Keywords: canon law; Code of Canon Law; penal law; sexual abuse of minors; sex offenses; celibacy; women in church; ordination of women; abortion; presumption of innocence

Citation: Hahn, Judith. 2022. Sex Offenses—Offensive Sex: Some Observations on the Recent Reform of Ecclesiastical Penal Law. *Religions* 13: 332. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040332

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 11 February 2022
Accepted: 1 April 2022
Published: 7 April 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

The sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults in the Catholic Church has received much attention over the past couple of years. The devastating findings on sexual violence in church have brought attention not merely to the pastoral and institutional structures where the abuse took place but also to the law which enabled them to solidify. Hence, when faced with the need to react to abuse in church, ecclesiastical authorities were also confronted with the task of a legal reform. On the one hand, the law had proven unfit to protect minors and vulnerable adults in church, and on the other, it had failed to effectively sanction sex offenders. It took about ten years for the reform of canonical penal law to be realized. The specific reform of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law was highly anticipated when the new norms were published in June 2021 (see Francis 2021a). As expected, they show greater sensitivity to the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. Nevertheless, it is particularly noteworthy that while the reform focuses on improving the legal protection of minors, it is detrimental with regard to women in church. Indeed, when reading the revised norms through the lens of critical legal studies, it becomes clear that the reformed penal law of the Code not only fails to improve the legal standing of women in church but even tends to increase their marginalization. In the following, I examine this issue in three steps. First, I analyze how the revised penal law expresses a reformed view of sexual abuse and spiritual violence against individuals in church: minors and vulnerable adults on the one hand (Section 2), and adults on the other (Section 3). Second, I study the regulations which fall short of this aspiration. A closer look at the reformed penal law reveals regulations which mostly leave the systemic causes of abuse untouched, but also norms which reinvent or even exacerbate abusive structures. Such structures, in fact, sustain clericalism and reinstitutionalize gender inequality, factors that are identified in a

large part of the professional public (of which some authors are listed below) as facilitating abuse. The revised penal law is arguably even more restrictive to women than it used to be, as it now spotlights "female" offenses such as abortion in contrast to typical "male" offenses such as homicide. It moreover specifically targets female attempts to penetrate the privileged circles of male clergy by criminalizing women who attempt ordination (Section 4). Third, I examine some procedural consequences deriving from the recent reform of penal law (Section 5). I then conclude by summing up my findings. Despite the many merits of the recent reform of ecclesiastical penal law, some parts of canon law may still be regarded as a support for abusive structures in church, particularly with regard to its view on violence, both sexual and spiritual, and its use of violence against women (Section 6).

2. Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

The new penal law of the church has attracted particular attention for readapting the legislator's view of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

2.1. Revised Qualification of Child Abuse

Sexual abuse used to be part of a list of diverse criminal offenses by clerics who violated their duty to lead a celibate life (see former canon 1395 §2 CIC/1983). Here, the abuse of minors was one of several offenses "against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue", coming after references to sex offenses committed by force or threats and public sex offenses. These offenses were all to be punished by commensurate penalties, including, in severe cases, dismissal from the clerical state. Under the old legislation, the offenses were clearly understood as delicts against clerical chastity. Hence, the focus of the law in the former canon 1395 §2 CIC/1983 was not on the victims and their sexual integrity, but on clerics and their obligation to lead a celibate life. This classification created much criticism, not merely among canonists but also among state bodies examining the institutional responses to the sexual abuse of minors. Among these bodies, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was the most prominent. In its final recommendations, the Royal Commission in fact suggested that Australian bishops "request the Holy See to amend the 1983 Code of Canon Law to create a new canon or series of canons specifically relating to child sexual abuse" (Recommendation 16.9, Commonwealth of Australia 2017, p. 51). The suggestion to integrate the sexual abuse of minors into its own norm or complex of norms also entailed qualifying these offenses differently, the legislative focus shifting from celibacy to the integrity of minors. The Commission proposed that "[a]ll delicts relating to child sexual abuse should be articulated as canonical crimes against the child, not as moral failings or as breaches of the 'special obligation' of clerics and religious to observe celibacy" (Recommendation 16.9, Commonwealth of Australia 2017, p. 51; on these recommendations, see also Costigane 2020, pp. 305–7). Similarly, when questioning canonist Gordon Francis Read as an expert witness in a public hearing during the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales in 2019, the interrogator criticized the common classification of sexual abuse as an offense against celibacy. In responding, Read acknowledged the unfortunate classification of the Code and its dealing with sexual abuse; he suggested removing sexual abuse from the list of clerical offenses against celibacy and inserting it into the section of offenses against human life and freedom. Read states, "There's another section, slightly later on, which deals with offences against human life and freedom, including, for example, abortion, physical assault, and so on. To me, as with the Australian Commission, it seems to me that would be a much better place to locate this particular area of legislation, not least because, of course, it applies not only to clergy, but to, indeed, anyone" (IICSA 2019, p. 135). Read goes on to add, "I think the law, as it is structured, focuses on the perpetrator and not on the victim, and I think that that's a balance that perhaps could, and should, be addressed in future changes" (IICSA 2019, p. 173). In the recent reform of penal law, the qualification of the sexual abuse of minors was revised in the recommended way. The mention of sexual abuse

was removed from the list of other sex offenses of former canon 1395 §2 CIC/1983 and given its own place in a new canon 1398 CIC/1983. This canon is now part of the so-called "offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty" (canons 1397–1398 CIC/1983). It follows canon 1397 with its penal norms on homicide, abduction, mutilation, and abortion. This new classification is an obvious and long overdue acknowledgment that sexual abuse is an offense that goes beyond the issue of celibacy as a violation of the victims' dignity and liberty.

2.2. Grooming and Child Pornography

The new ecclesiastical legislation also broadens the punishable offenses against minors in several respects in comparison to the old regulation in the Code. To the scope of sexual abuse, it adds grooming for pornographic purposes as well as the acquiring, retaining, exhibiting, and distributing of pornographic material (see canon 1398 §1 CIC/1983). The mention of grooming in ecclesiastical penal law is unprecedented. The new norm contains a problematic restriction, though. In commenting on the reform of ecclesiastical penal law, canonists Ed Condon and JD Flynn have criticized that the norm only renders grooming an offense when performed with pornographic purposes and not when performed with other sexual intentions (see Condon and Flynn 2021).

The new norm in the Code on the possession and distribution of pornographic material takes up an offense which was already punishable, following article 6 §1 no 2 of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Norms on Grave Delicts". However, while this regulation restricted the punishable offense to pornography of minors under the age of fourteen, the revision of penal law adjusted the age to include all minors, in accordance with concerns raised by the Australian Royal Commission. The Commission had suggested that the Australian bishops encourage the Apostolic See to change the law in this respect (see Recommendation 16.9, Commonwealth of Australia 2017, p. 51). The recent legal reform thus removed this age limitation so that possession and distribution of pornographic material of minors is now generally subject to punishment. The punishment for the mentioned offenses consists of removal from office and other penalties such as possible dismissal from the clerical state in severe cases.

2.3. A Broader View on Vulnerable Victims

In accordance with the legal revision introduced by the 2001 Motu Proprio *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* (see John Paul II 2001), the offense of sexual abuse of minors was adjusted to include all minors under the age of eighteen. The original norm of the 1983 Code referred to the age of sixteen. Legislation following article 6 §1 no 1 of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Norms on Grave Delicts" also broadened the circle of possible victims to include persons "who habitually have an imperfect use of reason" as well as others to whom the law grants equal protection. It is interesting to note that the legislation refrained to use the term "vulnerable adults" as commonly used in the debates on sexual abuse in church and also used by Francis in his Apostolic Letter *Vos estis lux mundi*. Such an indeterminate expression, however, was probably deemed not suitable for codified law (on the problematic ambiguity of "vulnerability" see Costigane 2020, pp. 308–10). Nonetheless, this decision may be criticized for narrowing the scope of possible victims. While *Vos estis lux mundi* understands as deserving protection "any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense" (article 1 §2 lit b), the new canon 1398 CIC/1983 limits victims to adults who constantly have an imperfect use of reason.

2.4. Expanded Circle of Punishable Offenders

Where the old Code merely addressed clerics as possible offenders, the revised law also addresses those who enjoy an ecclesiastical dignity or hold an office or function in church (see canon 1398 §2 CIC/1983). The amendment of the offense of sexual abuse to

include members of religious institutions appeared in *Vos estis lux mundi*, yet the inclusion of ecclesiastical officeholders is unprecedented. This change is also consistent with the Australian Royal Commission's proposal that Australian bishops urge the Apostolic See to amend the law to include as possible offenders "any person holding a 'dignity, office or responsibility in the Church' regardless of whether they are ordained or not ordained" (Recommendation 16.9, Commonwealth of Australia 2017, p. 51).

2.5. The "Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue"

The reform of ecclesiastical penal law has received much praise for its more comprehensive view of sexual abuse with regard to possible offenses, victims, and offenders. What has sparked continuous criticism, however, is the fact that the law still speaks of sexual abuse as an "offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue". This expression has been long criticized for being both opaque and misleading (on the history and use of the expression in canon law as well as on its widespread criticism, see (Provost 1995)). The wording is opaque insofar as it fails to use a clear terminology to describe the punishable offense. Linguistic ambiguity, in any case, is particularly problematic in penal norms, as it is a key principle of legal fairness to precisely convey to legal subjects which acts are punishable offenses. Furthermore, the phrase "offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue" is fundamentally misleading for the offense that appears in the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, which is, in fact, adultery. However, the ecclesiastical magisterium and the legislator have used this expression as an umbrella term to denote all kinds of sexual misconduct for centuries. As Gordon Read notes in his hearing during the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales, "I mean, historically, the church has always seen any kind of sexual sin as an unfolding of the sixth Commandment" (IICSA 2019, p. 131). Canonist Ronny Jenkins has rightly criticized that this practice of using one expression to cover all kind of sexual offenses is unusual compared to secular legislation, which frequently provides for a detailed classification of sexual offenses (see Jenkins 2004, p. 121). In church, some clarity nonetheless derives from jurisprudence which has worked out a list of sexual abuse offenses against minors covered by "the sixth commandment of the Decalogue". The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's (2020) *Vademecum* provides a list of offenses under no 2, which mentions "sexual relations (consensual or non-consensual), physical contact for sexual gratification, exhibitionism, masturbation, the production of pornography, inducement to prostitution, conversations and/or propositions of a sexual nature, which can also occur through various means of communication". Canonist Brendan Daly explains, "This description reflects the jurisprudence of the Congregation [of the Doctrine of the Faith, addition by the author]. These offenses include all actions that have a clear sexual intent, including any sexual activity the minor consents to or not" (Daly 2020, p. 198). Hence, the expression "offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue" has gained greater precision in ecclesiastical jurisprudence, while it is nevertheless not a helpful expression to add to the clarity of the penal norm of canon 1398 CIC/1983. In the end, however, recent legislation, which realizes many of the demands for reform with respect to the sexual abuse of minors, was evidently unwilling to revise the traditional language referring to sex offenses.

3. Sexual Violence with Adult Victims

The retaining of this wording was not merely an editorial oversight, as shown by the fact that legislation relies on the very same phrasing in other norms as well. It reappears in canon 1385 CIC/1983 in the regulation of the so-called *crimen sollicitationis* as the offense of priests who use confession to seduce penitents "to commit a sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue". Moreover, it emerges three times in all three paragraphs of canon 1395 CIC/1983 dealing with clerical offenses against celibacy.

3.1. Sexual Violence as a Disciplinary Issue

As mentioned, the reform of canonical penal law removed the sexual abuse of minors from the list of clerical offenses against celibacy and made it part of the "offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty". In this context, it is thus all the more striking that sexual violence against adults was not added to this particular section. Whenever a cleric "by force, threats, or abuse of his authority commits an offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue or forces someone to perform or submit to sexual acts" (canon 1395 §3 CIC/1983), these offenses, which fall under the section on "offenses against special obligations", are regarded as worthy of punishment insofar as they violate the clerical obligation to lead a celibate life. As they do not belong to the "offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty", legislation according to its current classification regards rape and sexual assault as punishable primarily because these offenses are incompatible with a celibate lifestyle. Consequently, they are mainly disciplinary issues. As offenses against clerical discipline, they are to be punished with just penalties, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state. As the reform left the regulations on sexual misconduct of clerics with or against adults widely untouched, one could dismiss this as insignificant. Nevertheless, one should not miss the implication of this decision to leave the regulations largely as they were. In such a major reform of legislation, particularly revolving around clerical sex offenses, it is striking that the reformers left the issue of sex offenses against adult victims who are not generally vulnerable widely untouched. It is incomprehensible that this was an editorial mishap. Rather, one must assume that legislation intentionally kept sexual violence against adults a mere issue of clerical discipline. The revised law accordingly does not view adults who fall prey to clerical sex offenders and who are capable of a sound use of reason as deserving of special protection or attention in church. Unlike minor victims of sexual abuse, the legislator does not take into account the sexual integrity of adult victims or their right of self-determination.

3.2. Clerical Authority and Abuse of Power

What is new, however, in the revised canon 1395 §3 CIC/1983 is that it includes as deserving of punishment not merely the use of force or threat in matters sexual, as mentioned by the former norm, but also the abuse of clerical authority to commit a sex offense. This idea already appeared in *Vos estis lux mundi* (see article 1 §1 lit a). It has raised criticism among canonists due to the problem of uncertainty of what constitutes abuse of authority. As canonist Helen Costigane observed with regard to *Vos estis*, "the question is raised as to how widely the term 'abuse of authority' is interpreted, whether it applies to a member of the clergy just because they are in a position of authority, and the extent of the vulnerability in the alleged victim" (Costigane 2020, p. 310). Ed Condon and JD Flynn, in commenting on the recent reform of penal law, further noted "that the legal notion of the abuse of authority is a concept with relatively little canonical jurisprudence, and room for a great deal of subjective disagreement—in short, something that can be difficult to prove, or disprove" (Condon and Flynn 2021). Condon and Flynn acknowledge that there are rather unambiguous cases of abuse of office with sexual intent, as in the case of former Archbishop of Washington Theodore McCarrick. However, in many other cases, it is arguably more difficult to distinguish what role is played in the sexual misconduct by the fact that the offenders are officeholders. Condon and Flynn see a practical legal challenge emerging from the regulation, stating, "priests and defense advocates are likely to continue to argue that it's unjust for an allegation like abuse of authority, which can seem legally nebulous, to be the deciding factor between losing or not losing the clerical state permanently, especially in allegations involving a single occurrence of misconduct, or as a compounding factor in an otherwise consensual but prohibited relationship" (Condon and Flynn 2021). Their remark is valid with regard to the current law and its application. What their remark also reveals, however, is that the problems derive precisely from the qualification of transgressions regulated in canon 1395 §3 CIC/1983 as offenses against celibacy. If one reads the norm through the lens of celibacy, one may come to Condon

and Flynn's conclusion that "abuse of authority" might play a role in "in an otherwise consensual but prohibited relationship". On the other hand, if we understand the norm as referring to offenses against the sexual integrity and self-determination of adult victims, it is hardly possible to imagine a "consensual" relationship whenever sex is based on the abuse of power. Abuse of authority, then, is exactly the factor that makes the notion of a consensual sexual relationship between adults untenable. Similar to the use of force or threats, it is the abuse of power derived from a position of authority, such as clerical status or an ecclesiastical office, which compels adult victims to engage in a sexual relationship without their free consent. The lack of clarity on this point in current law is precisely because canon 1395 §3 CIC/1983 is tied to clerical obligations such as celibacy. In fact, in the same way as the sexual abuse of minors, its rightful place is among the "offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty". Admittedly, such a re-classification would not solve the practical problem noted by Condon and Flynn of proving whether sexual acts were ultimately forced by an abuse of power. Nevertheless, this is equally difficult to prove in cases of force or threats in sexual relations between adults. While proving the use of force, threats, or abusive power to compel adult victims into sexual actions can be extremely difficult, each of these three strategies of enforcing sex overrides the free will of adults, compelling them into non-consensual sex.

The mentioned confusion to mistake abuse of authority to be a possible factor in a consensual relationship, in any case, is supported by the law itself. The failure of recent legislation to pay attention to the sexual integrity and self-determination of adults obscures that the insertion of "abuse of authority" into the law mentions an element that turns adult sex into an offense. It draws a red line which differentiates a regular use of power and authority from an *abusive* exercise of power, which turns adult sex into non-consensual sex. Secular legislation and adjudication have a long tradition of defining this distinction. The church could easily benefit from their findings if it were to acknowledge that adult sex also deserves protection from acts which violate the sexual integrity and self-determination of others.

4. Targeting Female Offenders

4.1. Attempted Ordination of Women

The Catholic public paid much attention to the changes in ecclesiastical legislation with regard to the sexual abuse of minors. Due to this focus, there was a tendency to overlook the fact that the recent reform of penal law also introduced a new offense into the Code of Canon Law: the attempt to confer ordination on a woman (see new canon 1379 §3 CIC/1983). This particular sanction is not new. It was introduced into canon law in 2007 (see Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2007; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2010, article 5). What is novel is that the recent reform of penal law inserted the attempted ordination of women as a penal norm into the Code. The norm dictates that both the minister who attempts to confer ordination on a woman and the woman who attempts to receive the ordination incur a *latae sententiae* excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See. This legislation accordingly qualified female ordination as one of the most gruesome ecclesiastical offenses on the order of sexual abuse of minors, violation of the sacramental seal, and desecration of consecrated hosts. Offending clerics may even be punished by dismissal from the clerical state. Theologian Denise Starkey observed with regard to this similar treatment by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Many were stunned when the church not only included women's ordination in the document, but also equated the ordination of women with the evil of pedophilia" (Starkey 2015, p. 184).

4.2. A Prominent Placing in the Code

As the content of the norm is not new, it is again important to ask why it deserves special consideration. Formal changes, however, can have serious implications. When legislation arranges norms, alters legal contexts, and couples certain norms, it is often not coincidental. To fully comprehend a law, it is necessary to pay attention to compositional

and editorial decisions. Hence, in this instance, one may ask what the legislation intended to communicate by not merely inserting an existing penal norm into the Code but by giving the violation of ordaining women a most prominent place among the "offenses against the sacraments". The attempted ordination of women is now part of the *first* canon in the relatively long list of offenses against the sacraments (see canons 1379–1389 CIC/1983). It directly follows the norms which criminalize the attempt to celebrate the Eucharist without having received priestly ordination (see canon 1379 §1 no 1 CIC/1983) and to administer the sacrament of penance without being capable to do so (see canon 1379 §1 no 2 CIC/1983). As the third offense against the sacraments mentioned in this list, the attempted ordination of women has a more visible place in the law than the desecration of consecrated species (see canon 1382 §1 CIC/1983). It is also more exposed than *crimen sollicitationis*, the offense of priests using the occasion of confession to seduce a penitent (see canon 1385 CIC/1983). It thus appears that discouraging women from attempting to enter the ranks of the clergy and of ecclesiastical hierarchy is imperative to the legislator. He not only found the penal norm to deserve a central place in the current Code, but also in the list of offenses against the sacramental structure of the church. The message is clear: Attempting to ordain women is not merely an attack on ecclesiastical discipline, such as sexual violence of clerics against adult victims, but an attack on the sacramental constitution of the church itself.

4.3. Ending the Debates on Women's Ordination

One may also interpret this particular legal reform to be politically motivated. Ed Condon and JD Flynn suggest as much in their comment on the reform of ecclesiastical penal law. The authors interpret the insertion into the Code of the attempted ordination of women as mainly a political signal to end the recent debates, especially those voices in the local churches which insist on the possibility of female ordination. As Condon and Flynn write, "Given recent debate about the possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate, and the calls from some German bishops to move forward on the ordination of women—first to the diaconate and later to the priesthood—the new text of the canon could be a signal from Rome that any attempt to forge ahead with these plans will be treated as a breach of ecclesial communion, and punished accordingly" (Condon and Flynn 2021).

4.4. Abortion as a Female Offense

In this political light, it is interesting to study those norms where recent legislation evidently saw the need to change the law either by revising old norms or adding norms to the Code which had not been part of the codified law. Yet it is similarly revealing to study some of the norms where the legal reform, despite reasonable expectations, provided no change at all. The ecclesiastical offense of abortion is one example. Many canonists such as James Coriden have long argued that "there is an urgent need to reform the Church's law on the crime of abortion" (Coriden 1973, p. 195). The offense of abortion nevertheless survived the reform of canonical penal law unchanged. The regulation reads, "A person who actually procures an abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication" (former canon 1398, now canon 1397 §2 CIC/1983). This norm in fact falls within "offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty", a classification which was denied to sexual offenses against adults, as discussed in Section 3. While the Code dedicated a separate canon to the offense of abortion before the reform, the norm is now part of a canon which contains several offenses such as homicide, abduction, imprisonment, mutilation, and grievous bodily harm (see canon 1397 §1 CIC/1983). This connection is striking as it couples the typical "female" offense of abortion with typical "male" offenses. Canon law admittedly punishes not only women who undergo an abortion but also men who carry out an abortion (e.g., medical personnel); nevertheless, the offense as such revolves around the female body and, thus, primarily directs punishment at women. The offense exists because the church perceives women and their procreative duties in a particular normative light that necessitates the moral condemnation of a women's decision to terminate pregnancy. In any case, to emphasize the heinousness of abortion, ecclesiastical legislation traditionally

regards it as necessary to add a *legal* disqualification to the moral condemnation. Here, abortion is not merely treated as a sin but also as a crime. Hence, the law criminalizes women as the natural offenders of abortion, and it also criminalizes men supporting them as their technical partners in crime. Thus, even though punishment includes men, it seems fair to understand abortion as a typical "female" offense. It therefore stands in clear contrast to the typical "male" offenses criminalized in the preceding §1 of canon 1397 CIC/1983. The 2020 criminal statistic for Germany, for instance, notes 2610 male suspects compared to 571 female suspects of homicide, 122,408 male suspects compared to 21,643 female suspects of deprivation of liberty, and 280,436 male suspects compared to 73,515 female suspects of bodily harm (see Bundeskriminalamt 2020b).

4.5. Different Standards of Punishment

Bearing in mind the sex difference regarding the offenses of canon 1397 CIC/1983, it is worth noting how the punishments for the offenses differ as well. While abortion is sanctioned with *latae sententiae* excommunication, ipso facto bringing about the excommunication on the offender upon successfully committing the offense, the other more "male" offenses are to be punished ("*puniatur*") with just penalties. Hence, the related punishments do not befall the offenders upon committing the offense but require an ecclesiastical ordinary to prosecute the offenses and impose sanctions—which is extremely rare in ecclesiastical practice. Consequently, abortion as a typical female offense is punished ipso facto with one of the most severe penal instruments of ecclesiastical penal law, the *latae sententiae* excommunication. In contrast, most male offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty are in theory punished with an undetermined "just" penalty, but in practice, frequently remain wholly unpunished. It is therefore apparent that ecclesiastical penal law treats abortion more strictly than even first-degree murder (see also Coriden 1973, p. 195). That is rather surprising, considering that ecclesiastical authorities tend to compare abortion with murder. Indeed, quite recently, Pope Francis called abortion precisely that in a press conference on the return flight to Rome after the Apostolic Journey to Slovakia (see Francis 2021b). Theologian Gina Menzies, in the Irish Times, noted that the way ecclesiastical legislation treats abortion in comparison to other offenses signals that "the Catholic Church considers that abortion is the worst sin that a human can commit, and that terrorism and child sexual abuse are less serious sins", taking into account that suspects of these other offenses are "entitled to due process before any penalty is imposed" (Menzies 2018). While the overwhelming male majority of murderers never face ecclesiastical sanctions, women who undergo an abortion incur excommunication. Critical voices such as Menzies' have repeatedly addressed this injustice over several decades. Their criticism, in any case, has not moved legislation to address the issue in the recent reform of ecclesiastical penal law. On the contrary, recent legislation has even emphasized the unequal treatment of "male" and "female" offenses by coupling them in one canon.

4.6. Different Papal Policies

The legislator's decision to abide with criminalizing abortion has a particular sting in light of the current debates in the United States. In June 2021, a majority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops voted in favor of preparing a document on the Eucharist which could pave the way for denying communion to Catholic politicians who support pro-choice positions such as the current U.S. President Joe Biden. The decision appears to have been made against the advice from Rome. Francis recently openly opposed the idea of denying communion to politicians who support pro-choice positions. Instead, the pope suggested that the pastors should deal with these issues in a pastoral instead of a political or legal way (see Francis 2021b). The U.S. bishops, in the meantime, seem to have relented, stating, "There will be no national policy on withholding Communion from politicians" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2021). They were apparently persuaded by the papal wish to avoid political confrontation. Francis as a politician and a pastor seems to oppose treating abortion as a legal matter whenever political leaders and their access

to communion are concerned. On the other hand, as a legislator, he avoided tackling the situation of women who undergo an abortion and ipso facto incur an excommunication excluding them from communion. Obviously, in this case, he did not see the pastoral solution as appropriate and decided instead to abide by the law's severe response.

5. The Impact of Procedural Issues

The recent reform of ecclesiastical penal law was merely a revision of Book VI on the substantial penal law of the church, not a reform of procedural law. The legislation thus left Book VII on ecclesiastical processes untouched, including its norms on the penal process (see canons 1717–1728 CIC/1983). It is nevertheless worth considering to what extent reforming penal law may be successful in improving the treatment of sexual abuse and violence cases if the reform does not involve procedural law. After all, procedural law is what guides church authorities' response to ecclesiastical offenses. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the suitability of existent procedural law for ensuring due process and fair trial both to suspects of ecclesiastical offenses as well as to their victims. It is also important to consider if and to what extent the new substantial norms touch upon procedural issues regarding the prosecution of sexual offenses in church.

5.1. Priests Prosecuting Clerics

As elaborated in Section 2, the recent reform of penal law took pains to revise canon law to respond more effectively to cases of sexual abuse of minors in church. Nonetheless, it failed to address some of the procedural challenges of these cases. One problem is that the abuse proceedings against clerics are entirely run by priests. Following the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Norms on Grave Delicts", only priests may be called upon as judges, promotors of justice, notaries, procurators, and advocates in these cases (see articles 10–14). While the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith can grant a dispensation from this requirement for the aforementioned offices and functions (see article 15), church authorities rarely make use of this option. Ultimately, the regular restriction of these offices and functions to priests attests to the congregation's and church authorities' reluctance to include laypeople, and even deacons, in abuse cases against clerics. Helen Costigane has critically commented on the "non-involvement of independent laypeople" (Costigane 2020, p. 313) by noting that it is evidence of clericalism. She observes, "those who have expressed concerns about the effect and impact of clericalism on the whole sexual abuse crisis cannot fail to notice that the process . . . can be carried out entirely by clerics" (Costigane 2020, p. 312).

5.2. Prescription in Abuse Cases

When looking closer at the revised norms of penal law, one can find that the recent legislation tackled some procedural issues. One obvious change is the new regulation on prescription in the Code, which sets a twenty-year time period for the prescription of abuse cases (see canon 1362 §1 no 2 CIC/1983) in accordance with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Norms on Grave Delicts" (see article 7). The Code originally stipulated a period of five years before these cases came under the statute of limitations. The extended period for abuse cases is not new per se, but its insertion into the Code is an important signal. By extending the time frame, the legislator acknowledges the particular challenge for minor victims of sex abuse to come forward with accusations.

5.3. The Obligation to Take Action

While the old canon 1341 CIC/1983 was rather hesitant in obliging the ordinaries to initiate judicial or administrative procedures in penal cases, namely only after other pastoral means had failed to repair the scandal, restore justice, and better the offenders ("*proceduram . . . promovendam curet*"), the revised canon 1341 CIC/1983 emphasizes that the ordinaries *must* take action and initiate procedures when they find that pastoral means have failed to achieve the intended purposes ("*proceduram . . . promovere debet*"). Hence, with

current canon law, diocesan bishops and other authorities who preside over communities of the faithful can hardly ignore accusations of sexual misconduct against their clergy anymore. Otherwise, they might become liable to prosecution themselves (see new canon 1371 §6 CIC/1983; see Francis 2016; see Francis 2019, article 1 §1 lit b).

5.4. The Presumption of Innocence

Another obvious amendment of ecclesiastical penal law with procedural implications is the introduction of the presumption of innocence into the current Code. Many voices have rightly emphasized the importance of the reform of ecclesiastical penal law, which finally implements the presumption of innocence into the law (e.g., Condon and Flynn 2021). The old law did not explicitly contain the presumption. However, as Ronny Jenkins has shown, it also did not contain any presumption of guilt. As canonical procedural law obliges the accuser to meet the burden of proof (see canon 1526 §1 CIC/1983), defendants are to be acquitted whenever their culpability is not proven in a way that makes the judges morally certain of guilt (see canon 1608 §4 CIC/1983). While one might interpret these provisions as effectively containing the presumption of innocence (see Jenkins 2004, pp. 117–18; Brown 2018; Renken 2020, pp. 228–29), Jenkins is critical of this interpretation. He notes that an acquittal due to a lack of proof that a defendant is guilty is not identical with presuming his or her innocence. The insertion of the presumption of innocence into the Code responds to that dearth. This development of canon law thus seems to accord with the principle of due process common in most secular legal orders. The revised canon 1321 §1 CIC/1983 now starts off the section on "Those who are liable to penal sanctions" with declaring, "Any person is considered innocent until the contrary is proved".

5.5. Why Now?

Modern procedural law typically requires that criminal courts prosecuting a crime presume the defendant to be innocent until proven otherwise. In any case, the history of ecclesiastical penal law and penal procedural law has long survived without positivizing this principle of due process. Given how long it took for the ecclesiastical legislator to incorporate the presumption of innocence into positive canon law, it is worth asking why it was expedient for the legislator in the last reform of canonical penal law to finally implement the principle into the Code. Examining the context, one can observe that legislation obviously began to see the necessity to do so, after the past two decades have put increasing pressure on ecclesiastical authorities to prosecute allegations of sexual abuse against clerics. While never before in the history of ecclesiastical penal law did legislation see the need to positivize the presumption of innocence, it seemingly found this a necessary step now, as ecclesiastical penal procedures are merely engaged in trying clerics for abuse. Ronny Jenkins noted shortly after the U.S. American Bishops' Conference had taken radical action to address sexual abuse in 2002 that the presumption of innocence was rather limited in canon law. Jenkins observed how the legislation changed the bishops' practice, whereby their new policy of "zero tolerance" in fact established a "presumption of guilt" that has dominated the authorities' dealing with suspects ever since. Jenkins remarked, "once an allegation is received, the presumption of bishops is not that the cleric is innocent until proven guilty, but that something did, in fact happen. Such a conclusion then leads to swift and exaggerated steps to remove the cleric from public ministry and view" (Jenkins 2004, p. 116). Ed Condon and JD Flynn, in their recent observations on the reform of ecclesiastical penal law, similarly interpret the implementation of the presumption of innocence into the Code as motivated by the problem deriving from "zero tolerance" policies against clerics accused of sexual abuse. Not only has it become standard procedure in U.S. American dioceses to promptly remove accused clerics from office (see also Coughlin 2003, pp. 990–92), but bishops often refuse to reinstall them later if the allegations are not proven. "In many dioceses", Condon and Flynn write, "the desire to be seen to act swiftly and without hesitation to remove priests accused of serious misconduct has created a class of what many canonists refer to as 'unassignables'—priests whom bishops refuse to

return to ministry even after a canonical process has failed to sustain the allegations against them, because of the possibility of public outcry" (Condon and Flynn 2021). The authors therefore assess the incorporation of the presumption of innocence into the Code as directed to deal with these cases. This is also quite plausible considering that *Vos estis lux mundi* mentions the presumption of innocence when speaking about suspects of sexual abuse under investigation in article 12 §7. It specifically admonishes the investigators that "[t]he person under investigation enjoys the presumption of innocence". One can thus easily see why legislation found the introduction of the presumption of innocence into the Code was deemed necessary in the recent reform of penal law. This decision, however, is also questionable, as it seems to be motivated entirely by the desire to protect accused clerics from prejudgment. Consequently, while this constitutes an important step in due process in church, it is nevertheless unfortunate that pressure must be placed on clerics—clerics accused of sexual misconduct and bishops accused of covering up these cases—to induce ecclesiastical legislation to accord with modern procedural standards.

6. Conclusions

Summing up the observations in the preceding sections, they merge into a more comprehensive picture of how the current law of the church deals with sex and violence. First of all, closer scrutiny reveals that legislation deals with sexual abuse and violence in an ambivalent way. In the context of *sex as violence*, it is noteworthy that the law now treats the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults as offenses which violate the victims' life, dignity, and liberty. At the same time, however, it fails to precisely acknowledge this connection when adult victims are concerned. This failure is not editorial in nature, but rather points at a systemic problem. If adults are not part of the group of vulnerable adults, the law continues to view sexual violence of clerics against them merely in the light of clerical discipline. It continues to pay only minor attention to the sexual integrity of adult individuals and their right to sexual self-determination. It is therefore questionable whether the church can successfully fight sexual abuse among their clerical ranks if it is difficult to unambiguously identify from the above-mentioned canonical legal qualifications the recognition of sexual integrity and self-determination as rights of the individual, which are worthy of the church's protection.

A further aspect which deserves mention points to the systemic fostering of abusive structures. Specifically, current legislation contributes to the unequal treatment of male and female victims of sex offenses in church. The reform of the penal norms shows that recent legislation paid most attention to offenses where the victims are predominantly male, as with the sexual abuse of minors in church. Little attention, by contrast, was devoted to offenses where most victims are female, as with sexual violence against adults. One of the shocking findings of the German so-called MHG Study funded by the German Bishops' Conference is that 62.8 percent of those affected by child abuse were male, while only 34.9 percent of the victims were female (see MHG Study 2018, A.2). The numbers differ in other contexts, as evidenced by the 2020 criminal statistic for Germany. The report mentions 825 male victims compared to 7955 female victims of minor age, making 9.4 percent of the victims male, and 90.6 percent female. The debate as to why in church the victims are to a strikingly high degree male is ongoing. The authors of the MHG Study attributed the predominance of male victims in part to the fact that boys traditionally have been altar servers or entered Catholic boarding schools (see MHG Study 2018, A.3). However, they also noted that this explanation alone is not sufficient. The study's authors also cautiously indicated that factors such as celibacy and the Catholic stance on homosexuality might foster suppressed sexual inclinations among the clergy. Ultimately, we do not know enough at present about why clerical abusers have usually targeted boys. Still, the recent reform of penal law took the alarming numbers very seriously. The revision of the law accordingly emphasized the sexual abuse of minors as a heinous offense in church and sought to facilitate the prosecution of these cases.

As discussed in Section 3, sexual violence against adults did not receive the same degree of attention. With regard to these cases, there is no reason to assume that the ratio of victims in church with respect to sex does not mirror the typical breakdown in other criminal statistics. In particular with regard to sexual violence of clerics against adults, which is coupled with spiritual abuse, there is overwhelming evidence that these attacks are mostly launched against women (see Reisinger 2018). We may therefore assume that the vast majority of adult victims of sex offenses are female. For Germany, the 2020 criminal statistic noted 1460 male victims compared to 18,312 female adult victims of sexual violence, making 7.4 percent of the victims male, and 92.6 percent female (see Bundeskriminalamt 2020a). Assuming that the situation in church is similar, the legislation, which improved the law with regard to the predominantly male minor victims, did not do the same for the largely female victims of sex offenses against adults.

I am not comparing these numbers to devaluate the most important step of revising the law on the sexual abuse of minors in church. The reform was essential insofar as it qualified the sexual abuse of minors and of vulnerable adults as "offenses against human life, dignity, and liberty". However, the merit of this revised classification of sexual abuse casts in stark relief the fact that the legislation did not reassess sexual violence against adults in the same way. By not establishing sexual violence against adults as a transgression against human life, dignity, and liberty, the reform represents a failure to deal with a fundamental aspect of the abusive and violent structures in the church. The church, namely, still does not attribute sexual integrity and human self-determination in sexual matters a general value which deserves protection, independently of whether violence affects minors or adults. This legislation thus left one systemic factor of violence in church unchanged. One might also further doubt the value of the reform in fighting abuse against minors. After all, it is unlikely that systems which do not attribute sexual integrity and human self-determination in sexual issues a general value will be successful in protecting minors against sexual abuse. Similarly, it is also unlikely that systems which do not show greater concern for offenses which mostly victimize women will be particularly successful in fighting violence against children. From a critical legal studies perspective, there are many points of discussion for why ecclesiastical legislation did not pay more attention to the evident parallels and interdependencies between sexual violence against minors and against adults.

The view that recent legislation all but ignored women's suffering in church is supported by the fact that it retained abortion as an ecclesiastical offense. My article does not make an argument with regard to the church's general stance on abortion, but it nevertheless remains open to debate, from a critical legal studies' standpoint, as to why the church continues to criminalize abortion given that abortion is also frequently tied to the marginalization of women (see Bong 2021). The current pope in fact argues in other contexts that the problem of abortion should be addressed in pastoral settings, and yet legislation continues to address abortion as a legal issue that criminalizes women who undergo an abortion and the women and men who support them. In light of the current reform of penal law, this leads to an unsettling observation: Where legislation pays little attention to offenses which afflict mostly women as victims, it deals harshly with those cases in which women are the primary offenders. The penal norm on abortion did not merely remain unaltered throughout the reform, but is rather now coupled in one canon with typical "male" offenses such as homicide and grievous bodily harm. The latter, however, are punished less severely than abortion. Thus, while the magisterium often compares abortion with homicide, the law punishes abortion more strictly. Recent legislation even emphasizes this disparity by creating a more visible contrast of "male" and "female" offenses by coupling them in canon 1397 CIC/1983. In doing so, it effectively underscores the obvious imbalance of punishments. Gina Menzies speaks of a "misogynistic legacy" with regard to the church's legal dealing with abortion and suspects that " . . . the rationale for treating abortion as the most heinous sin lies in the fact that the Catholic Church only sees women in terms of maternity, and not as human beings with their own inalienable rights" (Menzies 2018). It is not necessary to speculate about reasons why legislation treats

women in the aforementioned way to ask why the unequal treatment of the sexes is openly spotlighted with contrasting "male" and "female" offenses in one canon.

The observation that legislation in the last reform paid less attention to female victims and more attention to female offenders is also supported by the introduction of a new female offense into the Code: the attempted ordination of women. Again, it must be noted that, as with abortion, offenders punished by the penal norm are also male. However, the offense as such revolves around women and their wish to enter the Catholic clergy. Women who actively oppose their exclusion from the clerical state are criminalized and likewise clerics who support them. Protecting the status quo by criminalizing energetic female attempts to become part of the clergy and thus the highest ranks of the church was evidently so important to the legislation that trespassing this norm was regarded as deserving one of the harshest punishments. Indeed, the sanction involves the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a similar way to cases of sexual abuse of minors. The message of this regulation is clear: Whenever the offensive sex attempts to enter the traditional male domain, she becomes subject to similar types of punishment as sex offenders. Women who fail to respect their place in church essentially violate the communion in such a profound way that they deserve to be sanctioned in the severest manner.

Besides the fact that the church's criminalizing of women for attempting ordination may be a problematic signal, the gender imbalance cemented by penalizing these attempts could also prove detrimental to the main interest of the past legal reform to improve the church's dealing with sexual abuse. This might be the case if the exclusion of women from the clergy, also with the help of penal norms, lends structural support to preserving church hierarchy as a clericalist system. The MHG Study and other studies on church abuse have suggested "clericalism" is one factor which has contributed to the high number of abuse cases overall. The MHG Study, for instance, described clericalism as male elitism and "a hierarchical-authoritarian system that can lead the priest to adopt an attitude of dominating non-ordained individuals in interactions because he holds a superior position by virtue of his ministry and ordination" (MHG Study 2018, A.3). Hence, the identity of members of the clerical elite is reinforced through the marginalization of laypeople and particularly women. The researchers further noted that they understand sexual abuse to be "an extreme manifestation of such dominance", as "[s]exual abuse is above all also an abuse of power" (MHG Study 2018, A.3). Therefore, the authors conclude that clericalism may be a key cause of abuse and "a specific structural feature of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church" (MHG Study 2018, A.3). They also connect clericalism with a system of covering up abuse, finding that "[a]n authoritarian-clerical understanding of the ministry can lead to church leaders regarding a priest who has committed sexualised violence more as a threat to their own clerical system than as a menace to other children or juveniles" (MHG Study 2018, A.3). This view, then, only encourages "[c]overing events up and protecting the system" (MHG Study 2018, A.3) rather than prosecuting the offenders. Hence, one systemic problem fortifying abusive structures may lie in group cohesion and solidarity among exclusive elites. It is not surprising that members of these circles protect each other to prevent the criminal prosecution of group members. Legislation which perpetuates a purely male clerical system, including with the help of a penal law that harshly sanctions women who want to break into these circles, may be regarded as supporting male elitism and clericalism as systemic features. These, in turn, have permitted abusive structures to flourish in church.

In light of this particular context, it is not easy to assess the recent introduction of the presumption of innocence into positive canon law. Remarkably, legislation only just recently saw the need to establish the presumption as part of positive law in the wake of stripping the ecclesiastical authorities of their earlier discretionary power in dealing with cases of sexual abuse and misconduct. For diocesan bishops and other authorities who preside over communities of the faithful, current canon law makes it nearly impossible to ignore accusations of sexual violence against their clergy. With the imminent risk of becoming liable to prosecution themselves, covering up offenses is hardly an option any

more. It is striking to note that in this precise historical moment where legislation had to oblige the local authorities to rigidly prosecute the cases and stripped them of much of their former flexibility in dealing with these issues, it also saw the need to emphasize the presumption of innocence. Certainly, the historical circumstances of its emergence do not devalue the presumption of innocence as one of the key principles of criminal prosecution. It is one of the major cornerstones of fair prosecution and trials and therefore also has its rightful place among the guiding principles of ecclesiastical penal prosecution and processes. Nonetheless, one may understandably hesitate to simply praise this legislative decision as one wise and long-overdue move to subject ecclesiastical processes to the rule of law and its standards of due process. Given the precise historical moment, some Catholics might have a hard time of suppressing doubts of whether this piece of reform was truly about ensuring due process for all offenders in church or about handing the ecclesiastical authorities a helpful tool to defend clerics against accusations of sexual misconduct and themselves against the accusation of prosecutorial negligence.

Summing up through the lens of critical legal studies: Ecclesiastical legislation rightly used the recent reform of penal law to improve the legal situation of mostly male minor victims of clerical abuse. At the same time, however, it missed the chance to improve the legal situation of mostly female adult victims of clerical sex offenses and abuse of power. Legislation continues to criminalize women who terminate their pregnancy. Moreover, while it draws an equivalence with murder, mostly committed by males, it punishes abortion more severely. Legislation further introduced a harsh punishment into the Code which criminalizes women who attempt to enter the clergy. All things considered, the reform of ecclesiastical penal law has improved the situation of minors in church. By the same token, it has exacerbated the situation of women. One can thus only wonder in this context what is more perplexing—how ecclesiastical legislation deals with women or the fact that nobody seems to care?

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: Many thanks to Christopher Reid who carefully proofread my article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Observations on the Magisterium's Gender Anthropology and Its Consequences for Women in the Catholic Church

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Abstract: The Catholic Church has a gender-hierarchical constitution. The Church's magisterium justifies this structure and the lack of gender equality within the Church with the complementary sexuality of human beings as man and woman, which is considered to be the will of God. In this article, this doctrine is presented in detail, based on relevant documents of the Church's magisterium, and is classified with regard to its consequences for women within the Catholic Church. Even though the Church rejects criticism of its position as a dangerous "(gender) ideology", fewer and fewer women (and men) accept its teaching of a specific "genius of women" and of the assigned gender-specific roles in the Church and in the world associated with it. Moreover, there is now a growing awareness that violence against women is usually related to such hierarchical gender concepts.

Keywords: anthropology; catholic church; gender; magisterium; woman; women's ordination

Citation: Anuth, Bernhard Sven. 2022. Observations on the Magisterium's Gender Anthropology and Its Consequences for Women in the Catholic Church. *Religions* 13: 305. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040305

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber, Doris Reisinger and Hans Zollner

Received: 15 February 2022
Accepted: 26 March 2022
Published: 31 March 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

Since Pope Francis' revision of the Church's criminal law came into force in December 2021, sexual violence against women in the Roman Catholic Church is no longer merely a punishable violation of the obligation of celibacy, but also a crime against human life, dignity and freedom. Moreover, for the first time, sexual assaults committed by someone taking advantage of their ecclesiastical position and the authority associated with it can now also be prosecuted under Church law (cc. 1395 § 3 and 1398 § 2 Codex Iuris Canonici 1983).

However, this only partially improves the general legal position of women in the Catholic Church; they are still excluded from all offices through which they could shape Church identity by magisterial teaching and/or through ecclesiastical leadership, due to the impossibility of ordaining women as priests, which by the magisterium is considered to be a definitive, i.e., infallible doctrine (cf. Pope John Paul II 1994; Ladaria 2018). The magisterium justifies this doctrinal and legal situation with the complementary sexuality of human beings as man and woman, as it is considered to be God's will. Against this background, the "reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse [. . .], is not a question open to discussion" (Pope Francis 2013, No. 104). Since, according to church law, women cannot validly receive the ordination of deacons either (cf. Anuth 2020), they are limited to the lay state, but even in this they are not legally equal to men (cf. e.g., Lüdecke 2012, pp. 184–91), even though Pope Francis recently amended c. 230 § 1 CIC to allow women to become lectors and acolytes as well (Pope Francis 2021, p. 10). What would be discrimination under state law is considered to be a consequence of the magisterial gender anthropology within the Church, which, according to the Church's self-understanding, is not mere opinion or even an "invention" of the Pope and the Bishops, but their interpretation of God's plan for women and men guided by the Holy Spirit. However, the Church has long had a serious mediation problem in this regard and is also currently criticized for promoting misogynistic violence against women through its magisterial gender anthropology and the gender-specific norms of canon law (cf. Leimgruber 2021, p. 176f.).[1]

2. The Church's Magisterium and Women

As the pastoral theologian Rainer Bucher noted a good 10 years ago, the Catholic image of women is "even and especially among Catholic women—apart from a small minority—simply rejected, even ridiculed" (Bucher 2009, p. 287). These problems of acceptance are the result of social developments that also find support among convinced Catholics. The Church's authority knows this and has always reacted to it with "doctrinal intensification and inculcation" (Lüdecke 2012, p. 211).

As early as 1981, Pope John Paul II clearly stated the Church's position on the rights and duties of women and on their dignity and social role in his Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio" (Pope John Paul II 1981, No. 22–24). Then, on the occasion of the Marian Year in 1988, he set forth in detail the Church's teaching on the dignity and vocation of women in the Apostolic Letter "Mulieris dignitatem" and reaffirmed it in 1995 in a "Letter to Women" (Pope John Paul II 1995). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith provided a reminder of the Church's doctrine in 2004 in its "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004). The reason for this reminder and inculcation was that the Congregation saw the Church challenged by "certain currents of thought which are often at variance with the authentic advancement of women" (ibid., No. 1). Regarding the contents, the Congregation does not criticize individual publications or theologians, but identifies certain currents and tendencies that it considers to be dangerous (cf. Lüdecke 2004, p. 234). One of these tendencies, according to the Congregation, "strongly" emphasizes "conditions of subordination [of women] in order to give rise to antagonism". Women react to male abuse of power with their own pursuit of power and thus become "the adversaries of men". From the Congregation's point of view, this results in a "confusion regarding the human person" that is particularly harmful to the structure of the family (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 2).

"[I]n the wake of this first tendency" the Congregation sees a second one emerging, which minimizes the bodily difference between man and woman (*sex*) while the category of *gender* as a "purely cultural element [. . .] is emphasized to the maximum and held to be primary". From the Church's point of view this conceals "the difference or duality of the sexes" and "has enormous consequences" since it not only calls "into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father," but also equates homosexuality and heterosexuality and promotes "a new model of polymorphous sexuality" (ibid., No. 2). As the Congregation states, such an anthropology apparently denies the predestination of the person on the basis of his or her "essential constitution" as man or woman and renders "the fact that the Son of God assumed human nature in its male form" unimportant and meaningless (ibid., No. 3). Where the relationship between the sexes is "distorted" in this way, "their access to the face of God is threatened" (ibid., No. 7). For the Church, the relationship between man and woman cannot "be a kind of mistrustful and defensive opposition" (ibid., No. 14).

In the letter, the Church itself is being called an "expert in humanity" with "a perennial interest in whatever concerns men and women" which has "contributed to a deeper understanding of this fundamental question, in particular through the teaching of John Paul II" (ibid., No. 1). Nevertheless, this question remains "highly topical", as Pope Benedict XVI emphasized on the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical "Mulieris dignitatem", and went on to say: "The man-woman relationship in its respective specificity, reciprocity and complementarity certainly constitutes a central point of the 'anthropological question', so decisive in contemporary culture and ultimately for every culture" (Pope Benedict XVI 2008, p. 163). In 2009, on the occasion of the International Women's Day, the then Pope stated that the Church wanted to continue being committed "to ensure that every woman always and everywhere may live and express her abilities to the full, obtaining complete respect for her dignity" (Pope Benedict XVI 2009, p. 6). In the meantime, Pope Francis has also expressed himself similarly on various occasions and described the magisterial position, for example, as follows: "For quite some time, at least in

western societies, the model of woman's *social subordination* to man has been surpassed; it is, however, an age-old model that has never completely exhausted its negative effect. We have even overcome a second model, that of pure and simple *parity*, applied mechanically, and of absolute *equality*. And thus a new paradigm has emerged, that of *reciprocity*, in equivalence and difference. The relationship man/woman must therefore recognize that both are necessary insomuch as yes, they possess an identical nature, but each with its own modality. One is necessary for the other, and vice versa, for they truly complete the fullness of the person" (Pope Francis 2015a). The question is: what does this mean in detail?

3. God's Plan for Woman and Man

As soon as 1981, Pope John Paul II had already declared in his Apostolic Exhortation "Christifidelis laici", that by taking part in the "reflection on the anthropological and theological basis of femininity", the Catholic Church "enters the historic process of the various movements for the promotion of woman", and in doing so the Church reaches "the very basic aspect of woman as a personal being" and therefore can provide a "most precious contribution". Above all, however, the Church sees itself committed "to obey God, who created the individual 'in his image', 'male and female he created them' *(Gen* 1:27) and who intended that they would accept the call of God to come to know reverence and live his plan. It is a plan that 'from the beginning' has been indelibly imprinted in the very being of the human person—men and women—and, therefore, in the make-up, meaning and deepest workings of the individual" (Pope John Paul II 1989, No. 50). This signifies, that the unchangeable basis of all anthropology is, according to the Church's official teaching, "the revealed truth concerning man as 'the image and likeness' of God" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 6; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 5). The cornerstones of this divine plan for man and woman, constituted from and by creation (cf. Pope John Paul II 1989, No. 50; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 12), "can never be abrogated", although it is and will be "upset and darkened by sin" (ibid., No. 6). Thus, already in the first creation account, the Bible describes humans as sexually differentiated beings, who are created for and dependent on this relationship. As such, human beings are the image of God (ibid., No. 5). From the Church's point of view, the importance of the sexual difference is unequivocally affirmed in the second creation account; Eve is not an "inferior" but a "vital helper" for Adam (No. 6). Man and woman are considered to be related to each other: they are called to be there for each other and to complement each other (cf. Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 7; Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 7; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 6). This is considered by the Church to be "the heart of God's original plan and the deepest truth about man and woman, as willed and created by him" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 6). However, the relationship of the sexes was defaced by sin: "In this tragic situation, the equality, respect and love that are required in the relationship of man and woman according to God's original plan, are lost" (ibid., No. 7).

In the eyes of the Church's magisterium, the biblical text clearly indicates that in their common humanity, both sexes are essentially alike: "From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. *The woman is another 'I' in a common humanity*" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 6). The equal dignity of man and woman as persons, however, does not mean indistinctive equality, but "is realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity, giving rise to a harmonious relationship of 'uni-duality'" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 8). In this sense, the sexual difference characterizes man and woman "not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual" level, and this "diversity, linked to the complementarity of the two sexes, allows thorough response to the design of God according to the vocation to which each one is called" (Holy Congregation for Catholic Education 1983, No. 5). According to the Church's conviction, only sin has turned this creationally good relationship of the sexes into a "potentially conflictual" one (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 8).

The basic three-step of the magisterium's gender anthropology therefore consists of the following: "Man and woman are equal as persons", "men and women are different in

their expression of humanity", "women and men are dependent on mutual partnership" (cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference 1981, pp. 8–18). In external perception, this has long been perceived as a "stereotypical pattern of argumentation" of post-conciliar Church teachings on questions of the position of men and women, because on the one hand, "the equal personal dignity of women is emphasized again and again, on the other hand, the peculiarity of women, their specific, special nature is strongly emphasized, in order to legitimize a different assignment of tasks and roles" (Raming 1990, p. 420). Others state that a theological gender anthropology "at the height of the current state of human scientific research" remains a desideratum as long as the Church's magisterium holds on to "a pre-modern, essentialist concept of nature", "by which certain assumptions about the 'nature' of women (or the sexes) are directly linked to normative expectations of their social roles" (Heimbach-Steins 2007, p. 34).

The magisterium is nevertheless immune to such criticism, even if it is shared by many of the faithful, because according to their self-understanding, the Pope and the Bishops are not free to change the current Church's doctrine on the relations between man and woman. Thus, Pope John Paul II emphasized that a deepening of the theological and anthropological foundations of gender difference is, as always, "a question of understanding the reason for and the consequences of the Creator's decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man. It is only by beginning from these bases, which make it possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and vocation of women, that one is able to speak of their active presence in the Church and in society" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 1). God's plan for the sexes is the crucial factor for the magisterium's anthropology. The Pope and the Bishops see themselves committed to this divine plan as its binding interpreters (cf. Second Vatican Council 1966, No. 10; c. 747 § 1 Codex Iuris Canonici 1983) when emphasizing that "man and woman are distinct, and will remain so for all eternity" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 12).

The knowledge that God created human beings as man and woman in mutual relation to one another should enable Catholics to "appreciate that the presence of *a certain diversity of roles* is in no way prejudicial to women, provided that this diversity is not the result of an arbitrary imposition, but is rather an expression of what is specific to being male and female" (Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 11). Even if the human body in both sexes "includes right from the beginning the nuptial attribute, that is, the capacity of expressing love" (Pope John Paul II 1980), women furthermore have a special and "naturally spousal predisposition" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 20) according to Church's doctrine. This specificity of the female personality makes it understandable from the magisterium's point of view why man was not created for woman, but vice versa, why woman was created for man, without this implying a subordination of woman to man (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 6).

In this regard, the Church, and with it, most recently Pope Francis, "considers it very important that women be given proper esteem, that they be able to claim in full the place that is theirs, both in the Church and in society". For this reason, he explicitly calls for girls to be educated, among other things, "to the beauty and greatness of their vocation as women [. . .] in a right and discerning relationship between man and woman" (Pope Francis 2015b).

4. The "Genius of Women"

In order to counteract the tendency of an emancipatory "masculinization" of women, Pope John Paul II already demanded in "Mulieris dignitatem" to emphasize the vocation and dignity of women "that result from the specific diversity and personal originality of man and woman" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 10). According to the former Pope, the following becomes clear in the light of biblical anthropology: "The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different" (ibid.). Pope John Paul therefore liked to speak of a specifically "feminine 'genius' or also

of a 'charisma', a special 'vocation' of women" (Burggraf 1999, p. 327). The question arises: What does this "genius" of women consist of from the magisterium's point of view?

According to Church's doctrine, the personality of all women is essentially shaped by their physical capacity for motherhood (cf. Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 18; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 13). The fact that the physical constitution of women and their organism contain the natural predisposition to motherhood, conception, pregnancy and birth as a consequence of the conjugal union with a man, is considered by the Church not to be something purely biological, but also to correspond "to the psycho-physical structure of women" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 18). According to magisterial doctrine, the capacity for motherhood results in a special "capacity for the other", which is concretized in various specifically feminine values and gifts. Women are therefore said to possess a "deep intuition of the goodness in their lives of those actions which elicit life, and contribute to the growth and protection of the other" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 13). Women, therefore, also have a special sense of the meaning of life and a respect for what is concrete and, moreover, the "singular capacity to persevere in adversity, to keep life going even in extreme situations, to hold tenaciously to the future, and finally to remember with tears the value of every human life" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 13). Although all human beings are called to reach out to each other, "women are more immediately attuned to these values", and for that reason, they "are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values" (ibid., No. 14; cf. ibid., No. 16).

Pope John Paul II teaches in his "Letter to Women", that women, more than men, acknowledge their fellow human beings "because they see persons with their hearts"; it is therefore especially in their everyday service to others, when "they try to go out to them and *help them*", that women understand and "fulfil their deepest vocation" (Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 12). With regard to the manifold ethical-social service of women in the field of education and health care, in which they realize "a kind of *affective, cultural and spiritual motherhood*" (ibid., No. 9), John Paul II hoped in 1995 that women "will reflect carefully on what it means to speak of the *'genius of women'*, not only in order to be able to see in this phrase a specific part of God's plan which needs to be accepted and appreciated, but also in order to let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church" (ibid., No. 10).

As Mary is being understood as "the highest expression of the 'feminine genius'" the former Pope called her "a source of constant inspiration" for a deeper understanding of this special "genius" of women (ibid., No. 10). Even in the early years of his pontificate, he had taught that God had manifested "the dignity of women in the highest form possible, by assuming human flesh from the Virgin Mary, whom the Church honors as the Mother of God, calling her the new Eve and presenting her as the model of redeemed woman" (Pope John Paul II 1981, No. 22). In Mary, in addition to motherhood, virginity (cf. Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 20), which is considered the second specific dimension in the realization of the female personality, also acquires its "full meaning and value" (ibid., No. 17). Although, according to the magisterium's teaching, motherhood is of crucial importance to the female identity, women must not be reduced to their reproductive function (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 13). Consequently, Christian virginity "is of the greatest importance" against such a narrow perception of women. According to the Church, this vocation "refutes any attempt to enclose women in mere biological destiny. Just as virginity receives from physical motherhood the insight that there is no Christian vocation except in the concrete gift of oneself to the other, so physical motherhood receives from virginity an insight into its fundamentally spiritual dimension: it is in not being content only to give physical life that the other truly comes into existence" (ibid., No. 13).

Pope John Paul II assumed that Mary, who became a mother as a virgin, can help all the faithful, but especially women, to understand "how these two dimensions, these two paths in the vocation of women as persons, explain and complete each other" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 17; cf. Pope John Paul II 1987, No. 46). In this context, the motif of the bride is important: "Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God, guided by

spousal love [. . .]. By virtue of this love, Mary wished to be always and in all things 'given to God', living in virginity" (ibid., No 39). Since, according to the Church's understanding, a person only becomes truly devoted to others in such a bridal love, consecrated virginity cannot be properly understood without it; while this applies "similarly" to the consecrated chastity of men in priestly celibacy or in religious orders, the woman is understood to be "naturally" disposed to be bridal (cf. Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 20). The love of Christ as the bridegroom is considered ecclesiastically as an example and "the model and pattern of all human love, men's love in particular" (ibid., No. 25). Bridal love is understood as responding to this love of Christ: the bride is united with the bridegroom "because she lives his life; [. . .] united *in such a manner as to respond* with a 'sincere gift' of self *to the inexpressible gift of the love of the Bridegroom*" (ibid., No. 27). On the one hand, this is meant to be valid for the Church as the bride of Christ, and therefore for both men and women (cf. ibid., No. 27); on the other hand, it is also meant to confirm "the truth about woman as bride" (ibid., No. 29), who cannot find herself unless she gives her love to others (cf. ibid., No. 30).

In 1988, Pope John Paul II reminded all Catholics that if they want to fully understand God's plan of salvation for human history, they must not exclude "the mystery of 'woman': virgin-mother-spouse" from the perspective of their faith (ibid., No. 22). In the "womanhood" of faithful women, and especially of consecrated women, the Church recognizes "a highly significant 'iconic character', which finds its full realization in Mary and which also aptly expresses the very essence of the Church as a community consecrated with the integrity of a *'virgin'* heart to become the *'bride'* of Christ and *'mother'* of believers" (Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 11).

5. The Role of Women in the Catholic Church

According to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the knowledge of the special nature of the female personality, of the "genius" of women, enables to understand "the irreplaceable role of women in all aspects of family and social life involving human relationships and caring for others" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 13). Against the background of the special dignity and vocation of women, the Church also considers it plausible that their exclusion from receiving priestly ordination "does not hamper in any way women's access to the heart of Christian life" (ibid., No. 16; cf. Leahy 1996, p. 242). From the magisterial point of view, women merely get there by a different route than men.

The Congregation stresses that "women play a role of maximum importance in the Church's life". By living the Marian attitudes of listening and welcoming, of humility and faithfulness and of praise and expectation "with particular intensity and naturalness", and thus recalling them for all the baptized, they contribute "in a unique way to showing the true face of the Church, spouse of Christ and mother of believers" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, No. 16). Priests, however, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, act "in persona Christi capitis" and therefore, according to the conviction of the Church, must be men. The magisterium concludes that because at its institution Christ entrusted the Eucharist exclusively to the apostles, "he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is 'feminine' and what is 'masculine'" as "a relationship willed by God both in the mystery of creation and in the mystery of Redemption" (MD 26). The resulting differing roles of man and woman in the Church, however, should not be understood from a purely functional point of view, but should be seen in the light of the "sacramental economy", which means "the economy of 'signs' which God freely chooses in order to become present in the midst of humanity" (Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 11; cf. Pope Francis 2020, No. 100f.). In this perspective of an "iconical" mutual complementation, the distinct roles of man and woman, according to the Church's official self-understanding, represent two essential dimensions of the Church at once. Pope John Paul II, closely following Hans Urs von Balthasar, called these the "Marian" and the

"Petrine" principles (Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 11; Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 27; cf. e.g., von Balthasar 1978, pp. 65–72).

For Pope John Paul, the "Marian profile is also—even perhaps more so—fundamental and characteristic for the Church as is the apostolic and Petrine profile to which it is profoundly united. . . . The Marian dimension of the Church is antecedent to that of the Petrine, without being in any way divided from it or being less complementary. Mary Immaculate precedes all others, including obviously Peter himself and the Apostles. This is so, not only because Peter and the Apostles, being born of the human race under the burden of sin, form part of the Church which is 'holy from out of sinners', but also because their triple function has no other purpose except to form the Church in line with the ideal of sanctity already programmed and prefigured in Mary. A contemporary theologian", namely Hans Urs von Balthasar, the former Pope assesses, "has rightly stated that Mary is 'Queen of the Apostles without any pretensions to apostolic powers: she has other and greater powers'" (Pope John Paul II 1988, No. 27 Footnote 55 with reference to von Balthasar 1979, p. 144). Pope Francis has explicitly taken up this anthropological and mariological line of his predecessor and stated that, in the light of the nuptial mystery, the Church is the bride of Christ, and "we understand why there are these two dimensions: the Petrine or episcopal dimension and the Marian dimension, including everything involving the motherhood of the Church, in the deepest sense" (Pope Francis 2016, p. 8).

This means, that from the magisterial point of view, the man as representative of the Petrine dimension of the Church has his place in the realm of the official-hierarchical; the woman, on the other hand, as representative of the Marian principle, plays the role of a virgin or mother marked by specifically feminine values and characterized by bridal love (cf. Lüdecke 2012, p. 203). Even though "this charismatic sector is undoubtedly distinguished by the ministerial sector in the strict sense of the term", it is nevertheless considered to be "a true and deep participation in the government of the Church", because the support of ordained ministers by faithful women "has always been a crucial factor without which the Church cannot survive" (Pope Benedict XVI 2006, p. 273; cf. Pope John Paul II 1995, No. 11). Accordingly, as recently as 2020, Pope Francis stated that women "make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother"; acknowledging this means that "we do not limit ourselves to a functional approach, but enter instead into the inmost structure of the Church" (Pope Francis 2020, No. 101). Because of this connection between anthropology and church structure, Hans Urs von Balthasar as early as 1979 called the Catholic Church the probably "last bulwark in humanity of a genuine appreciation of the difference of the sexes" (von Balthasar 1979, p. 114). Regardless of whether one wants to share this assessment or not, against the background of the described anthropology of the Church's magisterium, the gender-specific provisions of canon law, according to which women do not validly receive ordination (c. 1024 Codex Iuris Canonici 1983) because they cannot act "in persona Christi capitis" qua being women, or there is no male counterpart for the state of consecrated virgins (c. 604 Codex Iuris Canonici 1983) because only a woman can adequately represent the bridal dimension of the Church integrally (cf. Anuth 2015; Hip-Flores 2018, p. 36), become understandable.

6. Consequences and Perspectives

All Catholics are obliged by canon law to obediently accept what the Church's magisterium presents as an interpretation of God's plan for men and women, including the expectations and assignments regarding their distinct roles (cc. 212 § 1, 750, 752 Codex Iuris Canonici 1983). By tracing its doctrine back to Revelation, the magisterium immunizes itself against criticism and consistently rejects it as a dangerous "(gender) ideology" (cf. e.g., AL 56; Congregation for Catholic Education 2019). Under the label of "gender ideology", the Catholic Church has been trying to reframe the human rights discourse since the mid-1990s. Against the UN Conferences of Cairo ("Population and Development", 1994) and Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995), with the demand for equal sexual and

reproductive rights on the one hand and the introduction of the gender concept into the UN context on the other hand, the Catholic Church sets its positions of "equality of dignity without equal rights" and complementarity of the sexes (cf. Paternotte 2015, pp. 135–42; Werner 2021, pp. 230–35). "Gender" is presented as a treacherous political strategy ("submarine") aiming at an anthropological revolution and as a threat for man and woman as persons; while in contrast, a new, i.e., Catholic "feminism" is being propagated, and a link to the discourse of ecology is being established. In addition to the aforementioned use of the Church's magisterium, political alliances are being forged with Evangelicals and Muslims, Catholic intellectuals with anti-gender positions are being internationally connected, and ecclesial movements such as Opus Dei, the Neocatechumenal Way, and Comunione e Liberazione are being mobilized for protest (cf. Paternotte 2015, pp. 135–42; Leimgruber 2020).

In the Catholic Church, interpretive authority over the "being" and "genius" of women lies exclusively with the Pope and Bishops, i.e., with men. However, Catholic women are less and less willing to have essence and role attributed to them in this way. They consider it neither theologically nor sociologically justified that women are treated "as second-class beings in teaching and practice" of the Church (Ganz 2021, p. 40). For them, the "half of humanity" is still "negatively discriminated against" by the Church (Fischer 2019, p. 269), and they call the Church's anthropology of sexes "a damning paean to women [. . .] which in its romantic exaggeration of virginity, sexuality and motherhood is a pure mockery of any woman" (Reisinger 2019, p. 1).

These problems of acceptance of the Church's doctrine are not new but have become even more acute in the context of the gender discourse. Moreover, in recent years, there has also been a growing awareness that sexual violence against women is usually related to hierarchical gender concepts, unequally distributed power, and dependencies (cf. Heyder and Leimgruber 2020, pp. 188, 201–05). In this respect, Doris Reisinger is probably right in pointing out that the "patriarchal basic order of the Church has its share in the abuse crisis, because the systematic exclusion of women inevitably leads to equally systematic violence against women and children, no matter the society or the institution" (Reisinger 2019, p. 1). However, as long as the Pope and the Bishops see themselves bound to God's plan for man and woman—as established and taught by them—and consequently as not free to reform the Church's doctrine, women must realistically adjust to the fact that the official anthropology of the Catholic Church as well as its gender-hierarchical constitution based on this doctrine will remain unchanged and therefore present a systemic risk factor.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] The following text is based on an earlier study by the author, which was revised, updated and translated for this publication (cf. Anuth 2017).

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Unchaste Celibates: Clergy Sexual Misconduct against Adults—Expressions, Definitions, and Harms

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Abstract: There is an ignored, misunderstood, and complex reality within the broader clergy sexual abuse scandal within the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)—that of clergy sexual misconduct against adults (CSMAA). Estimates and calculations of numbers of victims/survivors over the last half-century reach into the early millions. Furthermore, evidence reveals that CSMAA does produce many serious personal, relational, and practical harms. This article presents and discusses the many expressions of such harms. However, even with the evidence of such harms CSMAA events are, for the most part, still generally perceived as consensual affairs. Such a perception is challenged when CSMAA is contextualised within a professional misconduct framework, and even more so, when survivors thereof participate in the research. Furthermore, CSMAA is clearly not just one type of event. Accordingly, this article also presents a continuum of expressions of CSMAA to assist with perceptual accuracy of this issue along with an unambiguous definition of CSMAA.

Keywords: clergy; misconduct; sexual; adult; chastity; celibacy; harm; Catholic; professional sexual misconduct

Citation: de Weger, Stephen Edward. 2022. Unchaste Celibates: Clergy Sexual Misconduct against Adults—Expressions, Definitions, and Harms. *Religions* 13: 393. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050393

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 7 March 2022
Accepted: 21 April 2022
Published: 24 April 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

From its very beginning, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has declared itself to be 'Apostolic', meaning that its central authority and power lies with the "apostolic succession" or the ordination lineage going back to the original Apostles (ITC 1973). While celibacy was not at first required for the earlier diocesan/secular clergy, it was mandated during the Second Lateran Council of the RCC in 1139 (Leyser 2007). For already existing Religious/Monastic Orders, celibacy/chastity had been a self-imposed choice since their inception in the earliest years of Christianity (Dunn 2007; Rubenson 2007).

Out of these earliest of expressions and struggles of the fledgling RCC, it became firmly established that it was the apostolic descendants of the Apostles, in the form of bishops and Cardinals, and in the ultimate authority of the Pope, who held the central magisterial teaching power for the overall RCC (Doyle et al. 2006, pp. 8–9). This power or authority is in turn transferred to the general clergy in submission to the Pope and his bishop, for the teaching and guidance of the laity. As such, all clergy have been traditionally held up by the laity to be respected as leaders and teachers, representing Christ and the Pope, and to whom Catholics are required to submit in trust and obedience. To the general aura of chaste celibates can also be added Brothers and Sisters belonging to religious congregations and institutes such as the Marist Brothers and Sisters of Mercy.

Respect and trust of clergy are ascribed in part to such men due to their perceived holiness in giving up sex and marriage, to serve the 'flock' as caring and knowledgeable shepherds dedicated solely to doing so. This perception of clergy as holy, almost divine, found its definitional apex in the Council of Trent (1545 to 1563) when it declared that priests are

> *God's interpreters and ambassadors, empowered in His name to teach mankind the divine law and the rules of conduct, and holding, as they do, His place on earth, it is evident that*

> *no nobler function than theirs can be imagined. Justly, therefore, are they called not only Angels, but even gods, because of the fact that they exercise in our midst the power and prerogatives of the immortal God (from The Catechism of the Council of Trent—1566).*
>
> (as cited by Doyle 2006, p. 194; see also Cozzens 2002, pp. 82–84; Leyser 2007; Yocum 2013, pp. 90–117)

While the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) downplayed this more deified definition, Pope John Paul II during his papacy (1978–2005) sought to reinstate it (John Paul II 1992). Pope John Paul II was responding to a lessening of respect for the role of the priesthood, even by the clergy themselves, and a growing struggle between conflicting concepts of what it meant to be a celibate. However, according to Professor of Canon Law, Brian Provost, clarifying the Vatican's own documents concerning the nature and role of celibate clergy, there is no conflict:

> *the 1983 code [of Canon Law] makes it quite clear that clergy are bound primarily to perfect and perpetual continence [chastity], and to celibacy as a safeguard of this primary obligation. [However] even a celibate cleric can violate continence, and if so, sins against chastity.*
>
> (Provost 1992, p. 630)

What Provost is clearly acknowledging is the RCC's mandating of chastity to protect the celibate state. However, of note for this article is the final line, where he acknowledges that clergy can and do "violate" and "sin" against this requirement.

As to how many clergy "violate" or "sin" against chastity is unknown. A.W. Richard Sipe, celibacy expert and psychotherapist to thousands of clergy in his time, has estimated that 50% of clergy[1] have actually abandoned the belief that chastity is necessary for celibacy and have normalised such a belief and the subsequent acting out thereof (Sipe 1995, p. 61; 2003, pp. 44–50; 2016; see also Bordisso 2011). This conflict between ideal and reality must imbue a sense of cognitive dissonance in clergy so as to be able to live with such a contradiction. Such a contradiction then also inherently requires a culture of backstage and even underground secrecy to control the exposure of such clergy sexual activity, so as to maintain the myth of celibacy/chastity in general. It is within this culture of secrecy, Sipe claims, that CSMAA and indeed any expression of clergy sexual abuse, finds fertile soil in which to hide, to embed itself, take hold, and even flourish (Sipe 2008).

What this article will also, therefore, discuss is that in order to enable the continuance of this dissonant secret culture, it has been crucial that most clergy sexual activity be defined as merely consensual affairs requiring compassion, but not just consensual affairs. During the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, when asked about adults being 'abused', Bishop Geoffrey Robinson stated that most of the men in the Vatican believed that "Probably it was the adult who was the instigator there" (Royal Commission 2015, pp. 16047–48). There is little comprehension in such statements that clergy have great positional and personal power to manipulate victims into believing they are consenting and that such activity is also even 'blessed by God', because 'God is love' and, therefore, cannot be abusive. As a result, many victims of CSMAA are left in deep confusion and distress and, therefore, do not report CSMAA. Accordingly, the myth of the consensual affair, instigated by the other adult, continues as the dominant definition.

The gravity of the effects or harms produced by CSMAA, and this narrow and erroneous perception is still being minimised even in recent statements by Pope Francis regarding the sexual misconduct of the Archbishop of Paris, Michel Aupetit, with his secretary, many years ago; the Pope's comment was that the archbishop's "sin of the flesh" was "not that serious", and that his mishandling of the case through pride was the more problematic issue (Frishberg 2021). Pope Francis may well be correct in this case' however, what is missing is the secretary's point of view concerning the sexual misconduct she experienced and how it affected her.

It is this lack of concern for those on the receiving end of clergy sexual activity and misconduct that lies at the heart of the research presented in this article. The overall

conclusion is that what makes CSMAA a grave issue is not that it is a 'sin of the flesh' so much as that, like its child abuse counterpart, it can and does produce serious harms, including extended harms resulting from survivors reporting their abuse to officials within the RCC.

One of the major conclusions of the research behind this article (de Weger 2016, 2020) was the role played by the absence of a comprehensive and contemporary, research-based, RCC-wide definition of CSMAA. Currently, there is very little appreciation of the more 'professional' elements of fiduciary duty and crossing professional boundaries, and no unambiguous resolution still as to the concept of vulnerability in the context of CSMAA, and general parish life (de Weger and Death 2017). To this end, following the Background section, this article will begin with an elaborated definition of CSMAA which, it is hoped, will help in providing a deeper appreciation of the realities of this issue and provide a basis for any following discussions.

2. Background

Background Research and Methods

Firstly, it needs to be acknowledged here that the two studies on which this article is based were exploratory ones which sought to provide some preliminary investigations and descriptions of the experiences of victims/survivors of CSMAA and the reporting thereof[2]. As such, it is hoped these studies and the articles born from them will provide some foundation for further, more specialised and detailed quantitative and qualitative research studies: this issue is one in much need of such work.

When choosing CSMAA as my research topic, the question that needed to first be asked was whether CSMAA in the RCC is a relevant enough issue for in-depth research, i.e., was/is it harmful and do many adults experience it? In a short time, it became obvious that the answer to the relevancy question was a clear 'yes' for both elements. Indeed, it became clear that CSMAA may well "breed another crisis in the Priesthood" (Byrne 2010, p. 18). In 1995, regarding female victims, Sipe had also already warned that as myths about priests and women are exposed, and "a more accurate portrait of women's treatment within the celibate/sexual system is delineated, the crisis in the church will expand with ever greater explosive force" (Sipe 1995, p. 114; see also Rossi 1993).

This present article is based on 10 years of researching this very misunderstood and suppressed reality within the RCC[3]. The research began with a research Master's degree titled 'Clerical sexual misconduct involving adults within the Roman Catholic Church' (de Weger 2016). This was an exploratory mixed-method study utilising the responses of twenty-three women and six men who had experienced or were still experiencing clergy sexual misconduct as adults. These twenty-nine people volunteered to participate after reading invitations sent out to various social media platforms and Catholic-based online websites and magazines. Respondents were asked to complete an extensive survey but were also given frequent opportunities to provide freely written responses for those survey questions. This resulted in a great deal of highly informative qualitative data to compliment the more quantitative statistics and answers. In regard to the cases of CSMAA, many were historical cases, some recent and others were still current at the time (2015). As analysis of the responses progressed, three distinct themes emerged—Language; Power/Vulnerability; and Harm. The issue of the intersecting of Power/Vulnerability was further elaborated on in (de Weger and Death 2017).

The latest major study was a PhD dissertation titled 'Reporting clergy sexual misconduct against adults to Roman Catholic Church authorities: An analysis of survivor perspectives' (de Weger 2020). This time, a qualitative, in-depth interview approach was used. Six women and three men participated in those interviews and also provided documentation and written responses. While the findings of this second study are conceptually integrated into this article, a fuller analysis of those findings are the basis of a separate article (see de Weger 2022). The foci of this current article will be firstly, the element of

language surrounding CSMAA and how it is defined and why, and secondly, the findings and discussion surrounding the harms produced by CSMAA[4].

One thing became very clear in the past ten years of research: CSMAA needs to be clearly and professionally defined so as to avoid unjust deflections of survivors who have experienced such abuses. The other significant issue that faced this researcher was the serious need to differentiate types of CSMAA and clergy sexual activities with adults (CSAWA) from the more clearly black and white criminality of child abuse.

3. Reframing CSMAA as *Professional* Sexual Misconduct

As shall be discussed, it is clear that so many of those who experienced CSMAA in de Weger (2016) were not engaged in mutually consensual 'affairs'. Rather, they had been groomed and coerced into sexually servicing those clergy, or opportunistically abused by sudden and troubling attacks by clergy. Most of these clergy appeared to have no concern for the other person involved, nor that they were breaking their vows of chastity. For others who may have cared about their vocation to celibacy/chastity, what appeared to be happening was that they were experiencing difficulties in maintaining their vows for one reason or another. Either way, for all the other adults involved, the sexualisation of their contact by these clergy was completely unexpected and unwanted. As a result, for most participants their trust in clergy was deeply betrayed. When trust is betrayed in this manner, and especially in the context of the Church's teachings on sex outside of marriage, for so many Catholics, clergy sexualising relationships produces serious harms. This was potently clear in the narratives of all but one of the participants in (de Weger 2016, 2020). Once one considers the accounts of the survivors of CSMAA and the estimates of numbers of survivors, it is difficult to see this issue as something relating only to lesser 'sins of the flesh' by a few wayward clergy (Frishberg 2021).

In the course of the research here, one major element that needed to be acknowledged and more clearly understood was the fact that clergy are *religious* professionals who gain intimate access to their 'clients' or parishioners (Marshall 2004, p. 1926). They also belong to a very powerful institution that ordains them into that power and ministry. With such access and power comes enormous responsibility to always act professionally and in the fiduciary interest of those to whom they minister. However, there is still a great deal of ambivalence and ambiguity as to RCC responses to its own celibate and supposedly chaste clergy acting out sexually with adults (de Weger and Death 2017; Flynn 2018). In line with other professions such as psychiatry, medicine, and law, the RCC needs a clear universal definition for its own professionals as to what constitutes clergy sexual misconduct. Presented below is a clergy-behaviour focused definition that has been derived from experts in professional standards across all institutions, but perhaps even more importantly, is also founded on the epistemic insights of those who have actually experienced CSMAA.

3.1. Definition

> *Professional/Clergy sexual misconduct occurs when professionals/clergy—whether male or female—misuse, abuse, take advantage of, or disregard—whether intentionally or through negligence—their positional and personal power, that they hold by virtue of belonging to a powerful institution or professional organisation, to target, over-power, groom, or confuse—whether subtly or forcefully—less positionally/personally powerful adults, for any form of sexual activity with them—whether legal/consensual or not—with little or no regard for the harm produced, or the effects that such harm may have on others*[5].

3.2. Elaboration

- Professional/Clergy sexual misconduct occurs when professionals/clergy—*whether male or female . . .*

Professionals are men and women in society who have been officially recognised or 'anointed' to provide services to the public in their chosen field (Peterson 1992, pp. 11–16).

They have received this recognition and approval from their respective educational/legal/religious systems. They are also, for the most, members of organisations and bodies that guarantee their professionalism. Professionals in society are in general, highly regarded and given greater autonomy because of their training and the specialised services they provide (Schilit 1984, p. 20; Russell 1993, pp. 75–80; Muzio et al. 2016, pp. 142–43; Gabbioneta et al. 2019, pp. 1708–10). Clergy are society's religious professionals (Shupe 1995, p. 41). Regarding RCC clergy, in accord with RCC teachings, clergy are men (and women) who have openly dedicated themselves to imitate the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in both ministry and lifestyle, including his celibacy/chastity (CCL 1983, pp. 42–45). While clergy operate as general ministers, many are also professionals in a secular sense of the word as well, e.g., psychotherapists.

- misuse, abuse, take advantage of, or disregard

I.e., violate expectations, blur, and overstep boundaries, experiment sexually, in contradiction to the laws/policies/codes of conduct of their profession, and the general expectations of their clients/the laity (Rutter 1989, pp. 160–64; Russell 1993, pp. 89–111; Toben and Helge 2013; Tschan 2014, pp. 1, 22–23).

- whether intentionally or through negligence

Intent is a crucial perceptual and legal element of wrongdoing that results in harm; however, forms of neglect or carelessness also result in harm (Jorgenson 1995, pp. 243–46; Villiers 1996; Toben and Helge 2013). Intent usually implies pre-meditation to consciously violate laws, codes, and expectations (e.g., see Rutter 1989, p. 163; Jorgenson 1995, pp. 246–47). However, CSMAA also includes actions resulting from a perpetrator's belief (be it genuine or not) in sexual actions as being acceptable for spiritual or psychological 'counselling' reasons (Kennedy 2009, pp. 112–13). These are included simply because behaving in such a manner contradicts codes of conduct and general expectations.

- their positional and personal power, that they hold by virtue of belonging to a powerful institution or professional organisation,

Professionals are ordinary men and women who are accorded positional power by their relative institutions. Clergy also often have an element of personal power through personal charisma and given their influential ministries, being the "golden boys" of their communities (Rutter 1989, pp. 1–2; Benson 1994, p. 115; Tschan 2014, pp. 65–66).

- to target, over-power, groom, or confuse

This includes actions that may involve physical boundary breaches and/or psychological manipulation and confusion (Peterson 1992, pp. 72–104; Flynn 2003, p. 204; Garland and Argueta 2010, pp. 13–14; Garland and Argueta 2011, p. 410). With clergy misconduct this often occurs by using 'spiritual' persuasion to remold an abusive event into one 'approved by God'. Grooming also relies heavily on a professional's/clergy's abuse of their expertise and authority to blur accepted boundaries and to deceive and confuse their 'client' (Garland and Argueta 2010, pp. 12–15).

- whether subtly or forcefully

This addition is especially needed in regard to CSMAA. In religious and even general professional contexts, subtlety is more common than force, as force is generally not needed in a context of deeply confused trust (Kennedy 2009, p. 131). However, recent definitions of what are considered "Canonical crimes" found in the Vatican's *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* document do not clearly account for grooming, rather the only element needed according to this latest document is 'force' as in "forcing someone, by violence or threat or through abuse of authority, to perform or submit to sexual acts" (Vos Estis Lux Mundi 2019, Title 1, Art.1). While force obviously does occur within CSMAA events (see Kennedy 2009, pp. 13, 110, 123–24, 130, 144, 149–51; Reisinger 2022; The Pillar 2022), because of the power to groom and deceive, it does not seem to be as needed in religious contexts. Furthermore, however, there is also a more subtle form of force that can be used such as blackmail using professional/client-based in-depth knowledge of the client's private life.

- less positionally/personally powerful and most often vulnerable adults,

In professional/clergy sexual misconduct, clients/laity are easy targets. For most, they have submitted themselves to the professional in order to benefit from their expertise. This is a context involving much vulnerability and trust, in and of itself, which can be easily exploited (Rutter 1989, pp. 25, 26). Indeed, the fact that people are in a permanent or temporary state of vulnerability is almost an omnipresent factor in CSMAA and has been shown in all the studies of CSMAA to date (Flynn 2003; Kennedy 2009; Garland and Argueta 2010; Byrne 2010; de Weger 2016, p. 128). Furthermore, in CSMAA, those who are often targeted or who fall victim to grooming are also often adults of the more naïvely trusting kind or younger in age and experience (Doyle 2006, p. 208; Tschan 2014, pp. 57–58; de Weger 2016, p. 76). Evidence shows that there are also large numbers of individuals who were previously abused as children seeking out professionals and clergy. Many of these, as a result of their abuse, suffer boundary and transference issues that can be taken advantage of (Peterson 1992, pp. 134–36; de Weger 2016, pp. 129–33).

- for any form of sexual activity with them

These include criminal rape, penetrative and non-penetrative sexual activities, through sexual harassment, to obscene phone calls, and sexting, to sexually suggestive jokes and conversations, to inappropriate hugging and grooming behaviours (Tschan 2014, p. 46; Loftus 1994, pp. 28–31). All are included in this definition because subtler behaviours are often masking grooming behaviours that are the first steps to more serious abuses (Bourke et al. 2012, pp. 2405–6; Garland and Argueta 2010, pp. 4–5). As well, all are capable of producing harm in their own right anyway (Loftus 1994, pp. 28–31; de Weger 2016, pp. 50–59, 151–76).

- whether legal/consensual or not

In professional/clerical relationships, because of positional and personal power imbalances, combined with the personal vulnerabilities that are almost always present in those seeking the help of the professional/cleric, or even mixing socially with them, issues of consent or 'legality' are rendered moot (Rutter 1989, pp. 21, 25; Celenza 1991, 2004, p. 216; Gross Schaefer 1994; Kennedy 2009, p. 46; Tschan 2014, p. 47, 185; MEP 2014, pp. 13–14). Tschan (2014, pp. 46–47) states that professional/clergy sexual misconduct, "from a legal point of view, always takes place in a seemingly consensual way, otherwise it would be labelled rape" or another legal term corresponding to a given action, e.g., sexual assault, indecent assault, sexual harassment.

- with little or no regard for the harm produced, or the effects that such harm may have on others.

Whether intentional or not, professional/clergy sexual misconduct produces trauma/harm for primary victims. However, it also produces harm for others in victims' lives (Rutter 1989, p. 16; Cooper-White 1990; Peterson 1992, pp. 105–40; de Fuentes 1999; Flynn 2003; Tschan 2014, pp. 29–43). With any definition of CSMAA, all harms produced must be acknowledged.

3.3. Summary

Sex is unexpected in a professional/client relationship (Tschan 2014, p. 47). Professional people exist to provide the service defined by the professional body to whom they belong. Those coming to such professionals do not expect the provision of those services to include sexual activity. What the above definition seeks to provide is a clear understanding of what constitutes CSMAA and even CSAWA. Doing so clarifies what is expected of clergy professionals by their institution and by the whole community. It also provides a more definitive scaffold around which victims can claim victimhood. Furthermore, such a definition presents a solid framework and language around which people seeking to report CSMAA can construct their case. However, one more step was deemed necessary for a more nuanced approach to CSMAA cases and the reporting thereof. Accordingly, the following continuum of expressions of CSMAA has been provided.

4. Unchaste Celibates—A Continuum of Expressions and Severity

While it is clear that there are many clergy engaging in sexual activity with adults, unlike clergy child sexual abuse which is always a 'crime', CSAWA/CSMAA has much less clarity, with victims often, therefore, able to be dismissed. The definition in the previous section and the following continuum of expressions of CSMAA, within an overall harms-based approach to clergy sexual activity presented below, were all deemed necessary to counter-balance this anomalous ambiguity.

Figure 1 from the underpinning study for this article, de Weger (2016) revealed the following examples of types of CSMAA abuses:

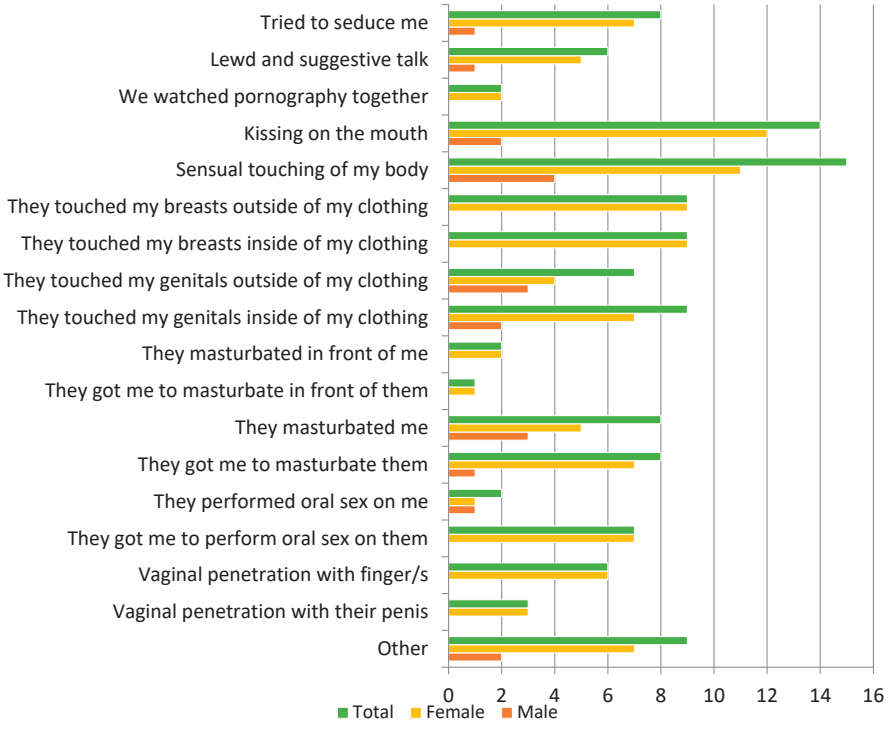

Figure 1. Types of abuse (n = 23).

In that study, all these examples were clearly CSMAA; it was not possible to come to any other conclusion. While many of the contexts and scenarios presented in the following continuum are based on these above examples, they have also been drawn from cases from other studies or news stories (see Fortune 1989; Flynn 2003; Kennedy 2009; Garland and Argueta 2010; Byrne 2010; de Weger 2020, Appendix 1). Others are possibilities, though very real ones, often discussed or mentioned in discourses on celibacy/chastity. While 99% of these expressions would be defined as 'sin' and immoral according to RCC teachings at least (Provost 1992, p. 630), it is clear that most go beyond this simplistic and deflective category and into contexts of serious misconduct requiring more just outcomes. However, most of these contexts have not been accorded any gravity of concern by the RCC and even the legal justice system. If nothing else, this list reveals the complexity of the CSAWA vs. CSMAA issue. It also reveals, however, the corresponding need for the RCC or any other religious institution to clearly delineate when CSMAA as opposed to CSAWA 'affairs' occurs. Having a typology or continuum of 'wrongness', also helps survivors of CSMAA who have not been taken seriously because of the simplistic blanket 'affairs' perception, to

situate their own experience within a more accurate category and context. It is clear from the narratives of the participants in this study and elsewhere that clergy sexual activity is rarely as simple or harmless as the CSAWA 'affair' label makes them out to be but is, rather, more likely to be an expression of CSMAA. There simply needs to be greater clarity as to when CSAWA moves more definitely into CSMAA. Hence, this list.

One more point first needing inclusion here is that clergy also mix freely and socially within the faith and broader communities of their 'clients', and with them and their families. Through their religious ministry, they acquire deeply personal knowledge which obviously would stay with them as they mix socially. As such, CSMAA grooming utilising this knowledge can easily occur both within *and* externally to pastoral contexts. Clergy sexual misconduct within pastoral contexts is always serious, and is in some jurisdictions now classified as criminal behaviour (de Weger 2020, pp. 63–67). As such, to highlight the dual-contexts reality and assist clarity, each context and scenario will, therefore, be defined positionally as being 'pastoral' or 'social' (sometimes both). Though it can only be speculation here, each will also be allocated the most likely hemisphere of Sipe's 50/50 clergy acceptance or rejection of celibacy/chastity rules (see Figure 2):

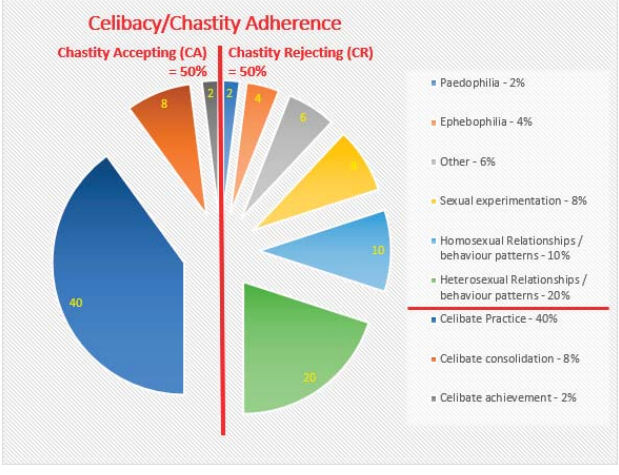

Figure 2. Sipe's chastity/celibacy adherence levels (adapted from Sipe 1995, p. 69).

These will be coded as 'celibacy/chastity accepting' (CA) and celibacy/chastity rejecting (CR). The sixteen contexts below are by no means individually unique or stand-alone ones. Many indeed meld into each other or develop from one to the other. This list is also not exhaustive.

The list comprises of three sections: sexual 'crimes', sexual 'misconduct', and sexual 'activity' by clergy against or with adults whether lay or other clergy. The 'crimes' section does not need further expansion—they are prosecutable crimes, full stop. As to 'misconduct', for all the participants in both (de Weger 2016) and (de Weger 2020), their experiences fell somewhere under Contexts 3–11. As such, only these expressions will be expanded upon here. The final group of contexts could be more easily seen as clergy sexual 'activity' or CSAWA: these are of interest but do not really come under the indvidual harms-based approach of this study[6].

4.1. Clergy Sexual Crimes against Adults

Context 1, the sexual psychopath and predator, and Context 2, the rapist cleric, fall clearly under the category of criminal acts. These are mentioned here because they occur (for examples, see Kennedy 2009, pp. 13, 110, 123–24, 130, 144, 149–51; Reisinger 2022; The Pillar 2022).

However, while these crimes are deeply heinous, of concern here are the contexts of CSMAA where distress and confusion exist because of grooming, consent doubt, and entrapment at the hands of powerful clergy in the context of adult vulnerability. In such contexts are found the seeds of doubt as to liability and harmfulness. This doubt also results in lack of clarity and direction from the church and society as a whole regarding responses to those who report these still more ambiguous forms of CSMAA.

4.2. CSMAA: Clergy Sexual Misconduct against Adults (Some Contexts Now Considered 'Criminal')

Context 3: The abusive cleric (Pastoral: CR/CA)

The major context, especially for this study, is when clergy are acting in their professional/pastoral roles as counsellors, confessors, therapists, and/or spiritual directors. In such a context, people come to their clergy professionals to seek guidance and support, usually in times of vulnerability or distress and confusion. For clergy to allow sex to enter this special relationship, is a clear breach of ethical and moral boundaries, fiduciary duty, and even a criminal act now in many jurisdictions (Toben and Helge 2013). There is no grey area here. This is clearly professional/clergy sexual misconduct, where their role, power, and position are seriously abused. While few clear laws exist to deal with CSMAA, under certain Australian jurisdictions, events such as those that fall under this context could be defined as criminal acts "if the person consents to the sexual activity because of the abuse of a position of authority or trust" (NSW Gov 2012, Section 61HE–8 (c); see also Tschan 2014, p. 47). Toben and Helge (2013, p. 159), discussing the need for new clearer legislation in regard to CSMAA, explain:

> *A clergyperson who, by virtue of occupying a position of authority—as perceived by the congregant or parishioner—and who, because of that position, has knowledge or notice of the emotional dependence or vulnerability of an adult congregant or parishioner, can take advantage of the position of authority and engage in sexual acts with the congregant or parishioner.*

Inserting sex into this context is certainly a violation of the person who came seeking spiritual or psychological help from a trusted religious 'expert'. The reason also that it is a clear case of sexual misconduct is because of the very obvious power imbalance in helping relationships (Marshall 2004, p. 1926). Even if clients seem willing, such 'consent' is often more a form of coerced or manipulated consent, emanating often from, for example, transference and/or trauma repetition compulsion issues (Celenza 1991; Gross Schaefer 1994). Regardless, in this ministerial context, it is always the cleric/professional who is responsible for controlling what unfolds. As Kennedy (2009) so astutely explains:

> *Clergy may not force, and the woman may desire him, but he has constructed this context, in which he makes her responsible, whilst relinquishing his responsibility for the boundary-keeping he knows he, as the professional, should maintain.*
>
> (Kennedy 2009, p. 131)

The same is true for male victims and female professionals/clergy in such contexts.

Kennedy (2009, pp. 109, 112) provides two examples of clearly intended CSMAA in Context 3:

> *Therapeutic deception (bodily redemption)—[ ] in one third of the study participants, this form of deception was used where the cleric convinced his victims that "sex (was) a necessary and appropriate part of (their) treatment; (that) sex will make (them) feel better, (and that they, the cleric, was) uniquely able to provide the sexual experience (the victim) need(ed)".*

And

> *Spiritual deception: the sacrament of sex—36% of women in [Kennedy's study] stated in various ways that "God was drawn on to convince women that sexual activity is not only therapeutic but also 'god-inspired' or sanctioned".*

When such ministerial relationships are sexualised, it is clearly CSMAA. It is also this context around which most new legislation is centred—that of clergy sexual activity *during or surrounding* ministry, especially when the clergy are also acting as healing professionals such as psychotherapists.

Context 4: The 'love-bombing' cleric (Pastoral: CR)

This context concerns clergy using 'falling in love' as a 'pick up' line, or, where the intent is to use proclamations of 'love' to obtain sex from a vulnerable other. This too is clearly CSMAA. Kennedy (2009, p. 107) has an example of this as well, that she names 'romantic deception':

> *Romantic deception—in one third of the cases the women explained how the cleric had fallen in love with them. As such, these are the [CSMAA] events most commonly defined as "affairs".*

In this case, the intent is not to pursue a mature relationship but to target people seeking support by declaring love for them, thereby making them more malleable to sexual activity. The key word here is 'deception'. Into the overall context of deception can even be added the self-deception of the cleric truly thinking that his actions are 'loving'.

Part of this scenario usually also involves clergy continuously telling the other person how lovely they are, how beautiful, with the intent of softening their resistance to sexual activity. This was clearly evident in the following statement from de Weger (2016, p. 106):

> *I was extremely confused. The priest was telling me this was "love" and said I was "beautiful". I felt wonderful while he was there, because his definition of what was happening was dominant. But afterwards I felt awful, sinful, depressed, seriously bad and often suicidal (Tanya).*

Furthermore, 'Tanya', who was seeking the help of this priest because she had been abused as a child and raped by a man just a year before, made the following final statement:

> *I was depressed and frequently suicidal. In retrospect NONE OF IT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED except that HE INITIATED a sexual relationship. I can say for absolute certain that, if it was up to me at all, I would have followed my sense that he was celibate and out of bounds. I fell for his bull-shit because I was convinced he was truly holy.*
>
> *(Tanya; emphasis, hers)*

This abusive context can last any duration, from 'one-night stands' to decades of manipulation (de Weger 2016, p. 80). It is clear from such events, and especially their aftermath, that mature, consensual, mutual 'love' was never part of these scenarios[7]. As such these events can clearly be defined as CSMAA.

Context 5: The (non?) deceptive relationship (Social: CR/CA)

Different to the deceptive cleric above, clergy developing mature and lasting relationships with other women and men who have not been coerced or deceived into such a relationship obviously must occur, and more frequently than realised (Murphy 1992; Anderson 2006). This is one of the 'grey-area' scenarios which, however, may become 'black' or 'white' so to speak. As such, three possible scenarios for Context 5 are given. It needs to be noted that none of these are '*pastoral*' contexts which would *automatically* render them CSMAA.

Context 5: Scenario 1 (Social; CR/CA)

This scenario is where clergy and adults have relatively equal positional and personal powers such as a priest and a psychiatrist. Also, both have shared intimate details about each other, and both have deep insights into the possibilities of deception and misconduct. They realise that there is an element of *public* deception in regard to the priest's proclamation of celibacy; however, both choose to continue the relationship. If the priest honestly acknowledges the contradiction of his personal and public life and leaves the priesthood this is a 'grey' context that has become 'white' so to speak.

Context 5: Scenario 2 (Social; CR/CA)

Similar to Scenario 1, however, in this context, the priest intends to remain a priest and the relationship remains secret. This is now presenting issues of equality in regard to how it may be affecting one party who may be forced to hide a relationship which he or she may not want to do. There are many accounts of such relationships where the woman has been waiting and waiting for the priest to leave so they can marry, but the priest never does and perhaps never intended to (see de Weger 2016; and Maltesemarriedcatholicpriest's Blog for examples[8]). If the cleric maintains this relationship as one that is convenient to him but deeply troubling for the other adult, this would then be clearly more akin to CSMAA. The following example from de Weger (2016, p. 94) shows the obvious control the priest has over the other adult:

> *I say emotionally abused me because everything is on his terms. I only see him when he wants to. If he doesn't want to see me he avoids me for months and then when he wants to see me he comes back as he pleases. He doesn't care if I'm crying or asking him to stop, then afterwards he says he loves me then I get so very confused because I love him and I don't want to lose him. I hope and wish that he will marry me (Winnie).*

If the pastor leaves the clerical life to pursue his relationship with the other adult, this is more a non-CSMAA context, though some may disagree. The Maltesemarriedcatholicpriest's website, run by a married priest, Rev Daniel Bartolo, and set up for clergy and lay people involved in relationships with clergy and to promote and discuss clergy marriage and relationships, is full of stories of this particular scenario. Most stories there seem to involve the cleric not leaving and the painful impact this has on the other adult.

Context 5: Scenario 3 (Social; CR)

This is a second possibility for Scenario 2 above. In this case, the other adult is more than happy with the arrangement where their relationship remains secret, and they happily live their own lives as well. Throughout Church history such other adults were termed 'paramours' or 'concubines' (Doyle et al. 2006, pp. 14–15, 24–25). Today the term would more likely be 'defacto' relationship, albeit a secret one, or private lover. There is, however, a broader aspect to this—the general laity do not know that 'Father' is having a canonically illegal relationship and as such is deceiving them in regard to his status as a highly respected because celibate priest/Bishop and professional. In this case then, on the individual couple level, one could say that theirs is a CSAWA relationship; however, in regard to the broader community, it is more a CSMAA one.

Context 6: The abusive cleric (Social) (CR)

For the most part, these clerics are chastity rejecting (CR). Keeping in mind also that while many examples of this scenario may begin in the pastoral realm, this context concerns sexual activity between clergy and another adult that occurs more in the 'social' setting. In this context the cleric is moving in family and friendship circles. Within these circles, the cleric can still engage all their power as a cleric to target and manipulate vulnerable people with whom he comes in contact. For example, participant Lynne described how [Fr J] had become "the family friend" and was then invited to her 18th birthday "as a family friend, not as a priest". Lynne later summarised how [Fr J] "cultivated the friendship" over about 3 years "and then made his move once [she] turned eighteen".

As mentioned above, clergy have many 'social' opportunities to engage in CSMAA. In this case, as Lynne explained, even after many years, [Fr J] had no intention of ever leaving to marry. When pushed, he told Lynne that he was really just "experimenting". As such, this is clearly another case of CSMAA.

Context 7: The opportunistic abusing cleric (Pastoral or Social; CR/CA)

This form of adult abuse occurs without warning for the victim, or any real premeditation in the offender. However, it often suggests an underlying lack of commitment to or struggle with the promises of chastity made at ordination/final vows. In this form of misconduct, opportunities to indecently or sexually assault or 'have sex with' others or to try to do so, are seized if the chance to do so arises. For example:

> *[He] walked into the meeting room and ran his left hand up under my skirt, grabbed my right breast and planted his mouth on mine. YUK (Jane).*
>
> *I asked him to stop . . . As this was the only occasion, I would accept his behaviour was perhaps due to extreme grief & was suffering complete loneness (sic) (Jessica).*
>
> *I just said "No" . . . . . I think the episode was a once only accident of arousal as far as I was concerned . . . . . (Margaret).*

Again, these are all clearly cases of CSMAA.

Context 8: The sexually harassing cleric (Pastoral/Social: Occupational; CR)

This form of CSMAA is more common than realised. It occurs in parish houses, schools and convents/seminaries at a rate that is only now starting to be realised (see Aguon 2017; Douthat 2018; DeGeorge 2019). Chibnall et al. (1998) show how prevalent sexual harassment is for Religious Sisters, both in regard to same-sex harassment between Sisters but even more so of sexual harassment by priests. CSMAA as sexual harassment may or may not end in actual sexual activity. One case from de Weger (2016, p. 78) describes a 60-year-old parish secretary who was constantly propositioned by the parish priest to have a 'relationship' with him. Her response:

> *You are immature to think that your secretary finds you an attractive proposition. Offering large sums of money, in this case over $10,000 for holidays etc. along with letters/poems proclaiming love are not what one expects from a parish priest, if parishioners knew they would be appalled by your behaviour. You know I need my job desperately and you tried to exploit my vulnerability as a single struggling parent—you are a pathetic little man (Carol).*

This form of sexual harassment is one of the penultimate expressions of power abuse using sex *and* financial need to 'get one's way'.

Context 9: The needy 'fallen' cleric (Pastoral or Social; CA)

In this context, all the emphasis is on the cleric who does believe in his/her call to celibacy but has deep and genuine needs most often relating back to psycho-sexual underdevelopment, or the existence of deep loneliness resulting from mandatory celibacy (Murphy 1992; Anderson 2006). Those in this category may have also joined the priesthood/religious life at a very young age and some of these in turn may also be struggling with sexual identity issues. As a result, there very often comes a time when such clergy feel they have missed out on a major aspect of life, and feel intense pressure to explore their sexuality, or seek comfort or 'development' in the arms and sexual companionship of another. Christine, from de Weger (2016, p. 96) explains one such scenario:

> *He did ask me to marry him which I found utterly remarkable given by the time he asked he was definitely an out gay man in the gay community. I said no, mostly because I was pretty sure his idea of marriage was not mine, and that in reality he would never leave the priesthood because his mother would disown him. We remained friends for the rest of his life and I more or less became his sole confidant. Unfortunately, he never really did get his head out of his rear end because he could never get over his mother (Christine).*

Such clergy often see themselves as having 'fallen' in their quest to be celibate. In many ways, this context has grey areas which, humanly speaking, demand some understanding and leniency. However, what is a major issue here is the concept that others can be collaterally 'used' to help clergy develop and grow up. Some adults may be more than happy to 'help' clergy do so. At first, Christine above was one of these. She says she was also confused about her sexuality and she and the priest were going through confusion together. She later wanted the whole sexual aspect to stop because it was causing her too much grief, but the priest did not want the sex to stop. As such, this really is one context which, while having the ever-present and obvious *positional* power differential, may have a less obvious *personal* power differential. It is also one context that requires a more case-by-case assessment of intention and consent to determine whether it seriously falls under the CSMAA definition. Regardless of this questionability, objectively speaking,

whether the cleric has personal problems or not is more an explanation rather than an excuse for sexualising a pastoral or even social 'relationship'. Furthermore, the effects on the other adult must be of primary consideration given that these are professional/religious contexts.

Context 10: The experimenting cleric (Social or Pastoral; CA or CR)

This context is near to Context 9. Here, the cleric who says s/he is 'experimenting' with sex and/or relationships, may be being honest. Their desire to experiment may also be a result of having joined the clerical life too early. However, this desire may also be a form of deception and/or a form of neutralisation of responsibility. This appeared to be the case for Lynne. After [Fr J] had ended the 'relationship', being told to do so because he was being considered as the next superior of the Religious Order to which he belonged, he said that he still wanted to be her friend. When she asked what he considered the 'relationship' had been until then, his reply was that he had been "experimenting". This realisation was understandably very devastating for Lynne. As such, this too was a clear case of CSMAA as firstly, this case began when Lynne was still considered a child, and secondly, the cleric led her to believe that he was in love with her and would marry her. He used his positional and personal power to manipulate Lynne into a sexual relationship which in the end he defined merely as "experimenting".

Context 11: The sex-addicted cleric (Pastoral or Social; CA or CR)

This context has some very complex, serious, and controversial elements within it. However, such complexity, while needing to be acknowledged and challenged, are beyond this article. Nevertheless, the element of clergy sexual addiction is one that has been previously explored and, in some depth, (see Fones et al. 1999; Gregoire and Jungers 2004). Sex-addicted clergy do commit CSMAA but while it may be a way of explaining CSMAA, sex addiction cannot be used to excuse it in any way. If approached from a harms-based perspective, the results for the victim are still adverse and perhaps even more complexly so in such a context.

4.3. CSAWA: Clergy Sexual Activity with Adults?

Finally, there exists various sexual interactions that are difficult to define as abusive, simply because the power imbalance has been removed in some way. Such contexts may, for example, exist where the other adult is as 'laissez-faire' about sex with the cleric as the cleric is himself. Other even less serious contexts would be sexual activity with an atheist where the adult really has no 'respect' or awe for the role of the cleric. Another would involve 'anonymous' casual sex as found in cases involving Tinder or Grindr, or park cruising where the cleric is incognito. The final context where it would be difficult to define clergy sexual activity as abusive, unless it went beyond the acceptable behaviours, would be the cleric who visits a sex worker.

4.4. Summary of the Contexts

Firstly, it is because of the confusions or even confabulations of various contexts of CSMAA/CSAWA, such as describing confusing sexual seduction of unsuspecting laity as 'affairs', that many survivors of CSMAA are not taken seriously when reporting. This confusion erroneously conflates the more serious professional misconduct realities of CSMAA with 'sinful' or 'immoral' definitions of CSAWA events. Presenting the many possible and real contexts will hopefully clarify when CSMAA is obviously professional misconduct and even criminal as opposed to merely immoral. Having done so, survivors can more clearly understand their own experiences within these various contexts. This will assist them to construct a perhaps more accurate self-perception in regard to feelings of shame or self-blame. Finally, it will allow victims/survivors to come forewarned and forearmed when reporting.

Secondly, regardless of where a scenario or context may lie on a CSAWA-CSMAA continuum, there is one unifying element: *all* are forms of deviance, at least according to the teachings of the RCC and the expectations of most of the laity. As such all also

contribute to the parallel cultures of secrecy that need to then be created, and the fallout thereof (Sipe 2008). As well, they all also have potential to cause a form of covert social harm in the undermining of morale and morality amongst the clergy, and within RCC communities. Finally, it is also this culture of secrecy that appears to negatively impact the ability of those who report CSMAA to be sincerely heard and redressed (de Weger 2020).

Because of the confusion surrounding what CSMAA/CSAWA events entail, there is a great need then for the RCC to clearly define clergy professional sexual misconduct against adults. This clarity does not yet exist. While acknowledging that this non-existence may well be an attempt at neutralisation itself, in the above contexts of obviously broader and varied expressions of CSAWA and CSMAA, without a clear and universal definition, the issue and those affected by it cannot be consistently and genuinely responded to.

The above contexts and definitions are a more 'legal' approach to the issue of CSMAA. However, there is the other approach—the harms-based one. CSMAA becomes even more clearly recognizable when viewed through the harms produced by this form of clergy abuse in the lives of adult victims/survivors.

5. Harms

Because the focus is rarely on the harmful effects on those caught up in CSMAA, little is known, let alone believed, concerning these effects. Along with definitions, and the power-vulnerability intersection, the area of harm emerged clearly as a major theme and issue when analysing the experiences of the twenty-nine victims/survivors of the first study (de Weger 2016). All but two respondents (Margaret and Christine) felt psycho/spiritually, relationally, occupationally, and even physically damaged by the effects of their CSMAA, effects which usually lasted decades. Such disabling was further often compounded and even intensified when they sought compassion and redress by officially reporting those experiences (de Weger 2020). Accordingly, the remainder of this article will be dedicated to presenting the findings surrounding the sequalae of harms produced by CSMAA.

5.1. Findings and Discussion

When analysing the data from de Weger (2016), it was helpful to categorise CSMAA harm into three main types. These are: personal harm (also separated here into psychological, spiritual, and physical); relational harm (harm to familial and intimate relationships, including sexual expression); and practical harm (the effects of CSMAA on jobs/careers, finances). While these separations are artificial, and are in reality all complexly interwoven, it is helpful to look at each type on their own.

Furthermore, rather than presenting the findings and discussion as separate sections, it was considered more beneficial to present the more qualitative-based findings and discuss them within the framework of the different types of harms as presented. As well, it needs to be noted that the quantitative material has not been analysed statistically here or in de Weger (2016) as this was never the intent of that study, it is presented only to show the given responses of the participants. In short, though, all but one participant in both studies (Margaret[9]) presented examples of some form and intensity of harm.

5.1.1. Personal Harm

Figure 3 shows the responses to the question, "In general, as a result of clerical sexual misconduct in your life, which, if any of the following apply"? These responses show the many forms of personal harms experienced by victims/survivors of CSMAA at the time of the event/s and at three subsequent stages. These responses, along with the written accounts, produced a vivid picture of what the respondents have had to endure as a result of their adult abuse experiences.

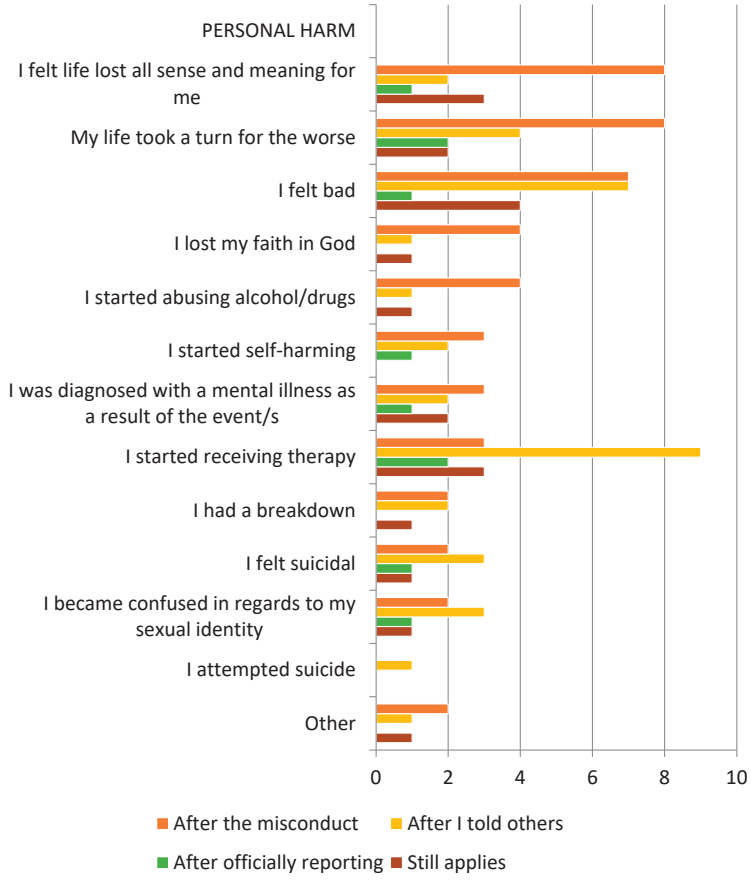

Figure 3. Personal harm produced by CSMAA according to periods of time (n = 22). More than one response was permitted.

Under 'other', "I felt confused and troubled" was the only one which directly stated an effect of the CSMAA. For, "I was diagnosed with a mental illness as a result of the event/s", respondents were asked to specify the mental illness if they wished. The following responses were provided:

- complex PTSD
- clinical depression
- depression and anxiety
- major depression

To further analyse and clarify the given responses, 'Personal Harm' was broken down into the following three types. The written comments of the respondents surrounding their choices have been added.

5.1.2. Physical Harm

CSMAA produces long term physical impacts on the victims. The respondents in this study revealed physical ailments that they saw as being directly linked to the CSMAA. These findings were consistent with other research on the physical effects of sexual abuse/assault (Brady 2008, p. 371; Freyd et al. 2005, pp. 98–99; Kluft 2010, pp. 48–54; Mason and Lodrick 2013, pp. 31–32; Morris et al. 2014, p. 98; Wilson 2010, pp. 57, 60–61).

Many of the harms discussed here are also expressions of "somatization" or "the development of physical symptoms of emotional problems" (Flynn 2003, p. 115; see also Garland 2006, pp. 12–13). Physical harm here also includes aspects of physical expressions of psychological harm, or "dysfunctional coping", such as drug/alcohol abuse, self-harming, and ideation about or attempts at suicide (Orzeck et al. 2010, p. 179). Elements of drug/alcohol abuse, self-harm and suicidal ideation became apparent in the selected answers to questions as well as in the written responses. For example, Maria stated the following:

> *I had a nervous breakdown but continued to work. Whilst she [the mother superior/perpetrator] dyed her hair (worn totally obscured by the veil...so this made no sense if not to fool herself), I was pulling mine out...as a form of self-harm (Maria; in parenthesis, hers).*

Maria's account of her two years of repeated sexual abuse as a young nun by her Mother Superior, is most powerful and disturbing in regard to revealing how CSMAA can have deep and lasting physical effects on victims:

> *I was disgusted and afraid, I felt trapped, used as an instrument of gratification. I began vomiting after eating and felt nauseated when I looked at her or even smelt her body odour. I was becoming increasingly depressed and confused, fearful of God's wrath.*
>
> *This last episode of abuse by the mother superior during my life among religious caused me to become so ill that I died during surgery and was resuscitated. My reaction to this final effect of the abuse was to run away from the convent as soon as I could get up from my hospital bed.*
>
> *I have struggled with my chronic worsening health problems all my life (undiagnosed thyrotoxicosis and increasing pain and disability from undiagnosed arthritis) and I am on the verge of being confined to a wheelchair (Maria; in parenthesis, hers).*

Judy was both a victim of CSMAA and a whistle-blower against clerical sexual abuse of children. She has had to endure much:

> *The whole matter of being disrespected, crushed, vilified, and denigrated for carrying the message of truth—or being a whistle blower, has seriously affected my life and now I have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia and possibly chronic fatigue (Judy).*

Judy and Maria's health issues are consistent with research on "betrayal trauma" (Freyd et al. 2005, pp. 85–86, 98–101). According to Freyd et al. (2005, p. 85):

> *The Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS) assesses exposure to both traumas high in betrayal (such as abuse by a close other) and traumas low in betrayal but high in life-threat (such as an automobile accident). Exposure to traumas with high betrayal was significantly correlated with a number of physical illness, anxiety, dissociation, and depression symptoms. Amount of exposure to other types of traumas (low betrayal traumas) did not predict symptoms over and above exposure to betrayal.*

Maria took her faith and religious life seriously. Maria's abuser was a 'close other', in the context that she was her 'Mother Superior' and that she was in a Religious Order, a Christian community of faith, service, and love, where sexual abuse is simply not expected. As such, she suffered deeply from betrayal trauma. Maria was also the only respondent to provide so much detail about the link between her CSMAA and her illnesses. However, as Flynn (2003) observed, CSMAA-related physical illnesses were a very real issue for many of her participants as well. According to Flynn (2003, pp. 114–17), many of these physical symptoms are directly connected with PTSD and complex PTSD resulting from the traumas of their abusive experiences, a reality backed up by the medical profession. However, for most of the respondents in this survey, the harmful effects of CSMAA were more of a spiritual and/or psychological nature.

5.1.3. Spiritual Harm

Catholicism is a "spiritual force, a way of life, and a religious movement" (Doyle 2006, p. 189). Spiritual harm disturbs this context and subsequently, a person's equilibrium in regard to their inner map, their faith in God, life, and others, and their overall world view. After abuse within one's faith institution, the belief system that has hitherto provided their sense of self, meaning and balance in life, begins to fracture (Crisp 2012; Doyle 2006). Figure 3 (above) gives some indication as to the extent respondents felt spiritually harmed by CSMAA. Sue sums up such harm:

> *I felt an attempt had been made on my integrity, that my commitment to religious beliefs and work was twisted into a space defined by another person according to his self-interest and need to release (Sue).*

For 36% (6 women and 2 men), their life 'took a turn for the worse', and for the same numbers 'life lost all sense and meaning'. For 18% (3 women and 1 man), 'I lost my faith in God' was selected. Tanya sums up such harm:

> *He destroyed my sense of safety and my hope of ever going to heaven (Tanya).*

Spiritual harm, however, is not a stand-alone effect. If one couples it with the broader loss of faith in the victim's Church and all it stands for, and their faith community and even one's own family, spiritual harm is an outcome of CSMAA that can and does have very profound effects on the lives of victims (Kennedy 2009, p. 206–217). As Maria states:

> *This abuse caused me to become divorced from my religion and shunned by my family. I have always felt an outcast (Maria).*

Another respondent sums up the spiritual (and associated) harm caused by CSMAA:

> *I lost a lot of long-time Church "friends" who were really fellow hero-worshippers of the priest. I often feel I was privileged by God to be liberated by the truth, where they have remained under illusions. They didn't want their sense of safety in the Church to be threatened. I don't have any illusions about the Church or priests, but a strong belief in God's holiness. Unfortunately, however, I seem to have lost fairly permanently my sense of safety in the world. I manage OK, but I suffer from chronic high anxiety (Tanya).*

Interestingly, for many of the respondents like Tanya, what was affected most was their faith in the RCC and Catholicism as a religion. For many, a personal faith in God was retained in some form.

While spiritual harm, or any type of harm, should not be viewed in isolation, the 'god-factor' (Flynn 2003, p. 8; Villiers 1996, p. 44) is an obvious and major contributor to this form of harm (Cooper-White 1990; Doyle 2006, pp. 207–8; Kennedy 2009, pp. 210–13; McLaughlin 1994). According to Doyle (2006, p. 209), the level of harm created when a trusted member of one's religious faith system abuses the trust of believers, is akin to spiritually dying. As Doyle (2006, pp. 208–9) states:

> *The impact on Catholic victims is unique and, in the opinion of some experts, particularly devastating precisely because the abuser is a priest . . . Many victims experience a kind of toxic transference and experience in their sexual abuse a form of spiritual death.*

Based within religion, CSMAA produces harms in ways that other forms of professional sexual misconduct do not (Flynn 2003, p. 8, pp. 121–22; Kennedy 2009, pp. 210–14). This spiritual harm can result in deep existential confusion and psychological conflict (Flynn 2003, pp. 155–56). Indeed, it is very difficult to separate the spiritual from the psychological (Crisp 2012). As such, spiritual harm is also very closely followed by and entwined with psychological harm (Crisp 2012).

5.1.4. Psychological Harm

Of all the forms of harm evident in this survey, psychological harm was the most prominent in the data presented. This is also the type of harm that Lievore (2003, p. 28)

states as being one of the qualities of "serious crime". As Lievore (2003, p. 28) explains, in Australia, sexual acts that may be viewed as serious are those that "deprive victims of liberty, threaten their lives or physical integrity, or produce psychological harm".

Figure 3, above, includes many examples of psychological harm produced by CSMAA as selected by the respondents. Respondents' written accounts provide an even deeper insight into their experiences of psychological harm:

> *I was naturally anxious and unable to suppress the anxiety till I began to inappropriately express frustration, mostly in community. When offered to have therapy I was diagnosed with major depression (Maria).*
>
> *After a time of great struggle and consequent growing dependence on substance abuse, in my case alcohol, I began my journey of recovery (Edith).*
>
> *CLERICAL SEXUAL ABUSE DESTROYS LIVES AND IT HAS SEVERELY DAMAGED MINE (Judy—capitalisation hers).*
>
> *A lot of the therapy in the first year or two was to help me cope with how the Provincial and others known to the priest were reacting to me (Tanya).*

As many of these statements also reveal, victims/survivors expressed a need for therapy to help them cope with the CSMAA, not to mention the effects of the reporting thereof.

For Teresa, a religious Sister, this was her experience as well:

> *Having therapy has helped me immensely to acknowledge the truth of what happened. This has freed me from feeling restricted by the guilt and shame. It has enabled me to revisit my childhood, to forgive and to re-engage with life as a religious (Teresa).*

According to Kennedy (2009, pp. 142–45), this regaining of control, where a renaming of CSMAA and other forms of abuse plays no small part, is deeply important for mental health restoration and eliminating the effects of CSMAA as much as is possible (de Weger 2016, pp. 40–50, 108–9).

The need for therapy or some other form of healing/support, suggesting the existence of CSMAA-produced psychological harm needing resolution in some way, was not found in traditional therapies alone:

> *I ended up involved in a twelve Step Program AA, [and] my life has slowly picked up... My husband has had great difficulties coming to terms with it and yet we have stuck together through it all (Edith).*

This statement by Edith also shows the important role of loved ones in the lives of victims/survivors. Andy makes this plain, as well:

> *I was fortunate to find a woman who loved me unconditionally (Andy).*

Such statements also express that CSMAA never occurs in isolation but always in a context where other people are caught up in the event/s and the repercussions thereof. This reality became even clearer in the responses to survey questions relating to the effects of CSMAA on relationships.

5.1.5. Relational Harm

In de Weger (2016), the following question was asked: "In general, as a result of clerical sexual misconduct in your life, which, if any of the following applied to your experience/s in regard to your relationships with others?" This question was asked because, obviously, CSMAA, like all sexual assaults/abuse, even if kept secret, does not occur in a personal vacuum. CSMAA involved not just the victim/survivor, but their families and loved ones, their broader communities, and the RCC institution itself. Accordingly, all these existing relationships are threatened or suffer. In turn, within these broader contexts, victims/survivors have to also contend with the many varied beliefs, attitudes and behaviours concerning CSMAA and sexual assault in general. These beliefs, attitudes and behaviours include ignorance and/or denial of such events. Furthermore, unlike

child abuse, in CSMAA, because of the existence of relationships of victims/survivors with husbands, wives, partners and children, the possible relational harms resulting from reporting such abuse causes victims to maintain secrecy about their abuse, resulting in great tensions and still further harms. Figure 4 shows the responses to the above question:

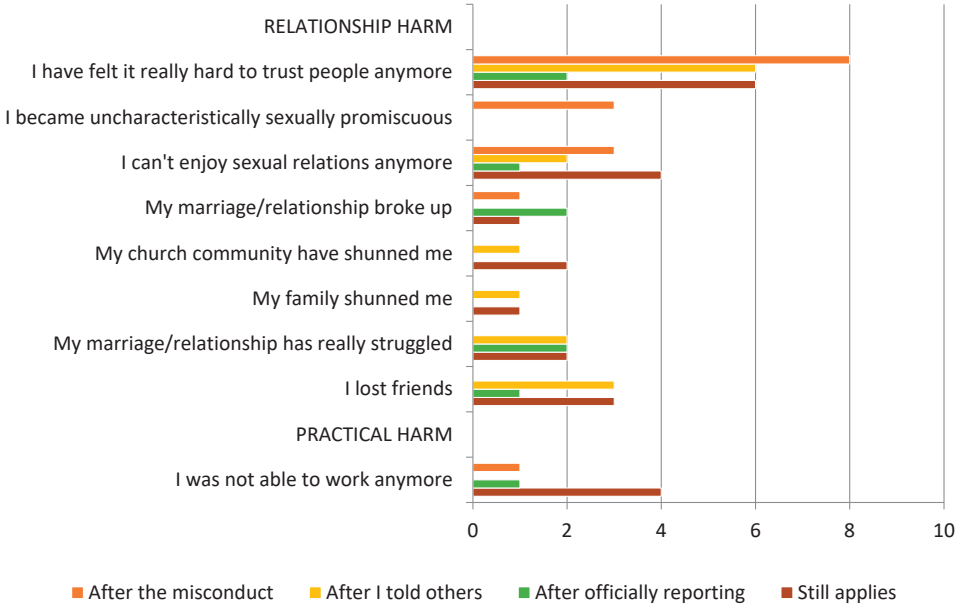

Figure 4. Relational, and practical harms produced by CSMAA according to time periods (n = 22). More than one response was permitted.

More variations and details became evident when respondents elaborated. James, who at the time of his abuse as a postulant in a religious congregation selected 'heterosexual' in regard to his sexuality, selected 'I became uncharacteristically sexually promiscuous' (with men), after the CSMAA, and

> *Following the abuse, I acted homosexual with other males but denied it externally (James).*

As James further revealed, he seems to still be struggling decades later with various expressions of sexuality and relationship issues.

> *My wife and I struggled sexually from the first year of our marriage 15 years ago. Now I am confused sexually. I find other males sexually attractive but remain in a Hetro (sic) marriage whilst living alone apart from my wife who lives alone too. I have had continual problems with power figures including managers, clergy, and so on. I prefer to live alone but need others loosely around me. I hate feeling controlled by anyone including checkout workers at a supermarket (James).*

According to James' own words, CSMAA has had a major impact on his relationships, sexuality, and broader self-identity in some way. Others elaborated even further:

> *Impact on my marriage has been huge and may be irreparable. While he has been incredibly supportive, the psychological effects on me continue to impact on our relationship and he feels he cannot "put up" with these anymore. He is still angry that I did not "trust" him and tell him sooner. I told him almost 20 years after we were married. What happened to me stole my adulthood and developing positive relationships with people in general, and men in particular. I feel so icky to have actually married and had children (Wendy).*

> *My friendships are becoming difficult because I'm living a secret life that I can't share with my friends. If I have problems, I have no one to ask for advice and if I am happy, I have no one to share the joy with (Winnie).*
>
> *Even without wanting it to, [CSMAA] sets up barriers. People who have not experienced it have no idea of the ways it affects a person, and because it's so hard to discuss, it just kind of gets in the way of everyday relationships (Sarah).*
>
> *At 65 years old I am still trying to accept myself as a good and worthwhile person (Scott).*

What all these statements verify is that consistent with the findings of Flynn (2003) and Kennedy (2009), one of the sources of greatest anguish felt by victims/survivors is how the CSMAA affected their personal relationships, including with themselves. This distress included the sense of dislocation they experienced within, and with their loved ones and community of faith (Flynn 2003, pp. 79–86, 122–40; Kennedy 2009, pp. 205–6, 208–9).

For some survivors, the deep impact on their ability to trust others again was also extended to their once highly respected and trusted clerics, as the following express:

> *I cannot respect priests now any more than I respect any other people. The word "Father" sticks in my throat (Tanya).*

For Teresa, her reversal of what was initially deep trust became especially clear in her final statements 'to the cleric' at the end of the survey:

> *I trusted you and I believed you would respect my trust. It took me a long time to rebuild my trust in men, in particular, although I am much more cautious (Teresa).*

The betraying of trust by a highly respected cleric whose religion stands for all that is hopeful, compassionate, and good profoundly impacts a person's whole outlook on the safety of life (Byrne 2010, p. 80; Flynn 2003, pp. 85, 117–22; Victorian Inquiry 2013, p. 47). The same is true for betrayal trauma in any relationship circumstance but particularly those of traditionally close ties of trust (Freyd et al. 2005). The breaking of that trust then leads to a deep inability to trust anyone again. A fallout of this is that this inability to trust can then, in turn, become one of the deepest barriers to the healing and re-establishing of relationships as well as the development of new ones (Flynn 2003, pp. 130–32).

While the sample for this study is small, the data provided do show that relational harm is part of the overall experience of victims of CSMAA, and in no insignificant way. However, there is one more area of harm that needs discussion, one that victims/survivors included throughout their stories of survival—practical harm. As with other forms of harm, practical harm cannot be seen in isolation. However, when discussed as a separate entity, a greater clarification of this usually ignored form of harm is possible.

5.1.6. Practical Harm

As with child abuse victims, the practical harm experienced by victims/survivors of CSMAA is an often-underappreciated aspect of clerical misconduct. However, the reality for victims/survivors of CSMAA is that, as a result of traumatic psycho-social effects of CSMAA in their lives, many have had to endure very serious practical difficulties. These include job/career losses, an inability to work and support their families and/or themselves, the need to upend their lives and move away from abusive clerics, financial crises, and all the everyday stresses inherent therein.

While the responses relating to practical harms given in Figure 4 are few, further reading of the written material given by the respondents revealed much practical and financial distress. While only one woman selected 'I was not able to work anymore', two female respondents (Maria and Ann) added that they were on a disability support pension, Maria stating that her need for this was directly related to her CSMAA. Below, Maria tells the story of how she had to rely on that disability pension when she fled the convent. As a result, she has struggled not just physically and psychologically/emotionally, but financially and practically as well. One of the last questions asked in this survey was "What might be some of your present urgent needs resulting from your whole experience of the

clerical sexual misconduct and how it has been dealt with?" Maria's answer was poignant and to the point:

> *I have struggled with my chronic worsening health problems all my life and I am on the verge of being confined to a wheelchair. I have never been able to work hence I've never been able to put away savings for my old age and possible infirmity. I have been in receipt of a disability support pension all my life since age 30. I am in debt and insolvent and am having to negotiate with the financial institutions to which I owe money to be relieved of my debts so I will not lose my house. My present most urgent needs are: (a) be relieved of my debts (b) be strong enough in body and positive enough in mind to survive surgery (Maria).*

When asked who should provide the assistance she needed, Maria had little doubt—the RCC:

> *It was their religious order that took from me every prospect of a career and a stable financial life by abducting me at 16*[10] *then abusing me as a child and as an adult until my health suffered, never to recover (Maria).*

Elsewhere, she explains:

> *If you truly repent give me of this world's goods and security...which you say you do not care about yet have much of! I need some financial relief so I can have surgery on the body I had, once strong and fit as that of a junior gymnast and ballet dancer...you stole that body from me! You abused that body until it died during surgery and was revived. Give me back my strength. Give me the money my poor mother gave you as my dowry that should have been returned to me when I left your convent so I could start my life again. I need you to pay the doctors to mend my broken body! I need to be funded at the highest level of medical and hospital cover...that insurance you cancelled and told me to pay myself when all I had was a Disability Pension of $42.70 a fortnight and was so very ill to the point of death. That's what I want, that the Church compensate me for ruining my body and mind then pay for the best doctors and medical treatment to restore me... (Maria).*

Respondent Ann had a physical disability from birth. However, she was still able to acquire a university degree and work. Nevertheless, Ann goes on to explain that because of her CSMAA,

> *I also lost my job and had to find part time work, but didn't know why, and then I was not able to work anymore, so that was when even part time work didn't last and it all came crashing in (Ann).*

As a result, she has to now rely on a disability support pension as well. With the realisation of her increasingly dire situation, Ann stated that she also believed it was the RCC, or the cleric's Religious Order, that needed to supply redress:

> *I also know that the Order must replace my massive loss of income/super from having to resign 20 years early. They need to be able to be taught to acknowledge this (Ann).*

James also needed to eventually rely on a disability support pension and had the following to say about how CSMAA has impacted him in practical ways:

> *Ever since the abuse I have suffered financially for many reasons. I volunteered three years as a missionary too. I have lost so many jobs due to issues with authority and I don't have a solid financial future due to the abuse and due to an ineffective church and Towards Healing.*
>
> *I need financial security into the future as I may have another 25 to 30 years of life in me (James).*

Job loss or the inability to work can be seen as a related effect of CSMAA. However, disclosure of CSMAA for those who are working, especially within the RCC, can present its own possibilities of practical harm. Another respondent, Joe, selected 'I work in the

church, and I am scared of losing my job' as one reason why he has never officially reported his CSMAA. Another practical harm resulting from CSMAA was, as some respondents also stated, how the CSMAA thwarted their desired future or greatly interrupted their current work:

> *I had to leave my studies and I so wanted to work as a missionary sister (Grace).*
>
> *I felt I had to leave a work position that I truly loved because working where I did with this person in a power position became untenable (Sue).*

As a result of their CSMAA, Scott, James, and Sarah all left the religious orders they had chosen and loved. They had hoped to dedicate their lives to the Church and its people.

Practical harms are not trivial. Maintaining a career or job was an issue for many victims/survivors of CSMAA in other studies as well (Flynn 2003, pp. 25, 77–78, 112–14, 135–36, 141, 163, 190, 196–97; Kennedy 2009, pp. 162, 205, 209–10). As the accounts given by the respondents show, such harms are deeply debilitating, stressful and destabilising. Studies have revealed the relationship between job loss and further connected harmful sequelae (Price et al. 2002, p. 310; see also Loya 2015). As such, the practical harms produced by sexual assault/abuse can be shown to have very disruptive cyclic practical, relational, and personal impacts. Clearly, the practical harms of financial and job instability produced by CSMAA needs to also be fully acknowledged along with the personal and relational harms.

5.2. Summary of Harms

CSMAA and even CSAWA cannot be said to be harmless. For all the participants in this study, apart from Margaret and Christine who considering their harm as not too serious and dealt with at the time, it was clear that the remaining survivors had been personally, relationally, and practically harmed and not in minor ways. As such, CSMAA needs to be more clearly outlined and defined beyond any myopic and simplistic, and even deflective 'consensual affair' perceptions.

6. Conclusions

For the RCC, one 'deviancy' that needs to be strongly suppressed or neutralised is that many more clergy are engaged in both clergy sexual activity with adults (CSAWA) and CSMAA, than those sexually abusing children (Sipe 1994, p. 134; John Jay Report 2004, p. 258). However, as Sipe (2008) has troublingly hypothesised, all expressions of sexual activity, misconduct, and abuse, are also inter-connected by the creation of a deep culture of fear of exposure of any abuse or sexual activity. Such an exposure could undermine the core male clergy power structure of the RCC (Doyle et al. 2006, pp. 8–9).

The most crucial element that needs to be fully grasped when dealing with CSMAA, and even CSAWA, especially in this context of the RCC, is that CSMAA does not happen because of adult vulnerability: all the cases in de Weger (2016) and de Weger (2020) clearly showed that CSMAA happens because there are clergy who are willing to groom, exploit, and even attack such adult vulnerability, and to explain away their behaviour, often criminal, as acts of love or weakness. However, this is clearly professional misconduct and a deep betrayal of usually vulnerable women and men, and indeed everything the clergy and the RCC stands for. Any definition of CSMAA, including the one presented in this article, must, therefore, seriously reflect these realities. Furthermore, victims who report CSMAA need to be sincerely validated and actually thanked for attempting to reduce sexual misconduct within the RCC. But they are not. Why?

One of the main reasons is that there are still officials within the RCC who are either unaware of or who choose to ignore their plight. Furthermore, lawyers are reluctant to take on cases of CSMAA simply because the existing laws make it virtually impossible to prove non-consent: the still erroneously held belief especially within the religious context, is that being an adult (over 18) those caught up in sexual activities with clergy must have consented unless there was violence or signs thereof. Governments now need to step up

and seal up this gap in the law. In addition, jurisdictions around the world need to catch up with those, such as certain U.S. states, that are unambiuously criminalising sex between clergy and parishioners, at least within the pastoral context.

In the Western world at least, in cases of sexual misconduct in other professions, arguments surrounding consent are no longer considered due to the inherent power imbalances in such contexts. However, because of a general perception of clergy as unique, respected, celibate/chaste, socially elevated 'holy men', clergy are not perceived in the quite same light as secular 'professionals'. There is some element of truth in this, given that clergy also socially mix with their 'clients' outside of the more one-to-one pastoral ministries. For some, this broader context also means that, somehow, sexual activity between clergy and others somehow translates into being a less serious issue than that of other professions. However, those who have researched professional sexual misconduct within institutions have clearly concluded that religious professionals have even *more* power and contexts with which to abuse others than their secular counterparts because of the 'God Factor', and when they do, the effects are, therefore, even *more* harmful (Rutter 1989; Peterson 1992; Russell 1993; Gonsiorek 1995; Villiers 1996, p. 44; Flynn 2003, p. 8; Tschan 2014).

CSMAA is harmful and has affected countless but unknown number of women and men within the RCC. In the fallout of the RCC's ambivalence and ambiguity concerning clear definitions of CSMAA, the victims/survivors thereof have been left feeling abandoned, unhealed, and even further traumatised when they reach out, usually in great hope, to the Church for help and understanding. When survivors report such misconduct, they need legal and psycho/spiritual validation, as well as sincere and just responses to their abuse-affected lives, but they are not receiving this (de Weger 2020). The question has to be asked, 'why is this still the case'? Hopefully this article has provided some valuable material for further discourses and action around this greatly deflected issue.

Funding: Both my Master's degree and Ph.D. were paid for as per the Commonwealth Government of Australia funding arrangements for higher degree research. I also received a university QUT scholarship for the final 2 years of my Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Both the Master's research project and the Ph.D. study underwent in-depth scrutiny by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Queensland University of Technology). Ethics approval was granted for both studies. Master's ethics approval number: 1300000401. Ph.D. ethics approval number: 1800001033.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. As part of the informed consent agreement, it was made clear that the data received during the research projects would be used to inform the Church and other interested parties and would be used as a foundation for academic articles in the future.

Data Availability Statement: Data for both studies (Master's survey, Ph.D. interview transcripts) are not publicly available but may be available by contacting me directly at *removed for peer-review*.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] Due to the controversial nature of Sipe's estimates, the following explanations and additions were deemed necessary:

For Sipe's explanations for his estimates and a validation thereof, see (Sipe 1995, pp. 66, 75–79; 2003, pp. 44–50). Sipe's (1995) estimates were based on his work with "over 1500 Catholic priests". Furthermore, he worked with and utilised a great deal of data from "25 psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, psychologists and historians", checking figures with "10 groups of priests in diocesan and Religious settings" (Sipe 1995, p. 66). In his 2003 book, the sample had increased to 2775 priest from "five levels of observation (Sipe 2003, pp. 49–50). Sipe's 'estimates' were also supported by various cardinals, including Cardinal Josk Sanchez, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome (Sipe 1994, p. 134), as well as many leaders from the various Religious Orders.

As to other sources, Sheila Murphy's, A Delicate Dance: Sex, celibacy, and relationships among Catholic clergy and religious, revealed the following: Of the female participants, 49% acknowledged sexual behaviours. Of this 49%, 39% reported only male partners; 35% only female partners and 29% both male and female partners. As for the male participants, 62% reported being "sexually active" and of these 58% said that their partners were exclusively female, while 32% said they were exclusively male (Murphy 1992, pp. 60–63).

The John Jay Report also provided data concerning clergy sexual misconduct against adults in this summary:

> *Haywood and Green provided an overview of the literature pertaining to prevalence, offense/victim characteristics, and evaluation of cleric serial offenders. Depending upon the study, prevalence rates ranged from 2% to 6% (pedophiliac and ephebophiliac clerics), 20% to 40% (sexual mis-conduct with adults), 8.4% (in a sample of 1322), and 5.8% to 24% (boundary violations with adults).*
>
> (John Jay Report 2004, p. 258)

Similar figures can be found in a 1995 report by Spanish psychologist, Pepe Rodriguez:

> *In traditionally Catholic Spain, 60 per cent of priests are sexually active, in violation of their vows of celibacy. Of these, his study found that 53 per cent had relations with adult females, 21 per Cent with adult males, 14 per cent with underage males and 12 per cent with underage females.*
>
> (Yallop 2010, p. 200)

It needs to be noted, however, none of the given studies can be generalised to the entire population of clergy. Not until a complete study of all clergy (Brothers and Sisters included) is done, and all clergy answer honestly, shall we never know with absolute certainty whether the 50% figure is fully accurate. But no one in the church or in academia is contradicting these claims/estimates and if anything, they are being 'supported'.

2 For the complete outlines of the research design, methods, and underlying methodological framework, including limitations, see (de Weger 2016, pp. 60–70) and (de Weger 2020, pp. 129–50).

3 Please note that only pseudonyms have been used here and in the foundational studies.

4 It was not possible to fully outline these findings here. For a full discussion on these see (de Weger 2016).

5 This is my own definition. While simpler ones exist, I felt the need to be as unambiguous and as inclusive as possible. It may well be developed or changed in the future.

6 For fuller descriptions of the scenarios either side of 3–11, see (de Weger 2020, pp. 48–55, 262–64). For another list, similar but different, see Benyei (1998, pp. 65–72).

7 The very important question of 'What is love' is far beyond the scope of this study even though there was a desire to include a discussion on the topic. Suffice it to say here, this study found the best definition of adult human love in Fromm's mid-20th classic, *The Art of Loving* (Fromm 1956). It also found similar content on appropriate mature and logical concepts in Karen Lebacqz short article "Appropriate Vulnerability: A Sexual Ethic for Singles" (Lebacqz 1987). For a definition of consent, see Marilyn Peterson book *At Personal Risk* (Peterson 1992, p. 124).

8 See https://maltesemarriedcatholicpriest.wordpress.com/?s=Married+Priest (accessed on 10 November 2021). (As of 17 May 2020, this site has ceased to operate, however, the content remains).

9 At the time, Margaret was a Christian Chaplain at the hospital where the event occurred. She was not 'disturbed' by the indecent assault of the priest who was a patient there, but understood the context. She also knew of his personal history of previous CSMAA. Also, it was clear in this case given the circumstances she was an 'equal' to the priest/patient.

10 The following is a paraphrasing of Maria's testimony dealing with her abduction:

These Sisters had abducted Maria from their Hostel for Girls, where, due to her mother's ill health, she had been sent to live. When she was 16 the Sisters allegedly forged documents and shipped her off to [country] and forced her to become a Sister, herself, enduring abuse there during the training. Once professed as a Sister, she was returned to Australia.

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Article

Insincerity, Secrecy, Neutralisation, Harm: Reporting Clergy Sexual Misconduct against Adults—A Survivor-Based Analysis

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Abstract: The foundational study for this article asked: how do survivors of clergy sexual misconduct against adults (CSMAA) in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) describe and understand their experiences of reporting that misconduct to Roman Catholic Church authorities? The findings were that, while survivors sincerely believed that they would be cared for when they approached their Church officials, most soon began to sense a deep lack of insincerity coming from the officials dealing with their case. This insincerity was exposed in various forms by those officials as well as RCC hierarchy connected to the cases. The conclusion here is that the RCC seeks to neutralise exposure of CSMAA and the survivors thereof, and that they actually need to do so. The result—further and deeper harming of the already harmed.

Keywords: Roman Catholic; misconduct; abuse; adults; reporting; clericalism; power

Citation: de Weger, Stephen Edward. 2022. Insincerity, Secrecy, Neutralisation, Harm: Reporting Clergy Sexual Misconduct against Adults—A Survivor-Based Analysis. *Religions* 13: 309. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040309

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 5 March 2022
Accepted: 28 March 2022
Published: 31 March 2022

1. Introduction

Clergy sexual misconduct or abuse against adults (CSMAA) causes serious and often life-long harms. However, for those who report CSMAA, another set of harms often overtakes and compounds those already endured. Following are the findings concerning the experiences of participants during and after official reporting process thereof (de Weger 2020)[1]. While the two geneses of harm—abuse and reporting—obviously interreact and connect, it is important to differentiate the harm of the initial abuse by individual clergy, from the latter 'harming of the harmed' when that abuse was reported. In short, the latter harm results when one's trust in an often lifelong-held, whole-of-life world view is betrayed. As such, the reporting experience, if it does not go well, can be even more devastating than the initial abuse-based harm. The reason for this is that this time, the harm experienced has been at the hands of the whole RCC community or faith family within which the survivor found their sense of meaning and belonging. Lack of official and unofficial validation by the victim's leaders and general community, often expressed as covert or overt victim-blaming, is spiritually and psychologically crushing. This lack of validation also enflames often-existing feelings of pain, confusion, guilt, and self-blame already often festering within victims because of the actual abuse, especially those who have secreted away their experiences because they are too fearful to disclose or report their abuses.

Reporting clergy sexual misconduct against adults to Roman Catholic Church authorities: An analysis of survivor perspectives (de Weger 2020) was an Australian-based study undertaken because there was a very large gap in the literature and research regarding CSMAA, and a complete vacuum of research into the reporting thereof. While this was definitely the case within Australia where the study was based, this lack of research is also a much broader one. In particular, the actual voices of victims/survivors of CSMAA, had rarely been brought to the fore. This project was also undertaken because it became clear in de Weger (2016) that many of the participants who had reported their abuses to RCC officials had experienced negative responses, but those responses were not able to be dealt with as part of this first study[2].

The overall conclusion of both studies was that official church responses were deeply flawed due to erroneous beliefs about CSMAA, which in turn influenced the attitudes and behaviours towards survivors. However, RCC official processes had to be seen to be upholding Church law and teachings. As such, frontstage, the RCC needed to present a spirit of support for victims, and action against sexually active and misconducting clergy. Such tension between front and backstage realities, cannot help but produce cognitive dissonance and an overall flavour of insincerity. This insincerity was particularly revealed when survivors did not submissively comply with RCC processes offered, or how it was being offered. Much of this insincerity could be traced back to the RCC's own ambivalence about clergy sexual activity and misconduct, not to mention being caught off guard about that ambivalence (de Weger and Death 2017).

When the McCarrick case made headlines, ending with the Vatican's 2020 report on the case (Dulle 2020), it became clear that the RCC needed to face the growing dilemma as to how to respond to those reporting CSMAA. As a news report at the time stated:

> Since 2002, all bishops in the United States have known exactly how to address an allegation that a cleric sexually abused a child. The procedure is uniform and clear, and bishops seem to understand the importance of following it precisely and promptly. But the manner in which allegations of sexual misconduct with adults are handled looks nothing like those clear procedures.
>
> Church law does not expressly establish that sex between a cleric and an adult is a canonical crime. As a consequence, bishops everywhere find themselves vexed, and frequently, about how exactly they should handle allegations of clerical sexual misconduct involving adults—even in cases like McCarrick's, where coercion is an operative factor (Flynn 2018).

This vexedness was clearly evident in the testimonies of the participants in this study[3]. Furthermore, what emerged when reviewing the literature was, because of an already deeply tarnished reputation resulting from clergy child abuse, the RCC has an understandable vested interest in not allowing the reality of adult abuse to further contribute to an already collapsing reputation. What the McCarrick case and this study revealed also was that the Church has adopted similar processes to other elite and powerful institutions when faced with exposure of scandal: the deployment of a range of neutralisation tactics. These tactics and modes were first outlined in Anson Shupe's *In the Name of All That's Holy: A Theory of Clergy Malfeasance* (Shupe 1995). Shupe's neutralisation tactics were modified and expanded in de Weger (2020, pp. 229–45). As with most such institutions, the prime reason for the RCC resorting to such tactics is to maintain the secrecy of CSMAA and, perhaps even more so, to disguise the normalisation of more general clergy sexual activity.

This article has also been strongly influenced by Richard Sipe's 11-point thesis (Sipe 2008), which presents a somewhat practical and believable basis to CSMAA and the reasons for the need to cover-up clergy sexual activity and abuse in general. Sipe's thesis has been all but ignored by the RCC, but with the now many sordid stories of sexual abuse and misconduct within seminaries, against nuns, and against lay people (see Appendix 1, de Weger 2020), one could say Sipe's thesis is becoming somewhat prophetic, and increasingly so. The networks of secrecy and blackmail these abuses have created are also slowly emerging (e.g., Jesserer Smith 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Niles 2021)[4].

According to Yocum (2013, pp. 93–107), the traditional projection of the celibate priesthood is one of a "symbolic system of purity" that, because of that proclaimed purity, holds great spiritual power and contains within it a divinely granted right to lead the flock. Yocum then relates this perception and institutional construct to the abuse crisis insofar as the power inherent in such a position, more easily enables abuse to occur, but also lies at the heart of why it has been so difficult to accept that 'holy' men could perpetrate such vile crimes (Yocum 2013, pp. 113–15). Shupe's more secular, sociological analysis of broader elite institutional abuses explains that the existence of elite deviancy within a *religious* institution such as the RCC, should not at all be surprising. Shupe's whole theory espouses

the broad, omnipresent expectation of deviancy occurring within powerful institutions. As Shupe (2007, p. 7) stated: we should be under no illusion but should

> expect "bad pastors" to be discovered as frequently as fleecing accountants, seducing professors, crooked cops, pilfering bankers, money-laundering corporate executive officers, and philandering therapists.

Deviancy within religious institutions should not exist . . . but it does. Why? According to Shupe, it is because of the iron law of oligarchy or in the case of religious institutions, the iron law of oligarchic clericalism (Shupe 1995, p. 56). Shupe explains how in every group of humans, there always rises a controlling elite. These elite have much power, and for many, such power can corrupt and become a tool for abuse. Such deviance and corruption then need to also be controlled and covered up so the elite can maintain their power of control, and their position.

In a strongly-worded letter written to Bishop McElroy in 2016, Sipe warned of the impact that continued ignoring of clergy sexual activity and misconduct would have on the RCC (Sipe 2016). The case of ex-Cardinal McCarrick was perhaps the first to fully publicly reveal the truth of high levels of sexual abuse within seminaries and between priests, and the part this activity played in control and of promotion or demotion of compromised clergy. With so much at stake there was then a subsequent constant need for cover-up of all forms of clergy abuse and even blackmail to maintain this secret culture of clerical deviancy so logically described in Sipe's 11-point thesis (Sipe 2008). With further investigations and reviewing of the literature dealing with CSMAA, of which there is precious little, it became clear that inadequate RCC responses to CSMAA may well be rooted in a subsequent deep fear of the exposure of the activities and controlling processes as described by Sipe. Indeed, there is a great deal at stake—the very central base of power and holiness of the RCC is its celibate/chaste, holy, chosen-by-God, male clergy (Doyle et al. 2006, pp. 8–9). Should the reality of the lack of adherence to these proclaimed teachings be exposed, the issue could well become the RCC's "feet of clay" (Old Testament: Book of Daniel 2: 33). Sipe complains at the end of his letter to Bishop McElroy: "I have tried to help the Church understand and heal the wounds of sexual abuse by clergy. My services have not been welcomed". However, his ignored insightful warnings are now being played out on the international stage.

2. Findings and Discussion

While a limitation of this study is its inability to generalise to the greater population, the nine participants in the study on which this article is based, is a number that fits within the requirements of a qualitative in-depth interview methodology. Furthermore, this study is validated and affirmed when triangulated with others such as Flynn (2003); Kennedy (2009); and Byrne (2010) not to mention the growing number of news stories concerning CSMAA and to how it is officially responded. To this can now be added a new study published during the writing of this present one, (Pooler and Barros-Lane 2022). This mixed method study of women survivors of what the authors term "clergy perpetrated sexual abuse of adults", also confirms many of the findings within de Weger (2020). While the study underpinning this article is focused on abuse within the Roman Catholic Church, when comparing findings from other denominations such as with the new Pooler and Barros-Lane (2022) study, what becomes clear is that there are underlying commonalities between denominations, commonalities which can also be found between religions, and indeed, between religious and secular institutions. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that in all the cases, the RCC Bishops, Archbishops, safeguarding leaders, and professionals that were involved are still in positions of authority and influence, and that the behaviours of these current RCC leaders and staff regarding those reporting CSMAA are serious and disturbing.

Rather than separating the findings and discussion thereof in two separate sections, it was more useful here to present these findings and discuss them within the framework of the tactics and modes of neutralisation to be presented. In many ways, all the findings and

corresponding discussion in this article could be summed up in one specific experience: a confusing duality of intent accompanied by a disingenuous spirit of compassion and justice on the part of the officials to whom survivors went to report their CSMAA. In general, all participants expressed a sense of shock and sorrow resulting from unexpected reversals of positive relationships with clergy and officials. A perfect example of this was Adela's case.

Adela, emotionally and sexually groomed into a relationship in the 1970s by a well-known and highly respected spiritual director, author, and speaker, explained her first meeting with the offender's Religious Order representatives so poignantly:

> We were approaching [the Religious Order] as friends, but they turned us into enemies straight away. Almost, you know, instantly, we were enemies, even though we've been friends for years, and we were approaching them in that spirit.

An interesting and serendipitous element of de Weger (2020) was the broad time span of the nine survivor experiences both of CSMAA and the reporting thereof. Regarding the reporting, the time range was from the 1970s up to the 2020s. In Australia prior to 2000, reporting clergy abuse was a more informal and more parochial process. For Adela (and one other participant—Gary) there was still no formal reporting process for adult victims of clergy abuse. In the late 1990s, two separate official reporting procedures were created: Towards Healing and The Melbourne Response. However, these were both established to deal with child abuse[5]. Nevertheless, most victims of CSMAA did go through Towards Healing anyway[6]. It appears that within these RCC processes, such a reversal as described by Adela became less overt. Now, due to a lot of pressure to deal with the ever-exploding clergy abuse scandal, making enemies of those reporting such abuse could not be seen to be happening.

Regardless of the process or time, all the participants in this study at first felt little doubt that they were going to be believed, validated, and cared for. However, all soon began to sense a deep lack of sincerity on behalf of those they approached. What were originally seen as compassion-based invitations appeared to collapse into an often-shocking sense of antagonism or at least ambivalence towards complainants. This was especially the case if survivors started to voice confusion or discontent with what the RCC was offering them spiritually, emotionally, and financially, or to how they were being responded to. Any initial sense of their abuse being validated and the harms and the effects thereof that they had experienced being fully redressed, slowly transformed into an anxiety-producing awareness that they were caught up in a mere legalistic and often acrimonious treatment of their complaints and even of themselves as people.

At the end of each interview in de Weger (2020) all participants were asked whether their overall lives had improved or not after the reporting experience. All nine participants (along with many in de Weger 2016) felt deeply harmed by their reporting and/or disclosure experience. One could say that the survivors in de Weger (2020) were psycho-spiritually torn apart because their hoped-for healing based on frontstage promises thereof were traumatically replaced with expressions of other less victim-supporting though backstage beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, which it appears were the more commonly held ones by officials dealing with CSMAA. The shock and subsequent confusion and harm experienced by such betrayal was for most even greater than that which they experienced as a result of the abuse (see also Table 1 in Pooler and Barros-Lane 2022, p. 6). As analysis progressed, it became clear that with almost all respondents, the retractions of compassion and belief appeared to be related to an inability or, indeed, unwillingness to genuinely and fully agree that what survivors were reporting was/is actually a serious issue of professional abuse enabled by heavily unbalanced power contexts. Now their whole Church was betraying them. Most simply could not fathom why and even how this had occurred.

What this present article proposes is that what participants were experiencing was being neutralised. How consciously devious or unconsciously cultural this neutralising was on behalf of RCC officials, lawyers, and clergy involved is unknown. Either way, the impact was the same.

2.1. Neutralisation: Harming the Harmed

According to Anson Shupe's theory of clergy malfeasance and elite institutional neutralisation, when secret deviancies and corruptions occurring within such elite institutions, including the RCC, are exposed, the automatic reaction is to try to cover up these deviances. Shupe (1995) outlines the way elite institutions achieve this end through normative, remunerative, and coercive neutralisation techniques. These are employed to manipulate those threatening to expose such deviancies, be they victims, whistle-blowers, the media, or their supporters (Shupe 1995, pp. 86–95)[7].

Shupe's theory rests firmly on the foundation that clergy malfeasance and institutional responses thereto are about conflict and power, or intersections between the more powerful, and the less powerful and powerless (Shupe 1995, pp. 25–42; 2007, p. 56; 2008, p. 26). Utilising their power, the overall objective is to respond to the exposure of malfeasance in a way that does not publicly expose the institution's sins or/and threaten the institution's power, prestige, and wealth. In the case of CSMAA in the RCC, there is a further need to maintain secrecy regarding further realities concerning the lack of celibacy/chastity adherence amongst clergy in general (Sipe 2008). To put it more bluntly, neutralisation tactics exist to ensure the institution survives such exposure as cheaply and cleanly or undamaged, and as secretly as possible.

As a result of the interviews with survivor participants, while based firmly on Shupe's original list, a broader set of tactics and modes was generated to more fully encompass and describe the experiences of the participants in this study (de Weger 2020). More tactics and modes were required also to account for tactics found within other studies such as Kennedy (2009) and Benyei (1998). To this end, the following adaptations and additions to Shupe's original tactics and modes of neutralisation, particularly in the more refined context of the RCC and its responses to CSMAA, were developed (see Figure 1).

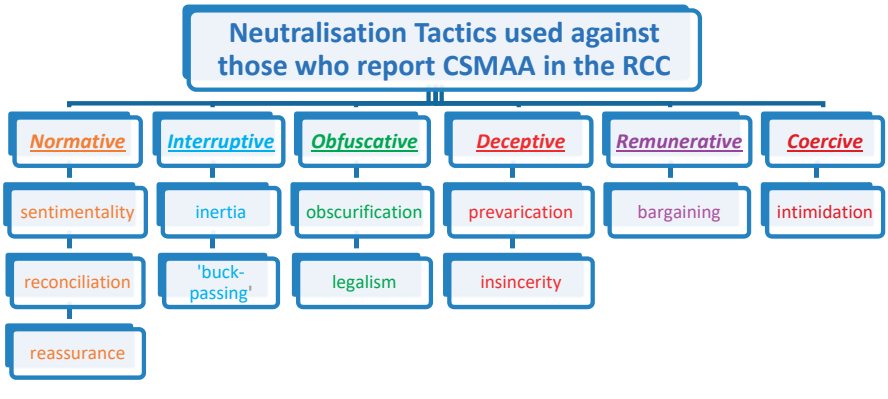

Figure 1. A new version of tactics and modes of institutional neutralisation (de Weger 2020, p. 229).

While the above figure presents a type of continuum, all these tactics and modes can occur at any time within the process.

The findings of de Weger (2020) were that neutralisation tactics, whether consciously or unconsciously employed, were clearly and frequently evident within the reporting experiences of the participants. These tactics and modes of neutralisation are a valuable skeleton around which one can flesh out actual events and experiences; they are a language which one can utilise in discourses of this otherwise neglected and even obfuscated issue.

2.1.1. The Normative Tactic: Modes—Sentimentality, Reconciliation, and Reassurance

The normative mode is that which seeks to not disturb the status quo. It engages a traditional 'Catholic' approach of deflecting possibilities of scandals within faith communities through a sentimental requesting of reconciliation and forgiveness. It also includes the

pacifying approach of reassuring believers that things are being taken care of and to have faith in the goodness and authority of the church's leaders.

Sentimentality

At the time of Adela's reporting (first half of the 1990s), she experienced many requests to "calm down" and even to "stop victimising" her abuser. However, these requests did not only or directly come from the clergy or RCC officials. Adela tried to also convey that at that time, many lay Catholics could not deal with the inner conflicts clergy sexual abuse generated; their faith in their institution was being severely challenged. Accordingly, they just tried to stop people 'rocking the boat' and used sentimentality to do so.

Reassurance, and Reconciliation

The modes of reassurance and reconciliation were the second most referred to in this study. Regarding reconciliation, the concept of forgiving, of not throwing the proverbial first stone at sinners, of compassion, are all very central to Christian/Catholic teaching and spirituality. There is much tension between such central teachings and others such as justice for the oppressed, the injured, and the less powerful. It is into this tension that reconciliation can be used to manipulate victims to forgive their perpetrator and as such, to not further pursue complaints about CSMAA that may reveal clergy sexual activity to the wider public. As Adela's experience above shows, reassurance and reconciliation as tactics are closely related with sentimentality in that sentimentality is often the catalyst used to generate emotions needed to facilitate reassurance and reconciliation. The tactic seeks to reassure victims that officials are taking care of matters (even if they are not) and therefore, they, from their side, need to become more like Christ, more Christian by forgiving and forgetting. The insinuation is that if they do not forgive, they are not being good Catholics. In Adela's case, Adela said [Fr D] was quickly removed from ministry, which had the effect on her to perhaps become less combative with [Religious Order A]. However, because the action taken by [Religious Order A] was short lived she became less reconciliatory, and more vocal. Adela had found out that her abuser was back in [City A] to give a talk. Adela wrote to the then provincial and said

> if he comes to [City A], we are going to be outside picketing saying, you know, this guy is a sexual abuse perpetrator. And we will be picketing outside. So, I'd like to warn you now, to warn him off. And he's not to come to [City A] anymore.

The talk was cancelled.

All usually working together, sentimentality, reassurance, and reconciliation are, Shupe says, "normative" tactics. Their primary purpose, whether intentional or unconscious, is to defuse victims' and whistle-blowers' anger and sense of injustice. This is done by appealing to their sensitivities and Catholic loyalties, to not pursue complaints any further because doing so will harm their Church and community and possibly them as well. As such, when successful, abuse events and their perpetrators are reabsorbed back into the institution's life and culture, and normalised even more, which was the desired outcome all along. Furthermore, as Shupe explains, this then has the added and disturbing effect of an increase in secondary deviance. Secondary deviance is behaviour that has had witnesses and which because of inaction, becomes more seriously entrenched into an institution's (secret) culture (Shupe 1995, pp. 46–48).

2.1.2. The Interruptive Tactic: Modes—Inertia and 'Buck-Passing'

The interruptive tactic is one which seeks to stop, constantly slow down, or interfere with the process of fully resolving reported CSMAA. The end hope is that those reporting will become frustrated and give up. It is the tactic that is first employed for both individual reporting and often for such as media exposés. One of the first ways to achieve this is to remain inert.

Inertia

Inertia is the preferred first response as it requires the least amount of energy and financial input from the RCC. By doing nothing, those dealing with survivors reporting their abuse hope that the complainant will cease and desist. It is interruptive in that it seeks to disrupt or suspend, through the passing of long blocks of time, CSMAA cases that have been reported.

Vince was a young refugee entering the priesthood but was not yet old enough to do so. He was placed under the care of a priest from his own home country while waiting to enter the seminary. That priest groomed and coerced Vince into having sex with him under the guise of helping him overcome sexual temptations with women. His case, when he later reported it, showed many elements of inertia from the start even when simply trying to contact RCC officials or to get them to return his calls. Inertia became more obvious in the waiting games that he experienced on behalf particularly of [Bishop A] and [Archbishop B] with whom he had to deal. In the end, Vince had to get the help of an insider, "a friend who is a solicitor who had a brother, who was a parish priest" to try "to whisper in the Archbishop's ear". This was the first of many go-slow phases.

Inertia is easy for large powerful institutions but very painful and often traumatic for powerless victims. Brian, spiritually and sexually manipulated and abused as a young 18-year-old postulant in a Religious Congregation, described inertia before, during, and after his reporting process. In fact, this slowness of response caused him so much grief to the point where he was considering a new inertia-based complaint. This time the complaint would be about the Towards Healing lawyer, because of his very slow and then aggressive responses and how these had harmed him even further.

'Buck-Passing'

The second mode in the interruptive tactic is 'buck-passing'. Shupe did not include 'buck-passing' in his theory; however, he alludes to it as "bury[ing] a complaint in a maze of red tape, [and] bureaucratic confusion" (Shupe 1995, p. 83). For Kennedy (2009), however, 'buck-passing' was recognised as a commonly used tactic. She defines it as individuals denying responsibility, and an inability or unwillingness to fully follow any sort of process (Kennedy 2009, pp. 177–78). In this present study, many examples of 'buck-passing' could be found. One of the worst cases was Vince's. At first, Vince approached his Archbishop:

> I wrote to [Archbishop] at the, um, the Archdiocese office because I didn't know about Towards Healing back then. [Archbishop B] passed it on to [Bishop A], who replied that he thought the Church doesn't have the expertise and the authority to investigate these matters and that he needed to go to the police instead.

At first Vince did not want to go to the police. He felt very uncomfortable about doing so and as the abuse had started in a different jurisdiction Vince felt it would be too complicated, and he could not cope with that. After feeling dismissed by the Towards Healing officials, Vince did decide to report the abuse to the police. However, the police did not interview him but just took his written statement. Nothing came of it, as he said.

It did not end there, however. What Vince was told about the Church not having the expertise and the authority to investigate adult abuse was also not true as Towards Healing had dealt with adult cases before. His case was eventually taken up by Towards Healing, but it did not end well at all. Vince's case, discussed further in other neutralisation contexts below, has also gone on for almost a decade; it is still unresolved and ongoing. Furthermore, the bishop who dismissed Vince at the start was later removed from the Towards Healing case due to his every obfuscative responses to Vince, and to victims in other cases.

Whistle-blower worker in Catholic Education, Rhonda, provides another example of 'buck-passing' to neutralise both herself, and the complaints of a teacher, Julia whom she was supporting. Julia had been groomed and manipulated into sexual activity with a Religious Brother, the director of the Catholic Education department. He had told Rhonda that he had "fallen madly in love" with Julia and did not seem to understand why this

was wrong. Rhonda tried to explain why but it did not seem to make any difference. She started supporting Julia who soon began to realise that she had indeed been groomed and abused by a man who was both her boss and a Religious Brother and she wanted it to stop and to be reported. She had by now also heard, through Rhonda, of other cases against this Brother. However, both she and Rhonda soon began to experience the full frustration of institutional 'buck-passing' and inertia. Rhonda explains:

> I approached the Towards Healing manager when he was in [City] and said, "why haven't you done anything?" and he said, "It was an industrial matter". And I said, "It certainly wasn't an industrial matter". And he said, "Well, we're not touching it". And so, every time, [Julia] had to initiate everything. They'd never ring [Julia] back. Or when they did answer they'd say, "I'll get back to you in five minutes", but they never did. And [Julia] just wasn't emotionally equipped to do it. It was too hard.

Thus, in the case of at least one of the victims of [Brother], 'buck-passing' worked; Julia was neutralised, and so was Rhonda for the time being at least. There are examples of other methods of neutralisation here, such as prevarication and intimidation, all working to silence and cover up the abuses of [Brother]. [Brother]'s abuses have never been revealed to the public and he has been moved on to become principal of another [Religious Order] college in an Asian country.

2.1.3. The Obfuscative Tactic: Modes—Obscurification and Legalism

The obfuscative tactic employs both confusion and omissions so as to allow RCC responses to avoid responsibility for acts of CSMAA and even crimes. Alternatively, complainants are bamboozled by complex legalistic terminology. The obfuscative tactic also may employ passive neutralisation through definitional ambivalence (de Weger and Death 2017, pp. 228–29). When victims reporting CSMAA are confronted with obfuscatory modes, they are left dis-empowered and without any framework around which to establish claims of abuse. In such complexity and/or vagueness victims of CSMAA who are often already reeling from the effects thereof, simply cannot cope, and give up.

Obscurification

Obscurification is the mode which seeks to muddy the waters regarding perceptions of clergy sexual misconduct and even crimes and to conflate these with lesser concepts such as consensual affairs, as the proverbial Eve tempting Adam, clergy sin or weakness—anything but actual and much more serious professional misconduct resulting from grooming and manipulation of adults who may be in a vulnerable state. Obscurification, therefore, includes the lack of a clear, informed, professional definition of CSMAA. Such a lack has led to minimisation, denial of responsibility, and/or re-abuse. Obscurification is also a more subtle mode, which is perhaps why it has worked well to date. While there does not exist a clear informed definition of CSMAA, the perception that "probably it was the adult who was the instigator", and worse, will continue (Royal Commission 2015, p. 16048; see also Doyle et al. 2006, p. 59; Kennedy 2009, pp. 46–47, 127, 139–42; Byrne 2010, p. 44).

The lack of a universal definition of CSMAA needs to be analysed much more. To date, by definition, the only adults who could be abused are those who fell within the narrow definitions of "vulnerable adult" or people with mental or physical disabilities to the level of rendering them "like children" (The Vatican 2019a, 2019b). In the most recent drafts of RCC policy in Australia, "vulnerable adults" has given way to "adults at risk" and "adults with diminished capacity" (Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. 2021). While the term "adult" is used when talking generally about clergy misconduct, when the discussion is more specifically about abuse, the document almost always uses the terms "adults at risk" and "adults with diminished capacity" even though the definition for "adult" provided is as follows:

> Adult: When used throughout the NCSS document this is an inclusive term referring to all adults, including adults at risk (Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. 2021, p. 22).

As such, what type of adult can be definitionally abused in Australia is still obscure. This also appears to be the case even with the *New Book VI of Canon Law* (The Vatican 2021), which was sensationally headlined as being a radical change regarding CSMAA[8]. However, when pushed for further clarification as to the type of adult that according to Canon Law definitions can be abused, even with this clarification, the matter is still very obscure (see Note 6). Ironically, perhaps, clear definitions of professional sexual misconduct against adults have been achieved by almost all secular professions. However, for the RCC, there is still no universal and canonically relevant definition thereof. In this vacuum, it is too easy for many to simply fall back on outdated perceptions of more or less harmless affairs between consenting adults.

This was indeed the dominant perception that all of the participants in this study experienced in some form. However, such beliefs only became evident when officials' true feelings were revealed, sometimes accidentally and often in anger, because victims were not passively submitting to the official processes. Four of the nine participants mentioned how this definition or 'belief' that they were not 'vulnerable' adults and therefore, what they experienced was not CSMAA, but more likely consensual sexual activity, albeit with an RCC celibate. For three of those four survivors, this was directly relayed to them as the following comments show[9]:

> He is quoted as having said he was not prepared to negotiate because "unlike child abuse, this was an adult thing" . . . I believe that everyone except for [Facilitator B], believed that it had to be consensual because I was over 18, and that's what the law says. And I believe that's why they fought it so hard (Lynne).

> On a couple of occasions when the abuse came up this priest still maintained [years later] that he was not entirely sure what constituted abuse when it came to adults (Elizabeth).

> Basically, what they were acknowledging is that, um, they pin it down to a consensual relationship. So, because you know, because it happened after I was 18, they consider it was a consensual relationship in me and him. So that just got them off every hook, you know (Vince).

The remaining five survivors expressed similar understandings that this was also how they felt they were viewed.

The other common ploy, somewhat related to the you-were-an-adult perception, was to suggest, sometimes quite directly, that victims were morally weak thus causing them to engage sexually with the cleric:

> [The psychologist paid for by the Religious Order] had been generally challenging, rather than supportive, but in the fourth session she actually suggested I might be feeling guilty because it was appropriate that I feel guilty! I was an adult after all and [Fr D] hadn't used force (Adela).

> And it was you know, the woman reeling him in. But then again, [Fr P]'s whole thing was, you know, it's your fault, or you know that you've sinned. It, in a sense, you've been complicit (Clair).

> [The psychologist from Centrecare] said: "Well it was just an affair between a boy and a girl, the boy left the girl, and the boy was a priest!" [Fr I] said: "You had an affair with him and now you ask us to pay?" (Sue).

> The new/current Executive Director of Catholic Education Service stated one of the victims was a "prostitute" (yet had never met her). Of course, she wasn't (Rhonda).

None of these perceptions show any depth of knowledge of the dynamics of power imbalance in such contexts even though almost all other professions now clearly assert its existence. Nor do they appear to even want to acknowledge the possibility that the clergy in question could actually be a perpetrator of sexual abuse. However, as Kennedy (2009, p. 131) asserted, CSMAA occurs not because there is a vulnerable or even weak adult but because there is a powerful clergyperson willing to take advantage of their power.

As long as there is no clear universal informed definition of CSMAA, one placed squarely within a professional framework, myths and stereotypical beliefs will continue to determine how CSMAA is interpreted and how victim complaints, their personalities, and their needs are responded to when they report. As shown above, the responses to the participants in this study at least almost invariably centred on one major aspect—that they were an adult and therefore, the sex must have been consensual. The outcomes of complaints also reflected this. While some expressed consent confusion, it can be firmly stated that objectively speaking, none of the nine participants here, or the twenty-nine respondents in de Weger (2016), expressed any true and mature consent: all were groomed and manipulated into sex with their clergy abusers. Definitions of CSMAA must reflect this.

The Role of the Cultural Secrecy in the Lack of Definitional Clarity

Why has the RCC not presented a uniform, un-obscure, and psychologically/harms-based definition of CSMAA? Part of the reason at least is that the RCC fears clarity even about what celibacy and chastity themselves mean (Sipe 1995, pp. 55–56; Bordisso 2011). In Canon Law, there obviously exists a clear mandate that "Clergy are obliged to observe 'perfect and perpetual continence,' (c. 277, §1)" (Provost 1992, p. 630). However, it appears that for 50% of clergy this definition is no longer the accepted one and are defining celibacy, chastity, and sexual activity for themselves (Sipe 1995, p. 61; 2016; Bordisso 2011, pp. 31–59, 60–66). For example: in the documentary *Secrets of the Vatican* (Thomas 2014) the following was included:

> NARRATOR: Francesco, a former seminarian, says he had a relationship with a priest who has since risen to a high position in the Vatican.
>
> FRANCESCO CACACCE: [through interpreter] He kept telling me that he was giving me his body, but his soul belonged to the Church, to God. The reasoning goes, "I'm a priest, but I have this need. I'll satisfy it and then go back to being a priest." It's a bit like vestments. "I wear them, I'm a priest. I take them off, and I'm just like anyone else" (Thomas 2014, 46 min 27 s).

As such, when it comes to clergy acting out sexually, this non-clarity needs to first be faced. Without such clarity, it is almost impossible for adults to construct or make claims that they have been offended against. The fact that definitional reluctance exists lies at the basis of presenting *obscurification* as a mode of neutralisation. With a clear universal, legal, and professional-based definition of CSMAA, the RCC cannot dismiss claims of CSMAA as merely consensual sexual activity albeit with a professional celibate employee of the RCC, or as merely clergy sexually misbehaving.

Legalism

The other mode of obfuscation is legalism. Legalism refers to when legalistic approaches usurp and override the expected pastoral ones, i.e., legalism is used to confuse, oppress, or even frighten the person reporting CSMAA. Legalism may not at first appear to be a mode of neutralisation. A legalistic approach can simply be the application of a legal framework to processes of complaints of CSMAA. However, legal-based threats can and did appear to have been used also as attempts to close down complaint processes. Infusing legal jargon and the sense of lawyer superiority into the process created an atmosphere where victims felt overwhelmed and rendered vulnerable because they were unable to understand or process such legalisms. While this may not be the intent, perceptions of legalistic threats succeeded in getting at least half of the survivors in this study to submit

to the RCC process; it was either that or withdraw from it altogether. Of all the neutralisation processes, it is this one which demonstrates so well, what feminist standpoint theory scholars, Wylie (2003) and Jecker (2007), tried to explain as being "top down" and therefore, inadequate standpoints by which to understand the realities and needs of those who were in the "bloodied dust" (West 1998)[10]. Furthermore, the suggestion is always that those in such high places have little perception that they are like this. As such, legalism and legalists involved in the Towards Healing process could be seen as participating in a neutralisation process. Whether purposeful or unwitting, it has the same effect, and is simply not pastoral. Survivors in this study and in such as Kennedy (2009), were often faced with bamboozling legalistic processes, which firstly, they simply were not prepared for, and secondly, tended to "pull the rug from under one's feet" when it came to having some semblance of personal empowerment and control when approaching Towards Healing meetings and the like. The reigns of control quickly became firmly placed into the hands of the legal and financial representatives.

In Vince's case, he requested a review after things went very wrong. He said that included in that document was an acknowledgement that Towards Healing was meant to be a pastoral and not legal process; however, Vince found the document as a whole very difficult to fully comprehend and very "off putting". It is little wonder that he found this to be the case given that it was drawn up by a solicitor, who was also the CEO of Towards Healing in [City F], and a document which was highly legalistic in tone and language[11].

In such states of confusion and surprise brought on by the sudden and unexpected more legalistic approach, many participants felt tricked as it were into submitting to thinking that this was part of the pastoral process and thus submitted to that process. Those who expressed shock, dismay, and anger when realising that their pastoral hopes were somehow being replaced by legalistic and financial bargaining, soon experienced either a more threatening or a more dismissive approach towards them. However, others submitted, though reluctantly to this new confusing legalistic process. The end result of that process favoured the RCC in that such an approach was also successful in keeping the reality of the CSMAA within the RCC's files and under their control.

Lynne, someone who has now processed everything she has been through, was very helpful in describing the "bamboozling maze" that faces those who report clergy sexual abuse, especially CSMAA.

> One needs to distinguish between the National Committee for Professional Standards office (NCPS) and the Church rep., say Bishop or Provincial Leader (in my case) who are part of the process. But the NCPS representatives are paid by Catholic Church Insurances (CCI), so they are compromised too. My understanding is, despite that they're supposed to instruct the solicitors and barristers, I would say it was the other way around. And so, I would say that [Lawyers' Company] were running the show, really.
>
> Their job is to be instructed by the client [Religious Order E]. But I don't believe that the clients really understood what they were doing with me. I think they left them to it. [Lawyer's Company] probably ran things by them and said, "I think we need to stall this more. I think we need to deflect this more. I think we need to see how serious she really is. I don't think this case should go ahead because she signed a deed of release. And, and we've got to try and stop it there". There are all sorts of reasons why they legally could spin it out for as long as possible. And [Lynne's lawyer] will tell you that he believes they spanned it out as long as possible, so that the money would add up and add up and add up and eventually, I would not be able to afford to keep going.

Whistle-blower Rhonda supporting victim Judith, had a similar account of her experiences with the legalism of RCC processes when she took out a civil action as a result of being pushed out of her career because of speaking out against the Director/Brother of her workplace:

> They used every piece of legal action, so every time I went to fight it, they'd change what they could do, you know, and so I'd have to go back and refer because it confused the hell out of me, and they use their lawyers at all times.

It needs to be remembered again, that in both Lynne and Rhonda (Judith's) cases the initial RCC processes found that the complaints against the misconducting clergy were accepted as genuine.

Lynne's and Rhonda's insights contain understandings which came well after they had been through most of the process. Thus, for most victims/survivors who have just begun approaching the RCC, especially those approaching with deep and often naïve hope and trust that they will be heard and embraced, are, without these deeper understandings, very vulnerable to being neutralised by this legalism. However, the dangers of such happening are, as with abuse itself, only possible if the more powerful clergy and/or RCC representatives are willing to abuse their power to take unjust, uncompassionate advantage of these women and men; to neutralise those who trustfully submit to them for help and understanding.

2.1.4. The Deceptive Tactic: Modes—Prevarication and Insincerity

The deceptive tactic is exactly as the term suggests. This tactic is employed to consciously take control of cases through lying, or absences of the whole truth. It uses modes which promise action but never deliver. In the case of this study, it presents frontstage claims of care and concern, but which eventually collapse into revelations of more actually-held negative backstage beliefs about the person reporting CSMAA and of CSMAA itself. Disingenuousness is the flavour of this tactic. For some, it is enough to crush them once discovered, to neutralise them, causing them to desist in their complaint.

Prevarication

The mode of prevarication is taken from Kennedy (2009, p. 178). Again, while Shupe alludes to this tactic, it is not included in his given tactics and modes. However, it is one which does require a place in the methods of neutralisation used within the narratives of the participants in this study and elsewhere. It is classified here as a deceptive tactic because as Kennedy (2009, p. 178) describes it, it is

> another pernicious ploy [used] to "string" women along; giving the impression that action was being taken but ultimately no progress or outcome resulted.

This mode really is a cruel and an even trauma-producing shock when it is discovered by victims reporting CSMAA. For the participants in this study, prevarication became most apparent in regard to requests that the perpetrator cleric be removed from ministry or dealt with in some way. For all participants, this was a major request included in their reporting process. For both Lynne and Adela, it was of particular importance. However, their requests, while acknowledged at first, had to be fought for constantly and over long periods of time, because while changes were promised, most of these ended being only minor.

> It had only been a matter of months and there was already talk of [Fr D] returning to full-time ministry. We protested but were assured by a church authority this was not so. Two weeks later [Fr D] was back in his parish (Adela).

> I asked the Provincial, [Fr I] about the Australian Catholic Directory and he said that he forgot to inform the publisher that [Fr H] left the order in 1999. However, looking back, I believed what the Provincial told me and didn't question more. As well, he told me [Fr H] left [City D] for [City E] because he received a scholarship to study Asian Studies at [Name of University] in 1988. But after the mediation, a PhD student friend—[Name of Student]—at [Name of University] helped me to find out that there was no such scholarship awarded to [Fr H] (Sue).

> [Facilitator B] said "[Fr K] has stood [Fr J] down from all public ministry and [Fr J] has volunteered to step down as leader at [Name of Church]" (I inform [Facilitator B] that [Fr J] is still listed as [Religious Order E]'s Provincial Vicar and Consultor). I told [Facilitator B], that [Fr J]'s name has been removed (on some websites), however, he has been left as Provincial Consultor & Provincial Vicar. I heard [Fr K]'s argument on this, that this is an internal not public position. I told [Facilitator B] that I found it quite incongruous actually, not to mention personally insulting, that he/they think [Fr K] can be left as a significant leader in an organisation that has otherwise stood him down publicly. This does not seem right or satisfactory at all to me. And two days before Christmas, two evenings before Christmas [a year later], I received formal notification by [Facilitator B] that [Fr J] was going to be fully reinstated. I was outraged (Lynne).

When, after promises of action, perpetrators are not dealt with justly, this can easily be interpreted as a deceptive neutralisation tactic: attempts are made to quietly reinstate clerics even after they have been acknowledged to be misconducting clergy. It appears that the expectation of those in power is that victims will either not notice or not respond. However, the harm such actions produce when they are almost inevitably discovered leave a sense that all the affectations of concern and desire to heal were merely empty prevarications.

The other main form of prevarication is revealed in promised apologies of meaning and substance never eventuating. Lynne explained how the lack of receiving a promised apology was a constant source of concern and pain. She described how she had written to [Facilitator B] saying that there had been no mention of a written apology in the settlement document and that she finally had to insist on an apology as part of the settlement. She then related how she told a friend that if she did not get a signed admission and apology then she probably would not be signing any papers. An apology in this case did eventually come, but again, not through any proactive desire on behalf of Towards Healing and [Religious Order E] to see Lynne healed.

Brian had asked for what he genuinely expected would be a meaningful apology. A form of apology did eventually come. However, he was shocked by its generic content:

> The "apology" [was] weak and insufficient to me. The "harm done" was not specific. Very legally vague! I could have fallen and injured my toe at church one Sunday or been bullied at school due to my association with the [Religious Order F]. Sexual Assault or Sexual Abuse causing deep and chronic mental damage was not mentioned at all.

To add insult to injury, Brian also experienced prevarication in the form of offers to him to help organise a healing liturgy for victims, and to talk to seminarians on the effects of abuse. He was quite happy to do so, however, after the Towards Healing process was over, he has never received any further responses from [Bishop E] and his diocesan office concerning these. Brian had been promised much but received very little in the end.

In one sense, regarding those in this study, the whole Towards Healing process could be seen as organised and systemic prevarication. What Towards Healing promised in policy documents *Towards Healing* (National Committee for Professional Standards 2010b) and *Integrity in Ministry* (National Committee for Professional Standards 2010a), was simply not being delivered. Prevarication is a powerful but cruel reality in the reporting process.

Insincerity

Insincerity, while obviously part and parcel of prevarication, was a more omnipresent characteristic: it was found in all cases in this study. It was when this overall insincerity was realised by the victims, that new and even deeper trauma was inflicted. At first, there was an unwillingness or inability for most participants to accept the reality that the RCC might actually be insincere in their responses to their genuine needs. In fairness to at least three of official first responders who were working at the more basic street level, this insincerity also appeared to have a hierarchy in that first responders were more genuine or sincere in

their concern for the victim. However, as one went up the ladder of officialdom within RCC processing of complaints of CSMAA, especially up to the ones who made the decisions on legal matters and financial redress, the more apparent the insincerity became. As such, it needs special attention and much closer scrutiny as a deceptive mode of neutralisation. Insincerity is not as obvious a neutralisation tactic as, for example, bargaining. It is perhaps more a general though hidden attitude to those who report. However, as shall be shown, insincerity can have the same neutralising effects in the process of reporting CSMAA to the RCC, once it is discovered by the person reporting, to exist.

The insincerity revealed in this study may well just be a product of confused beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours which still need reforming through deeper analysis of CSMAA and professional sexual misconduct in general. It is not unexpected that in this vacuum of conviction that CSMAA is indeed abuse, that insincerity cannot help but become an underlying attitude in regard to the reporting structures within the RCC. This was certainly the case according to the nine participants of this study, at least.

According to Sipe (1995) and Doyle et al. (2006), insincerity regarding CSMAA is deeply rooted in RCC systemic, cultural, and social beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Furthermore, centuries of misogyny have embedded a deep suspicion of at least women and, therefore, female victims anyway. However, Shupe explains how these can change within a strongly centralised hierarchy of power as is the RCC (Shupe 1995, pp. 27–31). However, before any such changes can occur, a belief that such change is needed, and then a willingness to facilitate those changes, is still required.

Insincerity is founded on actual though more backstage beliefs and understandings of the nature of CSMAA. These underpin a consequential belief that those who make complaints of CSMAA are in error. However, the frontstage of the RCC obviously must still present a caring attitude to all clergy sexual abuse victims—hence, insincerity. The term 'insincerity' itself, is a rather mild or bland one; however, it is a central player in the production of deep harm. It is also expressed in many different forms. As such, it will be revisited in more detail below.

2.1.5. The Remunerative Tactic: Mode—Bargaining

Pre-Official Professional Processes

The bargaining process, according to Shupe is one which "*appeals* to not press for redress [through litigation] in return for a [smaller] financial settlement" (Shupe 1995, p. 86; 2007, pp. 76–78). Bargaining often begins when it has become clear that survivors are not going to be perfect victims. Survivors become imperfect victims when they do not succumb to the normative modes of neutralisation presented above. However, forms of bargaining can be found within those modes as well. For most, though, bargaining is a specific mode that usually includes offers of money and organised assistance, all controlled by the institution. In Australia, since 2000, the RCC's response processes of Towards Healing and the Melbourne Response have become a form of what could be deemed official pastoral bargaining.

Those who made complaints about CSMAA before these processes were established (Gary and Adela) tell a somewhat different story than those who reported their abuse later to such as Towards Healing. Perhaps because clergy sexual abuse had not yet become a major newsworthy item, there was less concern, as it were, in the RCC of people revealing CSMAA. As such, institutionally controlled bargaining was not as necessary. In Gary's case, he also believed he had "no case" to bargain with anyway, and should he have wished to take things further, he would have just been "fobbed off". For Adela, any financial redress was not really an issue because for her; she just wanted her abuse validated and for the priest to apologise. However, even more so, because she had by then discovered the existence of at least twelve other victims, she wanted her abuser priest to be removed from the possibility of harming anyone else. Thus, at this earlier stage (1970s), there was no real pressure yet for a pastoral bargaining process in the minds of RCC officials. It was not far away though.

Post-Official Professional Processes

Regarding those who reported to the now-established Towards Healing process, a whole new set of attitudes and behaviours were presented by the RCC. The clergy abuse scandal had by this time been greatly reported in the media. Headlines, documentaries and dramatisations of clergy child abuse and church cover up were proliferating in the late 1990s and the RCC knew it had to do more to control the damage that the many cases that were coming forward could possibly wield. To respond to this growing pressure Towards Healing was created (Medley 2001, p. 82).

Towards Healing followed a very specific process and had its own Church officials/authorities, lawyers, insurance people, therapists and assorted assisting clergy, facilitators, and moderators. However, while it was promoted as a pastoral response it has become clear through studies such as Medley (2001) and Courtin (2015) that Towards Healing (and the Melbourne Response) appeared to have rapidly become a bargaining process concerned with private financial settlements obtained through the use of lawyers and very carefully worded legal documents, albeit under the banner of care and healing. Parkinson (2009), in his review of Towards Healing recognised the tension between the two elements of the pastoral and legal approaches:

> It follows from this that pastoral and legal approaches are not independent of one another, but they can be in tension. Resolving this tension between the pastoral and legal approaches is a critical issue—for both sets of demands are being placed every day upon the Towards Healing process, and are reflected in submissions to this review (Parkinson 2009, p. 10).

One argument of this study is that in regard to CSMAA in particular, because of a general underlying or backstage dismissal of such cases as not legitimate due to age, it appears that the legal approach tended to usurp the pastoral. This then results in the Towards Healing process taking on the strong bargaining tones presented in the participants' experiences, rather than genuine validation and healing of their abuse. This bargaining took various forms and included a range of added elements. While not all participants revealed clear bargaining elements, most did, and for some it was the very flavour of the Towards Healing process.

Sue, a young refugee, alone in Australia, was groomed and sexually abused by a Religious Order priest from her own country. When she approached Towards Healing, she had not intended to bargain. She wanted help and validation that what she had experienced was the same as what she had recently read about in the newspaper about other adult victims, and that she was not alone. She wanted someone to care about what she had experienced as the events still haunted her. However, instead, she experienced many painful and confusing responses by the RCC officials with whom she dealt. It became apparent from the start of the Towards Healing meeting, that [Fr H] whom she had deeply trusted, had taken on a very different demeanour towards her than he initially displayed, and started to minimise what had happened. As a result, her pain and anger put her on a new path. This new path was away from her previous naïve awe and respect for the RCC (she had converted to Catholicism after arriving in Australia) to one which then became a fight for her survival and happiness. In Sue's case, once she realised that the RCC was not really on her side, she stopped being a perfect victim. Depressed and angry, Sue then demanded what she believed was a more just redress. Doing so soon revealed more backstage beliefs about Sue's CSMAA; that according to [Fr H]'s superior, [Fr I] and supported by [Facilitator A], Sue had simply had "an affair" and now Sue just wanted the RCC "to pay for it". This devastated Sue.

Sue had not rolled over and just accepted the first bargains. She would no longer be the perfect victim, one who was naïve and submissive and even grateful for bargains made. It was realised that she could not be easily dealt with. As such, it then becomes clear that, as with Adela above also, she, like many reporters of CSMAA and other forms of clergy malfeasance, become considered as "enemies". Sue's complicated, complex, messy, and

demanding case/s left her feeling that she has never been genuinely heard and believed, and accordingly without true psychological, spiritual, or practical resolution. In the end, she accepted the presented offer or "bargain". However, now it was not happily or pastorally given but based rather on the belief that Sue had simply had an affair. Nevertheless, it became clear that she needed to be silenced by giving her the larger amount of money she requested. This larger amount, though still relatively small and used to pay for counselling and other related needs, was a little more realistic considering what she had been through and the effects it had had on her.

Of all the Shupian tactics that can be seen at play in Vince's case, bargaining would have to be the most overt. From the very start, Vince was offered $10,000 for his years of abuse in the hope that he would simply accept that and disappear, or not take matters further. When he did not disappear, he was offered $30,000. Both times, the money was "granted" as a way to "help him" in some way. At both times also, however, there was an undertow of, "while we don't really believe you deserve it, you really should take this":

> Well, it's already intimidating, all along because even at the facilitation; the two guys said to me, "now look, take it or leave it, because at the end of the day, it can be, it can be your word against the priest". And back at that time, you know, the, the, the statute of limitation was in place, and you got no choice, you got no chance (Vince).

This attitude was present even though Towards Healing had at the start acknowledged that Vince's was a valid and an obvious case of abuse. However, when it came to the bargaining or amounts of compensation, from what Vince disclosed, the RCC then suggested that the later sexual activity after he had turned eighteen, was not really abuse because he was "a consenting adult" and as such compensation should not be expected. According to an email Vince received by mistake, they also actually believed he was reporting CSMAA for his own gain only, with intentions to write a book about his and others' experiences of CSMAA. As such, the RCC official response was to neutralise him, using manipulation, falsehoods, intimidation, and with a final "take-it-or-leave-it" bargaining offer.

In one way, one could say that Lynne's case was also all about bargaining. As with Vince, Lynne's [Religious Order E] were not convinced of the gravity of [Fr J]'s clergy/professional sexual misconduct, believing instead that it must have been consensual as "she was an adult". As such, they believed the request she made for redress was outlandish and unwarranted. This resulted in a to and fro bargaining process which had at its base, the strongly-worded request by [Religious Order E]'s provincial that Lynne not pursue the matter further but to accept the financial settlement offer they presented. However, at that very point of time, Lynne had a series of surgeries about to occur and her mother was seriously ill as well. The [Religious Order E]/Towards Healing knew this.

> That sort of pressure was, for me with my history, like another [Religious Order E] priest abusing his power over me because he could. That is why I pulled out of the negotiations, accepted an offer I still consider an insult, and basically felt forced to call it quits from my end. The pressure, with only one week to go until hospital, was too much. I had to extricate myself.

Needless to say, Lynne found the whole process, veiled in threats and statements suggesting she take the money because there would be no other offers, was anything but pastoral. She had sought validation, healing, and for [Fr J] to be removed from ministry, and a level of financial reparation which would balance out all she had suffered and lost. Lynne felt intimidated and bullied throughout the process. In the end, she did not get the full validation she required, nor the financial support she needed, and [Fr J] was reinstated after 12 months. That was the last straw for Lynne: She decided then to begin a civil case against her abuser and the [Religious Order E]. This too ended in an agreed-to financial settlement because of the protracted stress it was having on Lynne. The RCC had the bargaining power of endless legal processes and finances: Lynne of course had nothing like that.

For Brian, after having experienced the Towards Healing mediation meetings, it was his conclusion that these meetings were nothing more than bargaining sessions infused with pressure to conform (Gleeson 2015, pp. 326–29). These meetings were where the Towards Healing Lawyer [Lawyer B] told Brian that he had to "take it or leave it, by 4pm that day". By this stage, Brian had had enough. He took the gesture offered. For Brian, this was bargaining, pure and simple. The experience with Towards Healing and [Bishop D] left him feeling anything but validated and healed. His experience had come down to a bargaining process controlled by RCC employed lawyers and financiers as he clearly outlined in the written account he presented.

Bargaining takes many forms. However, for most it involves financial incentives. These incentives are also often presented in a take-it-or-leave-it manner. Such offers or bargains are also almost invariably given in a context of demanding no further action. As such, the underlying intent of preventing further, more costly and exposing actions on behalf of the survivor is very clear. According to Shupe (1995, pp. 92–93) elite institutions, including the RCC, when confronted with exposure of deviancy within

> follow a basic negotiation pattern that seeks the most containment of victim anger (through silence) for the least amount of money.

The content of the narratives presented here confirm this general approach.

2.1.6. The Coercive Tactic: Mode—Intimidation

The final and most extreme of Shupe's tactics/modes of institutional neutralisation is intimidation. Because it is the final mode or last course of action to stop full revelation and claims for damages, intimidation did not overtly appear in all participant narratives, but it was often present in covert expressionsof a general sense of intimidation. Those such as Elizabeth and Clair who did not make major demands or were comparatively happy with the reporting process even given their issues, did not make any references to overt intimidation. However, those that did make waves all felt intimidated to some extent, some quite severely.

Gary, whose CSMAA was the oldest in regard to time, did not point so much to any intimidation concerning his reporting of his CSMAA. However, as he became more of a whistle-blower about clergy abuse, Gary's willingness to speak up publicly became known to [Fr B], who the RCC had employed to manage the clergy abuse crisis and the media. As such, it was not so much what Gary was exposing, but who, such as [Fr B] and their desire to keep matters out of the press. Accordingly, Gary's character was publicly questioned by [Fr B]. Gary said he was "bad-mouthed" to the press by [Fr B], "on three separate occasions", where [Fr B] kept "saying that I had a hidden agenda". In one sense he did have an agenda, however that "hidden agenda", Gary explained, was that he had actually looked at commencing a civil action concerning his abuse as a child, because the police still had not gone ahead with any criminal charges. Again, this was another case of trying to silence victims to stop them exposing what the RCC knew were even credible and already acknowledged abuse cases. If victims of declared and always criminal child abuse by clergy can have such difficulty, there was even less chance at this time (1990s) of CSMAA victims such as Gary, being heard and validated, let alone redressed.

Intimidation, according to Shupe's theory, is more reserved for those who threaten civil or criminal action, and especially against those such as lawyers and media who support the victims in their civil or criminal cases (Shupe 1995, pp. 97–98). Such people are often then constructed and proclaimed by the Church as being anti-Church rather than people seeking justice. The victims themselves are often then also cast as suspicious or dubious in regard to their accounts of abuse, and sometimes even as unstable, or as false accusers. However, intimidation can also be revealed whenever a reporter or whistle-blower of deviancy becomes non-cooperative during the reporting process because of non-acceptance of Church responses. The institution senses a threat and responds accordingly with this stronger tactic.

Adela experienced both direct and indirect intimidation but not just from RCC officials by making her feel like their 'enemy': She also experienced intimidation from other Catholics and broader circle of old friends within her community who decided to support her abuser after he had already presented to them his own version of what had 'really' happened. Adela was ostracised and experienced character assassination, not just by her abuser and his [Religious Order A] confreres, but by her friends and others connected to [Religious Order A]. She was accused as being the instigator who had "thrown herself" at "poor Father".

In Sue's case, once she requested a more realistic and just redress, the sense of intimidation began. She described how she admired this priest at first but at the Towards Healing meeting, he glared at her, and she actually became a little frightened of him. His whole demeanour towards her had changed. Furthermore, the statements the earlier Towards Healing-selected psychologist suggesting it was "just a boy-girl affair that went wrong", could well be seen as forms of character assassination and intimidation, or at best an attempt to manipulate Sue into feeling guilty, frightened, and unsure of herself. Covertly, what they were doing was "demanding" that she "cease" steps towards civil action which is the raison d'être of the coercion tactic (Shupe 2008, p. 75).

For some reason, perhaps due to his case being one of same-sex misconduct, Vince experienced intimidation from the start. Even though during the Towards Healing process, Vince had not mentioned he would seek lawyer assistance and take his case to court; he was intimidated in a way that suggested that the RCC suspected he might do so. Vince mentioned at least three specific times when he was made to feel that he simply "had no chance" of winning such a case in court. This is not an example of a pastoral, compassionate, and just response to someone who was obviously groomed then abused when he was very vulnerable, manipulated into a long-term dependent but sexually based service of his abuser who controlled the whole context. Instead, the RCC responded with threats, dismissal, cruelty, and lies in order to neutralise Vince and the possible exposures he might make revealing the RCC's inner secrets of clergy sexual activity and lax attitudes thereto.

One possible reason for Vince's appalling treatment is, perhaps, that he was also becoming someone who supported other victims of adult and child abuse from within his community. These activities were known by the church. He was not only a victim himself, but he was also becoming a whistle blower who, according to Vince, the RCC feared may write a book about all his experiences. As such, he had to be "shut down" . . . neutralised. However, he had not set out with any intentions other than simply wanting and believing he would receive understanding for his abuse and its consequences in his life. He had needed decades of therapy to help him deal with the harm that the abuse had caused. Instead, when asked to sum up his experience he had the following to say:

> For me and from what, from my experience it's got nothing to do with compassion and anything, but they just weighed it up on the ground of their legal advice and try to find a way through it so, in my particular case, I think they, they um, got the upper hand, they say, look, we can just pin it down to sex, um, a homosexual relationship, you know.

One of Vince's final comments was "So, it's continuous, it's intimidation all through". The painful official RCC responses included current Archbishops and Bishops, their own NCPS and RCC financial people and lawyers. This was not a pastoral experience but one which resulted in further deep harm (see also Table 1: Pooler and Barros-Lane 2022, p. 6).

While Lynne had felt intimidated during the Towards Healing process, it was in the court case that the RCC began using intimidation to the full:

> they certainly fought me as hard as they could possibly have fought on the ground that it was consensual, and I mean they pulled in QCs over this. You know, I was up against seven . . . seven, um, . . . top legal minds, by the end.

Such intimidation could be simply a part of Australia's adversarial legal approach. However, given that the [Religious Order E] and [Fr J] himself had acknowledged the CS-

MAA, and given the Towards Healing document's descriptions of clergy sexual misconduct and power abuse (National Committee for Professional Standards 2010a, pp. 7–8), and then the use of intimidation and character assassinations during the civil action, it could be said that the case was not conducted "in good faith": "good faith" is an underlying requirement of the adversarial system (Gibbs Wright 2020). Lynne says that her lawyer protected her from the worst of the intimidation and character assassinations but still, a great deal got through.

One of Brian's last comments as a participant was that he "does not thank the RCC for arriving at this state", the state of confusion and brokenness resulting not only from the abuse but the reporting thereof as well. The need to make such a statement reveals anything but a pastoral attitude. It is a statement inculcated by an ever-present undertow of intimidation. That undertow made its presence known in one climactic event.

Brian had been trying to ascertain what it was that Towards Healing were offering. When Brian said that the church would have to pay his legal fees (on top of the money offered), the Towards Healing's lawyer slammed the mediation table with his fist exclaiming, "The catholic church doesn't have to do anything!" Such slips of the tongue, often expressed as anger rises, reveal the hidden true beliefs about victims of CSMAA even when there was/is clear evidence that the abuse did occur and that such men and women have indeed been traumatised by that abuse. Yet, they are at the same time seen as impudent, as money hungry, as seeking redress where they do not deserve it because they were adults at the time of the abuse. Most come first and foremost to seek understanding and comfort. Brian was still seeking this only two years ago when he went to visit another Bishop who did provide that comfort, having himself also been a victim of CSMAA before becoming a Bishop. One then needs to ask: Why does the RCC in this case, feel the need to approach mediation with victims in such negative, defensive, and even intimidating ways?

In her interview Rhonda described how the victims of [Br A] were being slowly and deliberately intimidated through harassment leading to stress and related poorer performance in their jobs. In turn, this led to dismissals or non-renewal of work contracts. In the case of whistle-blower Rhonda herself, intimidation came in a similar but somewhat less subtle, "if you want to keep your job, keep quiet". However, Rhonda could not keep quiet, which resulted in more intimidation. Rhonda explained how within the [City H] CEO there was a woman [Senior Staff Member Ms B].

> [Senior Staff Member Ms B] managed, for the bishop, these sorts of situations many times. She's a bit of an expert, and she immediately called the head of the [Religious Order I] who was featured highly in the Royal Commission.
>
> The [Religious Order I] Provincial arrived and asked people if they wanted to talk to him about what had been happening. A colleague of Rhonda who'd been at Cath. Ed. for 20 years, said to her:
>
> Don't you dare go near him. He's not trustworthy. He only comes here when there's problems. So, don't you open your mouth or go near him. Because he's not a trustworthy man. He's just been bought in to cover this up, right.

It is clear then that this workplace was one experienced with clergy sexual misconduct. Indeed, [City H] educational institutions figured highly in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. As such, [Senior Staff Member Ms B] would have suspected that neutralisation modes such as sentimentality and reassurance/reconciliation would not work on such as Rhonda. Such people as Rhonda were already hardened because of their experiences but also because most people working within RCC offices are not usually naïve when it comes to clergy behaviours. However, those in high positions in such as Catholic Education also have enormous power to hire and fire, to destroy or manipulate. One of Rhonda's final comments expresses clearly how the intimidation mode operates:

> I met with [Bishop E] for three hours recently. He seemed more worried that there were still victims working at Catholic Education. He thought he had got

> rid of all of them. I suggested to him that because he and his senior executives treated several people who were abused or witnessed the events, so poorly, that his church's behaviour sent out a clear message to others to not talk/report.

This is the direct and indirect power of intimidation. It works particularly well when the intimidator knows how vulnerable and weak their victims are. It is also often successful. Those in the RCC seeking to maintain the cover-up of CSMAA, know this and this is why it is employed, or better still, this is why, as Lynne, Rhonda and others experienced, they employ lawyers and others to do the intimidation for them.

2.2. Insincerity Revisited: The Unexpected Shock Wave

If there was one term that most all-encompassingly defined the experiences of reporting in this study, it would have to be insincerity. Regarding those dealing with CSMAA victims, the belief that such people are probably just guilt-laden puritans trying to blame clergy for their own sin, still reigns, at least backstage; either that or they are people seeking to undermine, embarrass, financially exploit, and/or even abuse the Church and its representatives. Regarding the survivors' accounts in both de Weger (2016, 2020), there was no evidence for any of these erroneous held perceptions. One of the opening questions asked of all participants was, "What were you looking for when you approached the RCC". All said, healing, acknowledgement and validation; four needed financial help as a result of sequelae of harms; and most also wanted removal of the offender, not in vengeful rage but in order to protect others. All loved their Church. Ironically though, it was the RCC officials who believed that it was the victims reporting CSMAA who were being insincere. The evidence in this and other studies simply does not support this perception. Rather, evidence is much more supportive of the RCC responses being insincere.

Insincerity in regard to RCC responses to reporting did not have just one singular expression. Throughout the research many varied though related forms of insincerity revealed themselves clearly. Below is a list of these various expressions as well as how they most relate to other tactics and modes of neutralisation. Indeed, these various expressions need to be more singularly revealed and discussed in order to explain how they can function as particularly the deceptive tactic and modes of neutralisation. While all participants implied insincerity, the (pseudo)names of only those who provided more explicit examples of the discussed elements shall be given.

2.2.1. Biased Psychologists (Normative/Deceptive)

Church/Towards Healing psychologists often steered perceptions of the CSMAA towards RCC desired outcomes (Sue). On the other hand, victim-chosen therapists did not hesitate to describe and explain the CSMAA as clearly abusive (Sue; Lynne; Brian; Clair; Adela).

2.2.2. Lack of Action on Offending Clergy (Interruptive/Deceptive)

Offending clergy were not removed from ministry unless the survivor pushed for such; many were simply moved to other dioceses in Australia and overseas, some were even promoted even with the knowledge they had misconducted (Sue; Lynne; Clair; Vince; Brian; Gary; Adela; Rhonda).

2.2.3. Be the Perfect Victim or Else (Coercive)

Victims/survivors were poorly treated if they ceased being perfect as in fully compliant victims and even good Catholics for the RCC (Brian; Sue; Lynne; Vince; Rhonda).

2.2.4. Slips of the Tongue (Obfuscative/Deceptive)

The existence of dismissal of victims and even contempt thereof was revealed when officials became angry or felt challenged by the complainant. At these times, true feelings, and stereotypical or RCC-normalised definitions of 'consensual affairs' or at best, clergy simply misbehaving or sinning, were revealed in both verbal and written 'slips of the

tongue'. These more real 'backstage' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours also became even more evident in cases of RCC official dealings with whistle-blowers of CSMAA (Brian; Sue; Lynne; Vince; Adela).

2.2.5. Support Person's Status Influence (Deceptive/Remunerative)

While it should not be the case given the stated mission of such as Towards Healing (National Committee for Professional Standards 2010a), successful outcomes of official processes were sometimes based on the presence of powerful or important support persons rather than the veracity and reality of the CSMAA, and the opposite is true: (More powerful/important support person—Adela; Lynne: less powerful/important support person—Sue; Vince).

2.2.6. Character Assassinations (Coercive)

Character Assassinations were often only backstage conversations between officials but sometimes became more overt when victims did not submit happily to official RCC processes and threatened to take further action. They became quite overt when RCC officials were dealing with CSMAA whistle-blowers (Sue; Lynne; Gary; Vince; Adela; Rhonda).

2.2.7. Lack of Sincere and Meaningful (Healing) Apologies (Deceptive/Obfuscative/Normative)

Most participants complained that the apologies they received were generic and lacked substance as to what had actually occurred, and any clear admissions of actual guilt (Lynne; Brian; Elizabeth; Vince; Adela; Rhonda).

2.2.8. Obfuscating or Confusing Legalism (Obfuscative/Deceptive/Coercive)

Towards Healing and newly developing RCC protection policies were/are presented as a pastoral process. However, as many or most participants experienced, a more legalistic approach came into play usually very early in the official complaint procedures, often confusing victims who were seeking merely a pastoral response (Clair; Brian; Lynne; Vince).

2.2.9. Lack of Adequate Redress (Remunerative/Coercive)

While two participants (Claire and Edith) were more or less happy with the financial redress they were given, along with the assistance provided for counselling, most in this study and de Weger (2016) felt their lives as a result of CSMAA were far from compensated. Furthermore, it was apparent that the RCC always began with the least amount of financial redress that they could (Sue; Vince; Lynne; Brian).

2.2.10. Secrecy (Deceptive)

There were clear and frequent examples of the RCC wanting to maintain CSMAA events as secret. This was achieved through the new official responses being essentially bargaining processes to maintain the silence of the victims through non-disclosure agreements requiring promises of no further action. Doing this ensured RCC kept full control over their stature, finances, and its many other secrets regarding clergy sexual activity. It was also achieved through sentimentalist pressure to keep quiet so as to not harm the RCC 'good name' (Sue; Lynne; Clair; Rhonda).

2.2.11. Abusing the Deep Power Imbalance, Again (Coercive/Remunerative)

This was especially the case for those who were more vulnerable at the time of self-reporting (Sue, Vince). Those who were naïve or uneducated regarding the inner realities of the RCC—or who did not have strong support people, fared worse or were taken advantage of more than those who were more educated about the CSMAA and/or who had high-status support persons. However, those who may have been more educated were given similar treatment if they proceeded with civil actions. (Lynne; Clair; Adela; Brian; Rhonda).

2.2.12. Clericalist Elitism (Coercive/Normative)

This element was also evident in the way victims were somewhat initially seen as the cause of the CSMAA events, or, as people of questionable character trying to besmirch the good name of the church for personal or monetary gain (Gary; Adela; Sue; Vince; Brian; Rhonda). There was also evidence of sympathy rather than true empathy which maintained clergy self-perceptions of strong clergy—weak laity resulting in subtle transferences of guilt from clergy to victim. This clericalist elitism came through particularly when RCC officials were dealing with whistle-blowers as opposed to victims, or victims who exhibited whistle-blowing elements in their reporting (Gary, Vince, Rhonda).

2.2.13. Lack of Professionalism (Deceptive/Remunerative)

While the RCC through its National Professional Standards Office sought to bring the clergy under the umbrella of the term professional, there was often a concerning display of lack of professionalism. This was evident both in pastoralism camouflaged as legalism, and in the simple but often serious mishandling of victims' complaints, and indeed, lives. It was also evident in the advice given by officials as to how to manage Medicare issues relating to compensation (Vince, Brian, Clair).

2.2.14. Lack of Clear Definitions (Deceptive/Obfuscative/Normative/Interruptive)

RCC documents such as *Integrity in Ministry* (National Committee for Professional Standards 2010a) affirmed in words that CSMAA with any adults, not just the definitive "vulnerable" or "at risk" ones are a possibility, and one which called for professional responses through pastoral approaches. However, evidence from those who have actually experienced CSMAA and reported their experiences revealed that CSMAA was not being perceived thus—as misconduct perpetrated by professionalclergy—but rather as religious pastors falling, experimenting, sinning, or breaking the rules of celibacy (Sue; Vince; Lynne; Brian; Clair; Rhonda). Such perceptions and contexts carry with them, therefore, expectations of forgiveness and empathy (for the cleric), and spiritual family silence as opposed to legal consequences or public reprimands (Benyei 1998, pp. 104–17). With no clear and more reality-based definition of CSMAA, erroneous perceptions and their repercussions will only continue.

2.2.15. Summary of "Insincerity"

Most ordinary people would likely agree that people or institutions who behave sincerely, would not have the beliefs, attitudes, nor display the behaviours outlined above. This is particularly true for an institution that proclaims Christ as its founder. As Sipe (2008) revealed, the stakes surrounding exposure of clergy misconduct and general sexual activity are very threatening for the RCC. As such, the general response is to neutralise those reporting CSMAA. Accordingly, it would be very difficult for officials dealing with CSMAA to define it more as those who have researched this issue believe it should be defined: a form of professional misconduct, a betrayal of trust, abuse of power, abandonment of fiduciary duty (Fortune 1989, pp. 37, 42, 101; Rutter 1989, pp. 27–28, 205; Lebacqz and Barton 1991, pp. 106–12; Peterson 1992, pp. 178–79; Flynn 2003, pp. 17–27; Kennedy 2009, pp. 4–5; Byrne 2010, pp. 9–16, 51–52; Maltese Ecclesiastical Province 2014, pp. 13–14; Tschan 2014, pp. 46–48; de Weger 2020, pp. 66–70). Without such a definition there simply is no real victim or offender, or someone harmed and someone responsible for that harm (Rutter 1989, p. 23; Flynn 2003, p. 11). To fully acknowledge a more accurate definition, as all the authors just cited would call it, would be to instantly require justice for the offended, action against the offender, and even greater institutional transparency. Systemically, it would also require an actual and genuine reformation of backstage realities in order for these to sincerely synchronise with frontstage proclamations of compassion and justice.

3. Conclusions

Past and current clergy culture militates against change and maintains an inadequate response to CSMAA. Normalisation or minimisation of clergy sexual activity renders complaints of CSMAA somewhat unimportant. Some even suggest there is an element of puritanism, and a general lack of compassion for clergy who have to cope with a great deal due to celibacy, or who may have entered the clerical life too young[12]. At present, it still appears that clericalist self-beliefs about their believed-to-be noble quest to celibacy, if they accept that quest, or their own personal interpretations of chastity being unnecessary for celibates, supersede victims' expressions of their abuse. As a result, those already harmed by abuse are re-harmed, this time by the institution they love/d (Pooler and Barros-Lane 2022, p. 6). Much of the blame for the inaction or even the beliefs surrounding CSMAA and towards victims thereof can be traced back in the undertow of the culture of secrecy and fear exposed by such as (Sipe 2008). There is still little evidence to suggest that past processes such as Towards Healing, have sincerely advanced in new companies such as the Australian Conference of Bishops run and owned Australia Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. The entrenched culture described in this article is still blocking any meaningful, practical, and healing action from occurring when victims report their CSMAA. Within that culture, *because* of that culture, secondary deviance, and abuse/misconduct recidivism, proliferate. In turn, such misconduct then requires further deviancy in the need to cover-up. These deviant and sometimes criminal responses themselves then become expected and normalised.

Shupe maintained that powerful institutions are desperate to neutralise scandals within their structures secretly with as little cost as possible at first, but eventually at any cost it seems. At present, the RCC is no exception as many news stories and lawsuits including those discussed in this article (e.g., Lynne) have revealed (see also de Weger 2020, Appendix 1; Hainsworth 2020; The Pillar 2022). As such, the RCC culture clearly needs reformation.

All the participants of the studies underpinning this article stated that they really wanted to participate. Why? They hoped they could facilitate change by telling their stories and sharing them through such as this article; they really hoped there were people willing to listen. It is hoped that this article has helped them achieve their desire. They are brave and brilliant women and men, and we should be deeply grateful for their courage, conviction, persistence, and knowledge.

Funding: Both my Masters degree and Ph.D. were paid for as per the Commonwealth Government of Australia funding arrangements for higher degree research. I also received a university QUT scholarship for the final 2 years of my Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Both the Masters research project and the Ph.D. study underwent in-depth scrutiny by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Queensland University of Technology). Ethics approval was granted for both studies. Masters ethics approval number: 1300000401. Ph.D. ethics approval number: 1800001033.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. As part of the informed consent agreement, it was made clear that the data received during the research projects would be used to inform the Church and other interested parties and would be used as a foundation for academic articles in the future.

Data Availability Statement: Data for both studies (Masters survey, Ph.D. interview transcripts) are not publicly available but may be available by contacting me directly at stephen.deweger@qut.edu.au.

Acknowledgments: I wish to acknowledge the support of Doris Reisinger, my fellow researcher into this major issue within the Catholic Church. I also would like to thank the MDPI team for inviting me to present this article here. It means a great deal to me personally and in regard to all the participants in my research who wanted their stories told so as to make a difference in the Church and for other survivors.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 For the underlying methodology and methodological approach for this study see the chapter, 'Research Design' (pp. 129–50).

2 For the underlying research design for this study see the chapters, 'Theoretical Framework' and 'Methodology' (pp. 60–70).

3 Unfortunately, more complete descriptions both of survivors' experiences of abuse and of reporting cannot be given here. For these, please refer to the de Weger (2020) on which this article is predominantly based. These more complete accounts give a much greater context and support to the findings in this article.

4 Regarding Church Militant for whom Niles works: It has been particularly interesting and somewhat troubling that for the most, it has been only such often 'gay-focused' Catholic organisations or groups that have been the only ones to deeply investigate the issues discussed in this article. Regardless, though of their particular leanings and biases, I give all sources a hearing. It is hard to fault the actual facts presented in this horror story which depicts exactly what Sipe, by no means a conservative, tried to warn about a decade ago. However, it is a breath of fresh air that this journal, *Religions*, has created this special edition dealing with CSMAA—doing so will present a more balanced account not the least because it includes CSMAA involving women as well.

5 The Melbourne Response was developed just before the release of the Towards Healing protocol, by the then Archbishop Pell. Many believe this was in response after stern words from the then Premier of Melbourne (Gordon and Armitage 2014). The Melbourne Response only dealt with diocesan clergy. However, many found Pell's actions puzzling because Towards Healing had already been developed by such as the later ostracised Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, along with lay church leaders and academics, and was almost ready to be implemented. However, as explained by one of the lay people involved, Towards Healing soon became an arm of Catholic Church Insurances and legal firms.*We went into what we called a survivor mission. We started writing a draft protocol for them. And of course, they adopted nothing like what we put forward. Our draft was far more victim oriented (Private correspondence).*According to this contact, other RCC leaders became more concerned with controlling what the public heard and saw when it came to clergy sexual abuse and took over the control.

6 At the time of the study on which this article is based, the RCC in Australia was dismantling Towards Healing and The Melbourne Response and formulating a new body to oversee a more national approach to protection policies known as Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. (Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. 2021). There is no longer any national formal process such as Towards Healing, through which victims/survivors can seek compassion and justice.

7 As a very recent example of such neutralisation tactics in action, where victim, whistle-blower and media are intimidated, see the discussion of the Cardinal O'Brien case between a survivor's (Mr. Brian Devlin) literary account of this case in *Cardinal Sin: Challenging Power Abuse in the Catholic Church,* and the reporter (Ms. Catherine Devaney) who walked with him through the whole process (Root and Branch 2022). Unfortunately, at the time of writing there was no copy of this presentation, nor its transcript.

8 At first all the headlines and news stories about the *New Book VI* mentioned amazing new changes that now included abuse of 'adults', e.g., (ABC News 2021); (Sky News 2021); (The New York Times 2021). Once it became clear that the new additions to Book VI were not that new (regarding adults) and that the term 'adult' was still highly ambiguous (it was not even used once), the headlines curiously started to omit any references to 'adults'. The issue of a still existing lack of clarity as to what type of adult could be definitionally abused was the focus of a seminar held by St Paul's University, Ottawa, Canada and presented by Msgr John Renken (St Paul University 2022). However, there is no recording of this event.

9 While most of these quotes have been presented earlier, it is worth presenting them again because of their central significance to this tactic and this study.

10 Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) was the theoretical underpinning of the research approach of both de Weger (2016), and de Weger (2020). See de Weger (2016, pp. 60–66) particularly for a more detailed discussion of FST and why it was wholly appropriate for these studies.

11 This document was presented as part of the interview.

12 See comment "NMichael Kellyame | 8 June 2017" (Fr Michael Kelly SJ), in de Weger (2017).On further inspection, his original comment has been removed and replaced with a much more supportive one if it is indeed 'NMichael Kellyame' writing. This is the original one:*I regret to say I cannot join the applause for Mr. de Weger's contribution. There is a fatal conflation between what is considered normal sexual behavior—falling in love and developing a relationship—with something that is criminal and pathological—the sexual abuse of minors. They are different matters. For reasons Mr. de Weger gives, the reporting of the latter only really started to be done relatively recently. But I know for sure and certain it happened and was acted on 70 and 80 years ago. I know that from victims who 've told me their stories and from what I know of the actions of Jesuit superiors in the 1930s,'40s,'50s and '60s.The assertions about adult misbehaviour also neglects a basic fact which I have known for 50 years, 47 of them in the Jesuits. Many of those who ambitiously committed to a chaste and celibate life should never have and did so for unsustainable reasons like parental or peer pressure for example (my emphasis). That falling in love helped them to grow up should be seen as something positive. Something more about cultural and ecclesial context would enhance your argument, Mr. de Weger.* Michael Kelly 8 June 2017.Eureka Street is a Jesuit magazine and Fr Michael Kelly SJ, one of the original creators thereof.

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Article

Asymmetry in Confession as a Cause of Sexual and Spiritual Violence—Dogma Historical Resources for Making Changes to Confession in Terms of Clerical and Sacramental Theology

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Abstract: The dynamic and asymmetry of a pastoral situation is intensified by the Catholic theological rules to the extent that the confession may only be heard by an ordained man. It is particularly the priest's sole right to pronounce absolution that compounds spiritual dependency in terms of the personal relationship with God that the sin fundamentally impairs. I shall take dogmatic decisions and attrition—to indicate potential for change that could make the confessional, which is still an important place for some women, a possibly less dangerous place. These changes would be: Precisely, because the pastoral system, in its asymmetrical relationship in confession, is a place for passive, suffered and active vulnerability, it is essential for the priest to be aware of his own weaknesses and vulnerability. The liturgy could be used to change the concentration on the one form of confession and with it the focus on the priest. Making dogmatic changes to confession should aim to compensate for the asymmetry and vulnerability of the situation as such, thus focusing on protecting the person, rather than on the sacrament.

Keywords: sexual abuse; confession; sacrament; gender; embodiment; parrhesia; vulnerability; Catholic Church

Citation: Werner, Gunda. 2022. Asymmetry in Confession as a Cause of Sexual and Spiritual Violence—Dogma Historical Resources for Making Changes to Confession in Terms of Clerical and Sacramental Theology. *Religions* 13: 307. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040307

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 16 March 2022
Accepted: 29 March 2022
Published: 31 March 2022

1. Introduction

In the papal bull of indiction *Misericordia vultus* for the Holy Year 2015 under the motto of mercy, Pope Francis reminded his priests once again that the confessional should not be a torture chamber (Cf. Francis 2013, 2015; Hahn and Werner 2020). Here, the Pope probably meant that priests should not turn the confessional into a merciless courtroom situation but apply themselves with all due moderation to their double role of being a judge and a physician (Cf. Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) 1983, c.978 §1; Oehmen-Vieregge 2020). However, the exhortation fails to make any mention of the serious offense of *sollicitatio* (cf. Hallermann 2021b), which is all the more astounding in view of how the confessional has once again come into focus as a place of initiation and violence following the exposure of sexual violence and sexual abuse of children and young people by the clergy (Cf. John Jay College 2002, 2011). Furthermore, such sexual abuse is not a new phenomenon, as shown by the fact that sexual solicitation mainly of women during confession (precisely *sollicitatio*) was addressed not just by making it obligatory to use the confessional as a place of confession (cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014, pp. 232–33, 238) but also by promulgating self-jurisdiction regarding this offence of *sollicitatio* (Cf. Paul 2001; Hallermann 2021a; Pfannkuche 2012; Reisinger and Röhl 2021, pp. 196–215; Prosperi 2001). However, spiritual abuse as an act of solicitation per se has only recently been investigated in greater depth, revealing the complexity of abuse in the religious context (Cf., e.g., Fischer 2019; Wagner 2019; Haslbeck et al. 2020).

Why does the confession situation lead to sexual and/or also spiritual abuse, as well as of adult women? The dynamic and asymmetry of a pastoral or counselling situation is intensified by the Catholic theological rules for the sacrament to the extent that the confession may only be heard by an ordained man. Furthermore, only the ordained man is

allowed to pronounce the absolution formula for sins. Therefore, both the fundamental asymmetry of pastoral situations and the role of the clergy, as understood by Catholic clerical and sacramental theology, can turn the confessional into a place of violence, as examined on an increasingly interdisciplinary basis in recent years (Cf. Faggioli and O'Reilly-Gindhart 2021). When it comes to the 'systematic causes of abuse', a key role is played particularly by how the priesthood is understood. There is less of a focus on the confessional as a vulnerable or precarious place for the penitent, resulting precisely from the dogmatic decisions on the sacrament, as well as the clerical understanding of the priest as a physician and judge in the role of 'father confessor'. The image of the priest includes a gradient of openness between the penitent and priest, as already indicated by Michel Foucault when he ascertained that the priest does not have to display the personal openness that is expected from the penitent (Cf. Werner 2021b, pp. 40–60). This asymmetry is reinforced in dogmatic terms because the penitent's subjective contribution, in other words, confession, contrition and atonement, constitutes the sacramental character together with absolution from the priest. It is particularly the priest's sole right to pronounce absolution that compounds spiritual dependency in terms of the personal relationship with God that the sin fundamentally impairs (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 210–17).

In the following, I would like *first* to present the sacrament of penance in its dogmatic and legal structure (1), in order to examine its asymmetrical basic structure from the point of view of power analysis in a *second step* (2). *Third*, I shall take momentous dogmatic decisions in the past to indicate potential for change that could make the confessional, which is still an important place for some women, a possibly less dangerous place (3).

2. The Basis of Confession in Terms of Sacramental Theology

The "MHG" study (named after the cities of Mannheim, Heidelberg and Göttingen as the institute addresses of the participating scientists) presented in Germany in 2018 on the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy also revealed systemic deficits in the Catholic Church. This study explicitly named the confessional as one of the places where sexual abuse was either initiated or even carried out (Cf. Dreßing et al. 2018, p. 13). This situation described with reference to minors is equally a reality for adult women, as shown impressively by reports and studies published in recent years, referring to both sexual and spiritual abuse (Cf. John Jay College 2002, Table 4.4.4, p. 81; Doyle 2003).

What is confession? In the sacrament of confession, the penitents are expected to name their sinful transgressions in serious contrition and to vow that they will change the situation. At the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the decree on penance (in Can. 4 DH 1704) further confirmed that the necessary elements of confession for the penitent consist of the subjective acts of contrition, confession and satisfaction. They were qualified as '*quasi-materia*' (DH 812–814) with recourse to the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The act of absolution is specified at the Council of Trent in Canons 9 and 10 (DH 1709–1710), where absolution is understood as a judicial act of the priest in the 'forma' of the sacrament of confession necessary for the priest's role as a physician and judge. The setting for confession thus changes between two contradictory—or to some extent conflicting—prerequisites to be found in the role of the priest (Cf. Oehmen-Vieregge 2020). This double role as a judge and physician has a long history in the development of the sacrament of confession and merges today in an interpretation of the priest in (Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) 1983), Can 978 Section 2 (cf. Meckel and Müller 2021; Demel and Pfleger 2017), who is supposed to fulfil both tasks. Sin is also called the illness of the soul and is interpreted as a legal violation of the righteousness of God. For the priest to fulfill these roles, the penitents are obliged to recognize their sinful deeds/thoughts, to examine their consciences unsparingly and thus to reveal their inner selves. Confession reconciles the penitent with God and with the Church, as, depending on the severity of their sin, sinners also exclude themselves from the church community. At this point, it becomes clear that the sacrament has another dimension that reinforces its asymmetry, and that belongs to the community of believers (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 332–46). Only a priest endowed with the authority for the sacrament of reconciliation

is allowed to pronounce absolution (cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014, p. 226, F.6), as an indication and implementation of what the priest says: that God forgives sins. Confession is, therefore, a situation with the penitents, on the one hand, revealing their innermost feelings, thoughts and deeds, and with the priest, on the other hand, in the role of physician and judge, listening, reacting, imposing the right "spiritual medicine" and punishment and stating the forgiveness of sins in the name of God. The Second Vatican Council took up the findings of Bartomeu Maria Xiberta, which had been forgotten: in confession, reconciliation with God and with the Church takes place—however, the debate on how to understand this continues. This double reconciliation is important because it recalls that in the sacrament of reconciliation, an external visibility of belonging is made possible, linking the forum internum and externum (Xiberta 1922; Werner 2016, pp. 287–346).

The only regular place for confession is a confessional in a church or chapel, and the only form is private confession or private absolution after a penitential celebration (Cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014; Werner 2016, pp. 264–87). The liturgical reform after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) thus also follows the dogmatic stipulations of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the Council of Trent (1545–1563), as well as their concretion in the code of canon law in (Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) 1983)[1] (Cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014, pp. 227–28). This renewed stipulation has created structures that uphold the primary objective, namely, to protect the sacrament, but without looking at the protection of the penitent (Cf. for a critical viewpoint Reisinger and Röhl 2021, pp. 211–15). However, the focus should have been on protecting the person based the long history of sexual solicitation in the context of confession. The next section looks at why such violence can take place during confession.

3. Asymmetry in Confession—The Problem with Catholic Narratives

Although asymmetry cannot be avoided in pastoral and counselling situations (cf. Seibert 2022; Behrensen 2022, p. 173), three Catholic narratives make confession particularly perilous for emotional and spiritual manipulation and abuse. Asking for help inevitably causes a vulnerable openness in the desire for consolation, acknowledgement and healing (Cf. Karl 2021). Mary Clark Moschella names the following three narratives that create and sustain the conditions making sexual and spiritual abuse possible: patriarchy, clericalism and body negativity (Cf. Moschella 2022, p. 509). Moschella finds it necessary to deconstruct these narratives before a new biblical theology based on solidarity can be devised. Moschella understands patriarchy as a multifaceted abuse of power that prepares the stage for sexual abuse: "Patriarchy is the combination of sexism plus power, power that is social, material and/or spiritual in nature" (Moschella 2022, p. 511). The fundamental beliefs of the patriarchy include not only the binary division of the world into man/woman and other external factors, but also encompass intellect, spirit, feelings, etc. (cf. Werner 2021a, 2021b, pp. 180–214), and harbor the racist view that people of color are worth less (Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza 2001). The inequality produced in the patriarchy is unilaterally beneficial to men and reinforces hierarchical structures. Furthermore, in this inequality, patriarchy has a long societal history that puts more confidence in men than women. These are the reasons that the patriarchy is so successful. Maria Katharina Moser elucidates this power-shaping capacity in hegemonial masculinity, in which men "[have power; GW] over the bodies of those who are subordinated to them. In patriarchal structures, these are boys, girls and women" (Moser 2010, p. 94).[2] Patriarchy, therefore, means having complex power over subordinates and enhancing masculinity. The focus on sexuality illuminates a further interpretation of this masculinity, which has long been deconstructed by feminist research—Moser continues—as concentrating on sexuality fails to reflect critically on the image of male sexuality as being driven by physical urges or having an extremely strong sexual drive (Cf. Moser 2010, p. 94). Further complex analysis would be necessary for an adequate assessment of the underlying abuse of power, particularly when patriarchy encounters clericalism.

The second narrative for Moschella is clericalism. When the patriarchy encounters clericalism, the effects are reinforced by the arguments brought forth by clericalism that is justified by the God-given, sacred nature of the office. "Clericalism can be broadly defined as the tendency to locate ecclesial power and authority exclusively or primarily in the province of the ordained clergy. [. . .] In the Catholic Church clericalism functions to support the injustice of an all-male clergy, because the power to modify church laws concerning ordination resides in the hands of a body solely comprised of ordained men" (Moschella 2022, pp. 512–13).[3] Moschella analyses three different models for dealing with pastoral power in clericalism: (a) power over; (b) power within; (c) power with (Cf. Moschella 2022, p. 512). It is, in particular, the "power over" model in pastoral power that is predestined for sexual violence and spiritual abuse. "It stands to reason that extreme power inequalities (often tinges in patriarchal assumptions) must be challenged, in order to reduce what Catholics might call 'occasion for sin'" (Moschella 2022, p. 514). The second model of "power within" is understood as a kind of encouragement to shape everyday pastoral life in the existing hierarchy and is easiest to understand as transparent and clear when non-clergy members are included. However, it is especially the third model of "power with" that is susceptible to sexual violence and spiritual abuse, as "'power with', often characterized by friendliness and intimacy, can also create conditions for abuse" (Moschella 2022, p. 514). According to Moschella, it is often a taboo to refer to the priest's power as such, and she recommends breaking this taboo to deal responsibly and transparently with power (Cf. Birekmeyer 2021)[4].

Moschella views the third narrative as the negative interpretation of the body, or "[. . .] body negativity" (Moschella 2022, p. 514). This unholy notion is related to the patriarchy: "when the flesh is viewed as separate from and less holy than the spirit or intellect, the goodness and grace of our creaturely status is rejected" (Moschella 2022, p. 514). As time went on, the body and all corporeality were increasingly associated with sin, leading to the development of a narrative focusing on purity and holiness while degrading the body. It is thus possible to put aside one's own sexuality with its desire and needs as being less holy, separating it from one's own self-awareness because it does not fit in at all with the spiritual ideal of a priest's existence. "When sexuality is denied, disowned or split off from a pastor's awareness, there is a greater risk for that pastor to engage in abuse" (Moschella 2022, p. 515).

These three narratives, which Moschella calls "death-dealing narratives" (Moschella 2022, p. 517), are still deeply ingrained in the nature of the Church. Hierarchical clericalism, in particular, generates an imbalance in the power relations in the Church, where the floodgates for sexual abuse are opened wide in the context of "long traditions of silence and shame around human bodies and sexuality" (Moschella 2022, p. 517). Particularly because the whole body, the embodied person, is present in every interaction, there is a need to remove the taboos regarding corporeality and physical, personal and sexual needs. This is all the more necessary in view of the fact that the specific setting of confession is involved with revealing actions, feelings and needs in order to clarify the drives and urges involved in contrition and the idea of atonement. Sexual violence and spiritual abuse are associated with a confusion of the roles in which "the priest administering the sacrament is in an initial position of trust and maintains his status as spiritual 'father' and 'mentor' in a whole range of different activities [. . .]" (Cornwell 2014, p. 277).[5] With regard to children from precarious backgrounds, Alexander Fischer describes this situation as follows: "The combination of an asymmetrical power configuration [. . .], religious context, emotional vulnerability, a promise, and, for those affected by violence, often a new kind of sexuality forms the basis for a toxic atmosphere" (Fischer 2022, p. 192). This combination applies to women insofar as the described narratives put them in a fundamentally vulnerable starting position during confession, so that they can be and often were and are exposed to these power mechanisms. Hildegard Mathies summarized this in her comments at a conference on the spiritual/sexual abuse of women in Siegburg (Germany) in 2019: "Priests who become perpetrators often exploit their role as pastor and confidant. Women in need, in unstable mental or physical condition and women searching for understanding, nearness

and acceptance can become victims" (Mathies 2019, p. 31; cf. Figuera and Tombs 2022). This situation seems to occur particularly when a woman in such a state of emotional and/or existential vulnerability encounters a priest who has no clarified or formed feelings or knowledge of his needs: this opens the floodgates for transgressive conduct. During an emotionally intensive interaction, the body and the bodies can become "sources of confusion", as Moschella so accurately puts it, "when we experience desires in pastoral situations . . . " (Moschella 2022, p. 515). One aspect of the asymmetry indicated by Michel Foucault (cf. Foucault 2012a, 2012b; Werner 2021b, pp. 40–60) is that during confession, the priest does not have to open up about himself; he does not have to be truthful to the extent that is expected from the penitent. The asymmetry is further reinforced by the priest acting as a kind of neutral ground, a person with no apparent problems, and the opposite of the penitent. If this figure then shows emotional attention and affection, a desire to take the conversation to a deeper level and the prospect of an emotional or existential change in the emotional situation of the penitent, this can then pose a threat of manipulation and transgression that binds the woman to the priest (Cf. Fischer 2022)[6]. This analysis makes it clearer that confession has become a key element in sexual and spiritual abuse in a way in which it "[. . .] upholds the principle of guilty sin that can only be exonerated by a priest (possibly even the same one responsible for the sexualized abuse) but that adheres persistently to the penitent and also acts an instrument of obedience [. . .]" (Fischer 2022, p. 211).

In recent weeks, following the publication of studies on sexual abuse in France and also in Australia, demands have become loud for a change in the sexual ethics (cf., e.g., Moschella 2022, pp. 517–18) and in the training of priests (cf. Dreßing et al. 2018), together with queries about the seal of confession, in order to put an end to possible cover-ups.[7] I would like to take a look at the dogma history to focus on two other possible changes in terms of clerical and sacramental theology, as despite all danger, confession is still an important place for some people.

4. Dogma History: Protecting the Sanctity of the Sacrament

The regular form of the sacrament of confession as it is known today is not something that is self-evident in historical terms but is the result of major changes. Dogmatic changes have different causes. However, a persisting exegesis can be ascertained with regard to the sacrament of confession: protecting the sacrament and the sanctity of the Church (cf. Paul 2001)[8]. Three changes provide proof of this (Cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014, pp. 230–32;[9] Gisevius and Sommer-Krick 2020).

The first change occurred in the early Church, at a point in time when communal confession was still customary and the pastoral role consisted primarily of the art of living (cf. Foucault 2012a, 2012b; Werner 2021a, pp. 40–60; Werner 2020)—as Foucault established in his studies on *parrhesia* and on governmentality. In late antiquity—according to Foucault—the image of the male/female pastor underwent a fundamental change. The notion of the ancient world, in which the soul is guided by *parrhesiastes* who tell the truth about themselves and thus encourage the penitents to tell their own truth, was relinquished during late antiquity and replaced by a new practice oriented towards a different notion of roles and truth. The pastoral role, now attributed to the clerical monopoly (now primarily males), expects the 'flock', i.e., those receiving pastoral care, to tell their life experiences. The pastors themselves do not have to do this anymore. As pastors, they are priests of God, and as such, they are role models. It is only due to this development that from this point onwards, the effect of a sacrament no longer primarily depends on the morals of the priest, nor on his level of education but only on the intention to act in the interest of the Church, as well as on the right matter. Therefore, the effect of sacraments in the Catholic perception emerges *ex opere operato*[10], which means that God's promise will be fulfilled in the sacrament even if the minister involved is morally dubious or—something that was often the case in earlier centuries—not sufficiently educated to state the formula correctly or has turned away from the faith (Cf. Mathias Wirth and Schroer 2022, p. 9)[11].

Second, in the early 13th century, communal confession was changed into mandatory auricular confession. Although auricular confession was already common in the Celtic Church, it took some time and several controversies to change this form into a binding liturgical form (Cf. Dallen 1986, 2020). During a period of great upheaval and faith revivals when believers of both genders interpreted the Bible for themselves with great self-confidence, leading to critical Christian communities (cf. Hahn 1982), private confession offered the possibility of being informed about the penitent's orthodoxy at least before Easter[12] (Cf. Prosperi 2001). The dogmatic prerequisite for this decision was a more unequivocal notion of the sacraments for a better understanding of why confession should be a sacrament at all. The narratives and testimonies of the forgiveness of sins in the Bible make it quite clear that it is God alone who forgives sins. This is stated strikingly in the story in the Gospel of Mark chapter 2, verses 1 to 12 (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 287–93). The way Jesus forgives sins here becomes the starting point for the accusations of acting on behalf of God and blaspheming (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 287–93). Therefore, if God is the only one who can forgive sins, and God already sees and forgives the contrite heart, clarification was required to explain the need for the forgiveness of sins in a sacrament. In the old Church, confession was not just a public, communal act, but also the second 'life raft' after baptism (Werner 2016, pp. 224, F. 1240, 228; DH 1542). Now, it is extended to venial sins that are to be confessed once a year before Easter in auricular confession. In stipulating confession, the Lateran Council, therefore, makes several things possible: from now on, confession is only auricular, it is extended to venial sins, for which Easter is recommended, or immediately for mortal sins; confession is one of the seven sacraments and, therefore, also consists of the two necessary parts: matter and form (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 215, F. 1182. 216, 229–31). Auricular confession permits dual control: for the priest with regard to the faith and morals of the penitent, and for the penitent with the need to move from the sin of commission to willful sin and, therefore, to self-reflection and self-improvement.

Third, the question as to how exactly to understand matter and form leads to a theological controversy. Contrition as an essential 'matter' of confession becomes the lynchpin of scholastic debate. Which contrition is necessary for the sacrament? There is a difference between perfect and imperfect contrition. The former needs no forgiveness in the sacrament, as God forgives the contrite heart, while the latter has to be converted effectively into perfect contrition in the sacrament. This demanded a change in form, i.e., absolution: an intercessory (deprecative) absolution formula is not sufficient to bring about such a change in contrition, so that the dogma prescribes the indicative formula only (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 234–63; 2017).

These decisions have been confirmed time and again over the centuries, right through to the present day: private confession remains compulsory, with the subjective acts necessary for obtaining the sacrament via the absolution of the priest assigned to this purpose. However, several elements have been lost with sacramental performance: the communal form, which not only elucidated that personal failings also affect the congregation/community, but also effectively indicated the many forms of the forgiveness of sin; the liturgical form of the laying on of hands as a symbol of healing, which was practically no longer possible in the confessional that was prescribed from the mid-17th century onwards; contrition as one's own place of forgiveness outside the sacrament; and joint intercession for the forgiveness of God.

However, the dogmatic decisions were proposed to condone these losses in order to protect the sanctity of the sacrament. This sanctity also had to be protected from the sinfulness of its members, as illustrated particularly by the moralization of the subject in the 19th century in the veritable explosion of confession activity through to the mid-20th century (Cf. Werner 2016, pp. 193–95, 335–49; Werner 2020). Even after the demand made at the Second Vatican Council to reform the sacrament of penance (SC 72), private confession is still upheld as the regular form[13], at the confessional in a church or chapel as the regular place of confession for both genders (cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014, p. 232)[14], which is also on account of the fear of sexual transgression (Cf. Anuth and Odenthal 2014, p. 236, F. 66).

However, the legal regulations still view the protection of the person as an "incidental aspect" (Hallermann 2021a, p. 2).[15] The way the practice of confession was abandoned by the faithful during the 1970s could be read as an act of sensus fidelium, indicating that something is profoundly wrong with the practice of confession.

5. Proposal for Making Changes to Confession—Final Thoughts

The decisions of dogma history have brought about essential changes in the sacrament of penance. This has led to the persisting asymmetry and threat in the vulnerable situation of the confession (cf. Karl 2021, p. 171)[16], making it possible to uphold the three narratives, namely, patriarchy, clericalism and body negativity, in turn encouraging sexual and spiritual violence and abuse. The Church has had an eye on the threat of sexual abuse in confession for centuries, but always from the point of view of preserving the sanctity of the sacrament. The confessional was supposed to ensure this as a safe place, but it could not keep the promise that it had been built for, which was to prevent massive spiritual and sexual abuse—also of women—in the context of confession. The following changes make sense from a dogmatic point of view if the Church wishes to counteract this threat while holding on to this sacrament:

First, there is a need to change the image of the priest, harking back to the tradition of the early Church. This would mean that the priest and his life would be truthful to the extent that the priest lives according to what he says, also revealing his own feelings and experience that support the situation. However, this would not be a purely spiritual statement, but rather one that concerns life as such. As a consequence, this would mean revealing one's own feelings, life situation and failings to an extent that is appropriate in the context of professional situations. Foucault recalls the tradition of parrhesia. Katharina Karl emphasizes this act of revealing, in the context of vulnerability, with a picture of scars or wounds (Cf. Karl 2021, p. 176). Precisely, because the pastoral system, in its asymmetrical relationship with confession, is a place for passive, suffered and active vulnerability, it is essential for the priest to be aware of his own weaknesses and vulnerability (Cf. Karl 2021, p. 171)[17]. It is, therefore, a case of learning new roles "in the sense of dealing reflectively with one's own role and hierarchy-conscious, highly delicate situations in a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship" (Karl 2021, p. 178). Knowing and showing weaknesses would be an appropriate aspect of pastoral action that prevents violence.[18]

Second, thought should be given again to the form of the sacrament of penance. On the one hand, the forgiveness of God is possible in many ways, for example, in acts of charity, in reading the scriptures and in attending worship. Private confession would thus take its place alongside the others as a form of church penance, thus preventing an excessive focus on this form. On the other hand, a more versatile understanding of the sacrament and its elements could be possible. If contrition is the place for the forgiveness of God, then God acts in and with the contrite person. This would allow the predicative formular to be brought back into the liturgy alongside the indicative absolution formula. Dialogue could show which prayer for the forgiveness of sins would be appropriate in the specific situation. Above all, the liturgy could be used to change the concentration on this one form and with it the focus on the priest. Liturgical history already offers possible forms. Although this would result in fundamental legal changes, in this case, recent history already shows that this is conceivable (see above).

Making dogmatic changes to confession should aim to compensate for the asymmetry and vulnerability of the situation as such, to the extent possible in such a setting, thus focusing on protecting the person, rather than on the sacrament. This is all the more applicable when there are different vulnerable factors involved (cf. O'Bannion 2012, p. 110)[19]: "If we want safe and genuinely loving Christian communities, instead of breeding grounds for sexual abuse, the soul-wounding narratives of patriarchy, clericalism and body negativity must be challenged" (Moschella 2022, pp. 517–18).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Prescribing the confessional as the place for confession goes back to the statement made by Pope John Paul II. CIC/1917 also included the special rule that men may also be heard outside the confessional (c. 910 CIC/1917), but this was not included in CIC/1983.

2 Maria Katharina Moser already elucidated in 2010 how patriarchy acts in its "power of control" that is then (also) expressed in the medium of sexuality towards subordinates. She draws attention in particular to the fact that sexual violence against men usually ceases from an age of mid-20 upwards, because they are then deemed to be peers as men among men, but this does not apply to women (Moser 2010, pp. 95–96).

3 It is not only the MHG study that sees clericalism as one of the greatest problems in the context of abuse: Pope Francis also calls this a perversion.

4 Refers to the findings of (John Jay College 2002), that confession no longer took place just in the confessional but also in different places, so that for adolescents in particular, the borders between administering a sacrament and other "social" activities become increasingly blurred (Cf. Birekmeyer 2021, p. 25). The fact that the priests perpetuate their role as "father confessor" during sexual abuse is particularly important.

5 (Cornwell 2014, p. 277), cited after (Birekmeyer 2021, p. 25).

6 Impressive analyses of these mechanisms can be found in the many publications of the last five years (Cf. Faggioli and O'Reilly-Gindhart 2021).

7 Cf. https://www.ciase.fr (accessed on 6 February 2022); https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/32063-zeitung-papst-verteidigt-beichtgeheimnis-als-unverrueckbar (accessed on 6 February 2022).

8 The first sentence of the apostolic letter begins with the words: "The Safeguarding of the Sanctity of the Sacraments, especially the Most Holy Eucharist and Penance, and the keeping of the faithful, called to communion with the Lord, in their observance of the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, demand that the Church itself, in her pastoral solicitude, intervene to avert dangers of violation, so as to provide for the salvation of souls "which must always be the supreme law in the Church" (CIC, can 1752)".

9 They draw attention to the fact that the confessional goes back to the setting for confession as a conversation and is post-Tridentine in both denominations (F. 27). The originally separated conversation venue only developed into widespread use of the confessional during the 16th/17th century. "The concern that already existed before the Council of Trent to separate the confessor and penitent in physical terms to avoid sexual transgression or corresponding suspicions was only implemented by the Catholics with the mandatory confessional lattice panel" (231). Today's confessional dates back to Karl Borromäus (Instructiones fabricae et suppelectilis ecclesiasticae dated 1577), who prescribed it for all churches (see 231). It became mandatory in France and Germany and in the mission areas.

10 The effect of the sacrament as *ex opere operatum* is stipulated at the Council of Trent (DH 1608) and *named ex opere operantis* in the narrow context of the reception and response to human mercy. The aim of this differentiation introduced by Peter of Poitiers (dec. 1205) was the effect of the grace of God in the sacrament, even if the priest possibly had a heretical or deficient faith or difficult moral conduct.

11 They illustrate the influence of this concept for establishing separate worlds, which in turn is a major contributing cause for sexual abuse.

12 At the Fourth Lateran Council 1215, annual confession at Easter was recommended, with direct confession in the case of a mortal sin (DH 812).

13 The Ordo Poenitentiae of 1973 stipulates private confession as the regular form, while private confession and private absolution are also conceivable in a shared liturgy of the Word; general absolution is only permitted in exceptional circumstances (plane crash or similar disasters). (German Liturgical Institute, Die Feier der Buße. Nach dem neuen Rituale Romanum. Study issue, Trier among others (Pastoralliturgische Reihe in Verbindung mit der Zeitschrift "Gottesdienst" 2008).

14 Here c. 964 §1/CIC 1983 does not include the prescription from cc. 909 et seq./CIC 1917 according to which women must be heard in the confessional, while men can also be heard outside the confessional.

15 To protect the sacrament of confession, on 1 June 1741, Pope Benedict XIV issued the apostolic constitution *Sacramentum Poenitentiae* to regulate sexual solicitation during confession. The Holy Office promulgated the *Instruction Crimen Sollicitationis*, which was reissued by Pope John XXIII on 16 March 1963 and continues along the same line. Once again it deals with the crime of sollicitatio or crimen pessimum, i.e., homosexual acts. On 30 April 2001, Pope John Paul II promulgated new norms under SST/2010 against grave delicts against the faith that are prosecuted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Currently

valid are the norms revised by Pope Benedict XVI (SST/2010 dated 21 May 2010), together with the Motu Proprium *Vos estis lux mundi* promulgated by Pope Francis. This wants to "protect persons reporting crimes by clerics against the sixth commandment, while at the same time preventing cardinals, patriarchs, nuncios, bishops and their legal peers or senior leaders of institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life and monasteries *sui iuris* from preventing or hindering the prosecution or punishment of such offences" (Hallermann 2021a, p. 2).

16 Karl makes it clear that pastoral confession is explicitly a place where vulnerability is experienced.

17 Distinguishing between 'vulnerance' (the power to hurt) and vulnerability, see also the article by Ute Leimgruber here.

18 Rightly joins others in indicating that unacknowledged wounds can lead to violence (Cf. Karl 2021).

19 His study places the practice of confession in an intersectional analysis. One of his insights is that the power of priests in the confessional is geared more to social status than to gender. Particularly with regard to sexual violence in the confessional, he states clearly: "Sexual solicitation in the confessional, for instance, was a crime usually committed against those with limited means of retaliation" (O'Bannion 2012, p. 110).

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Victims Are Not Guilty! Spiritual Abuse and Ecclesiastical Responsibility

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to show that victims of spiritual abuse are not guilty of what they have undergone and that, in the Catholic setting, the Church has an institutional responsibility for it. With this objective, after the Introduction (1), the paper analyses the definition of spiritual abuse (2); tackles several topics stemming from the analysis of definitions, such as the nature of spiritual power and its effects (3), the issue of vulnerability (4), the institutional dimension of spiritual abuse in the Catholic setting (5), and the disputed topic of intentionality (6). The article provides a conclusion that aims to summarize the results of the analysis (7).

Keywords: spiritual abuse; abuse of conscience; vulnerability; institutional responsibility

Citation: Fernández, Samuel. 2022. Victims Are Not Guilty! Spiritual Abuse and Ecclesiastical Responsibility. *Religions* 13: 427. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050427

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber, Doris Reisinger and Antonio Muñoz-García

Received: 10 March 2022
Accepted: 6 May 2022
Published: 9 May 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

Abuse of conscience, or spiritual abuse, can occur in any religion or faith-based community; however, it takes on different features, dynamics, and strategies depending on the specific institutional settings in which it occurs; therefore, although it is not a phenomenon exclusive to Christianity, it is worth studying in the Christian context. In the Catholic Church, spiritual abuse is shaped by certain specific institutional elements; namely, religious orders, the universal magisterium, canon law, vows of obedience, papal infallibility, and the efficacy of sacraments, among others; therefore, spiritual abuse in the Catholic context deserves a dedicated analysis.

Abuse of conscience or spiritual abuse is a complex phenomenon, and common sense is not enough to understand it. People who hear about incidents involving spiritual abuse through the media tend to figure out how this could happen and attempt to guess the causes of this destructive phenomenon. Moreover, Christians who have positive experiences in the Church find it difficult to understand and even accept that these things could actually happen. Consequently, people imagine that the victims were naïve, that they should not have trusted their spiritual adviser, that they were too confident, that they chose the wrong person, or that they belonged to the wrong community. 'People imagine that victims have tacitly consented or were complicit, consciously or unconsciously, in the harm they have suffered' (Poujol 2015, p. 25). Hence, they think: 'I would not have let myself be deceived in such a way' or 'This will not happen in my Christian community'. In addition, some people envision that victims have a particular 'psychological profile', and they suppose that the victims allowed themselves to be abused because they were immature or had some affective deficiency; they were looking for someone who would direct their lives for fear of making decisions or for an unbalanced desire for certainty. The idea behind all these thoughts is that some personal deficiencies made them vulnerable to abuse.

This phenomenon corresponds to what the Ryan's classic study calls 'Blaming the Victim' (Ryan 1976). According to this theory, victims produce a discomforting dissonance because they threaten the belief that the world is fundamentally fair and rational; hence, victim-blaming is a psychological defense to reduce this dissonance (Harber et al. 2015). Accordingly, in an ecclesiastical context, victims are blamed because they threaten the holiness of the Church. If they are guilty, the Church is safe.

The tendency to blame victims finds support in some civil and ecclesial documents and protocols that speak about the protection of children and 'vulnerable adults'. Again, at first glance, this expression supports the presumption that spiritual abuse happens to victims because they are vulnerable. Consequently, people who are not considered 'vulnerable adults' seem to be safe. These ideas 'unjustly place the blame on those who have suffered abuse' (Chartier-Siben 2021a). Thus, paradoxically, these tenets suggest that victims of spiritual abuse are somehow guilty of what they have suffered.

However, these widespread ideas that have no scientific support must be rejected. Therefore, the aim of this article is to show that victims of spiritual abuse are not guilty of what they have undergone and that, in the Catholic setting, the Church has an institutional responsibility for it. With this objective, after the Introduction (1), the paper analyses the definition of spiritual abuse (2); tackles several topics stemming from the analysis of definitions, such as the nature of spiritual power (3), the issue of vulnerability (4), the institutional dimension of spiritual abuse in the Catholic setting (5), and the topic of intentionality (6). The article provides a conclusion that aims to summarize the results of the analysis (7).

2. How Is Spiritual Abuse Defined?

The first problem related to the definition of this phenomenon is its very name. The more common moniker for this phenomenon is 'spiritual abuse', but some authors speak about 'abuse of spiritual power' or 'religious abuse', whereas others use the expression 'abuse of conscience', especially in Catholic settings. Do these expressions refer to the same phenomenon or does each of them indicate a slightly different but overlapped subject? In my view, 'spiritual abuse', 'abuse of spiritual power' and 'religious abuse' are almost synonymous, whereas 'abuse of conscience' is a slightly more specific kind of spiritual abuse that harms the conscience of the believer (Fernández 2021). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this article, the differences between these kinds of abuse are not relevant; therefore, I use 'spiritual abuse' because it is the broader and more frequently utilized expression.

The second problem is that of the definition itself. How is spiritual abuse defined? What are its essential features? (Oakley and Kinmond 2013). The pioneering book on this subject is that of Johnson and VanVonderen entitled *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Johnson and VanVonderen 1991). In it, the authors stated: 'Spiritual abuse is the mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support, or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining, or decreasing that person's spiritual empowerment' (Johnson and VanVonderen 1991, p. 20). In addition, the same authors provided a description: 'Spiritual abuse can occur when a leader uses his or her spiritual position to control or dominate another person. It often involves overriding the feelings and opinions of another, without regard to what will result in the other person's state of living, emotions or spiritual well-being' (Johnson and VanVonderen 1991, pp. 20–21). These preliminary definitions are generic and have prompted further reflection. A couple of years later, another author offered the following definition: 'Spiritual abuse happens when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control or exploit a follower, thus causing spiritual wounds' (Blue 1993, p. 12). These definitions focus on three elements: the misuse of spiritual authority, the act of taking advantage of a follower, and the harm that it brings to the victim. A short book published in 1994 described it as follows: 'By spiritual abuse, I mean that I will deny their spiritual freedom by telling them there is only one way to God' (Linn et al. 1994, p. 12). Although this definition is quite generic, it highlights a central topic: the loss of freedom.

An academic book that deals with the relationship between psychology and spirituality provided the following definition: 'Spiritual abuse is misuse of power in a spiritual context' (Wehr 2000, p. 20). Accordingly, spiritual abuse would be a type of abuse of power that takes place in a spiritual context. The same aspect is highlighted by a paper that affirms that spiritual abuse occurs when people use 'their power within a framework of spiritual

belief to practice and satisfy their needs at the expense of others' (Hall 2003, p. 33, quoted in: Oakley and Kinmond 2013, p. 30). Thus, spiritual abuse revolves around power.

Alongside the issue of power in a religious context, another important element is underscored: abusers seek their own benefit. Another article defined spiritual abuse as 'A misuse of power in a spiritual context, whereby spiritual authority is distorted to the detriment of those under its leadership' (Ward 2011, p. 901). Again, the misuse of spiritual power and the damage that it provokes are emphasized. The short book *Spiritual Abuse: Unspoken Crisis* offered a functional definition: 'Spiritual abuse is when a Christian leader causes injury to others by acting in a self-centered manner in order to benefit themselves' (Nelson 2015). These words focus on the harm that befalls the victim and the perpetrator's intentionality. According to Keller, one type of 'religious abuse occurs when abusers use religion to justify their actions' (Keller 2016, p. 74). Although it is not explicit, the author suggests that abusers use religion for their own benefit. A similar description was given by the book *Broken Trust*: 'Spiritual abuse happens when people use God, or their supposed relationship with God, to control behavior for their benefit' (Diederich 2017, p. 36). This definition revolves around spiritual authority, the limitation of freedom, and the abusers' benefit. An academic article in the field of counselling adopted the following definition: 'the act of an individual in a position of religious leadership/authority to gain power and control over individuals or collective groups' (Cashwell and Swindle 2018, p. 183; Gubi and Jacobs 2009). Another work stated: 'Abuses of spiritual power are psychological abuses performed in a way far from being anodyne: "God" is used as the lever to put pressure on people's conscience in order to subjugate them, or even reduce them to a real state of slavery' (De Dinechin and Léger 2019, p. 19). This description has three elements: spiritual power, the abuser's intention, and the victim's loss of freedom. Moreover, another author stated: 'Spiritual abuse involves using the sacred to harm or deceive the soul of another' (Langberg 2020, p. 127). An important step forward is the work of Lisa Oakley and her colleagues. After extensive research conducted in 2017, in the UK, involving different Christian denominations, she proposed a new definition based on empirical evidence:

> Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it. This abuse may include manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, coercion to conform, control through the use of sacred texts or teaching, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position, isolation as a means of punishment, and superiority and elitism. (Oakley and Humphrey 2019, p. 31)

This definition includes many aspects of the definitions mentioned in previous works and is based on the results of scientific research. In addition, it incorporates a description of spiritual abuse and its consequences, thus providing elements to help recognize it.

In summary, three features of spiritual abuse are highly apparent in these definitions: the misuse of spiritual power, the harm that it causes to the victims, and a benefit that the abusers seek for themselves. The first and the most frequent characteristic is the misuse of spiritual power, which is expressed in different terms by the authors; therefore, spiritual abuse revolves around the misuse of spiritual power. The second characteristic mentioned by most definitions is the harm that spiritual abuse causes to the victims. This damage involves the spiritual or religious dimension of the person: 'It changes their experience of "self", their understanding of who they are as a person, their relationship with others—and often with God, their ability to trust and even their sense of ontological security' (Oakley and Kinmond 2013, p. 89). What are the consequences of spiritual abuse? 'Although the impact of religious abuse is like other types of mental, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, the element of the sacred is a unique component' (Cashwell and Swindle 2018, p. 184). Thus, on the one hand, spiritual abuse harms people, similarly to other types of abuse, and on the other hand, the fact that spiritual abuse involves the name of God, means that it

hurts people on their religious level. According to the literature, the effects of spiritual abuse can be classified into five categories: (a) loss of freedom—a real state of slavery, (b) distortion of the image of God, (c) undermining the systems of meaning-making, (d) the impact on the ability to trust in others and oneself, (e) and the construct of depression (Poujol 2015; De Dinechin and Léger 2019; Johnston 2021). There is a third feature that is present in some definitions, namely, that of intentionality. A number of authors stated that perpetrators commit spiritual abuse while seeking to benefit themselves, and therefore, intentionality is presented as a critical feature of spiritual abuse.

It is worth noting that none of these definitions—at least explicitly—mention the concrete institutional setting of spiritual abuse—only the context of faith is pointed out. One article presented spiritual abuse as a form of betrayal trauma that has an institutional character (Cashwell and Swindle 2018; Freyd 2008). How is this absence explained? Perhaps, since these authors did not focus on a particular Christian denomination, they did not analyze the specific institutional setting that fosters spiritual abuse; therefore, from these reflections emerge four topics that delineate the structure of the following pages: the nature of spiritual power or authority, the topic of vulnerability, the institutional dimension of spiritual abuse in the Catholic setting and the issue of intentionality.

3. Spiritual Power: Its Nature and Effects

As previously stated, the studied definitions indicate in different words that spiritual abuse is committed by virtue of spiritual power: 'spiritual authority', 'power in a spiritual context', 'power in the context of a spiritual belief', 'divine position', and others. Moreover, expressions such as the 'use of religion', the 'use of God', or 'a supposed relationship with God' express the same concept; therefore, spiritual abuse is a type of abuse of power and consists of the perverse use of asymmetry of spiritual power (Murillo 2020). On the one hand, this means that it is not the power that hurts, but its perverse use. Abuse is not a consequence of power but its misuse; the problem is not the asymmetry but its perverse use. On the other hand, the misuse of spiritual power touches on the religious dimension of human beings. Thus, it is a specific kind of abuse. In fact, it differs from other types of abuse because the victim seems to experience that 'God is behind or in agreement with the damaging behavior' (Oakley and Humphrey 2019, p. 58). For example, abuse in the film industry, sports, and Churches have important common characteristics, but they are not the same kind of abuse in different contexts. Abuse in Hollywood and in the Olympic Games have the same essential features, although they take place in different settings. By contrast, when abuse is perpetrated in the name and by virtue of a spiritual authority, it holds victims from within and damages their spiritual dimension. That is why it demands a definition in its own right (Oakley and Humphrey 2019). This distinction does not claim that one kind of abuse is more serious than another. It is not fair to measure and compare abuse. My contention is that the misuse of spiritual power touches on the religious realm of human beings and provokes a particular type of harm. In this type of abuse, 'the abuser acts in the name of an absolute principle, which the mistreated person recognises as absolute' (Berceville 2019), and 'God is used as the lever to put pressure on people's conscience' (De Dinechin and Léger 2019, p. 19). A Twitter dialogue illustrates this difference well. Lauren posted a tweet about *gaslighting* in the Church. Someone replied that manipulation is everywhere, not only in the Christian context, and genuinely asked whether there is a difference between the toxic behavior in the Church and that in family, work and other contexts. Lauren answered: 'Gaslighting is damaging enough. However, when they connect their gaslighting to your connection to God, claim to speak for Him, question your eternal destinations, making you question it yourself, the damage is incalculable' (@laurchastain22: 21 February 2022). Emotional manipulation is devastating, but when an alleged divine authority is involved, it hurts people at their religious level, which is a very deep dimension of human beings.

It is worth mentioning that the testimonies of victims are eloquent: 'In our lives, our abuser was a God substitute'; therefore, spiritual abuse causes damage 'to the person in the

name of God' (Oakley and Humphrey 2019, pp. 57–58). A mother who wanted to tell a minister that her boy's mentoring has to stop, declared that she was frightened of 'what God would do' and that 'she was scared of going against God'; the boy also stated that 'if he said he did not want it [the mentoring], then he would feel he was going against God' (Oakley and Humphrey 2019, pp. 61–62). Certainly, the abuser takes the place of God in the faithful's conscience. In this context, 'contradicting the superior means contradicting God' (De Lassus 2020, p. 116). The superior takes the place of God. Thus, a contemplative nun affirms: 'I joined the monastery to be in the presence of God, and I ended up living in the presence of the superior' (De Lassus 2020, p. 283). It is not uncommon for superiors to pronounce phrases such as 'God told me' or 'Our Lady spoke to me in prayer' (Sorlin 2018; De Lassus 2020). In summary, spiritual authority differs from other types of power because it touches the spiritual dimension of the person. Hence, its misuse is a specific type of abuse. This kind of abuse, which harms at the spiritual level, causes damage at the psychological and physical levels as well.

4. Spiritual Power and Vulnerability

Why is a believer susceptible to abuse by a spiritual leader? This question raises the issue of vulnerability, which is a complex concept. The word 'vulnerability' has different meanings and 'is a notorious vague term' (Herring 2016, p. 5). Civil and Church documents use the expressions 'vulnerable people' or 'vulnerable adults' to indicate a particular group of people who, by reason of age, illness, or disability, are unable to take care of themselves. In fact, ecclesiastical documents speak about the protection of minors and 'vulnerable persons' (Francis 2019a). The Apostolic Letter *Vos estis lux mundi* provided the following definition: 'vulnerable person means: any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence' (Francis 2019b, Art. 1, §2 b). This definition, which corresponds to what is called 'special vulnerability' (UNESCO 2005), differs from 'radical vulnerability' in that indicates a common human condition (Montero 2022). If this difference is not taken into account, the expression 'vulnerable persons' could suggest that only a special group of people is susceptible to abuse, and all other adults are safe; however, spiritual abuse does not stem from any deficiency on the part of the victims. Anne Lannegrace, a member of the committee for sectarian deviations within the Catholic Church of the French Bishops' Conference, tackled this issue. She affirmed that it is usual to think that victims of abuse of spiritual power have more fragile personalities than others and that they are easy prey for abusers or predators; however, this is not always true. It has been found that eminent personalities who are not susceptible to accusations of weakness of character can be abused by perverse leaders (Lannegrace 2018). In addition, Oakley and Kinmond affirmed that their research does not support claims of a specific personality type of abused individuals (Oakley and Kinmond 2013). This means that even people who do not belong to the so-called 'vulnerable persons' category are vulnerable to spiritual abuse. It is necessary, then, to take into account the distinction between special and radical—or general—vulnerability.

From an anthropological point of view, radical vulnerability falls under the human condition. It is not a deficiency of a given group but a common characteristic of human beings. It comes from the Latin term *vulnus* (wound). Vulnerability is a possibility, not a fact (Montero 2022); it indicates the possibility of being wounded. Therefore, radical vulnerability indicates the ability of being exposed to others, whereas being exposed to others implies the possibility of being wounded. Vulnerability 'leaves humans open to being blessed and hurt, to good and evil' (Langberg 2020, p. 19). It makes people open to others and susceptible to love and to abuse. Being open to others always implies a risk. For this reason, vulnerability, as such, is not a deficiency. To be receptive and, therefore, vulnerable, is a necessary condition for genuine human life. Invulnerability and absolute autonomy are not authentic human ideals. Understood in this way, radical vulnerability makes possible the authentic development of human life in encounters with

others; however, it is important to nuance a sharp distinction between these kinds of vulnerability because radical vulnerability always manifests itself with concrete special vulnerabilities (Montero 2022).

In the Christian context, vulnerability is a condition for discipleship. One who is not open to and affected by the call of Jesus is not able to follow Him. The disciples must be open to be affected. In fact, Ignatius of Loyola praises those who are willing to be affected, 'los que más se querrán affectar' (Ignatius of Loyola 1985, n° 97). Once again, the ability to be affected, that is, vulnerability, is not an imperfection but a necessary condition of discipleship. Openness to others makes spiritual abuse possible; therefore, generous persons are more at risk (Lannegrace 2018).

Consequently, spiritual abuse can happen because of human openness to others, not due to some sort of deficiency on the part of the victims. This conclusion rejects the wrong tenet, which postulates that what makes abuse possible are some characteristics of the people who suffer it. This unjust tenet fosters victim blaming and, worse, self-blame. A survivor shared that it took her 15 years to recognize that the cause of the abuse she suffered 'was not my stupidity' (De Lassus 2020, p. 335). This perverse process has been called the inversion of guilt, that is, victims bear the responsibility that should have been the offenders' (De Lassus 2020, pp. 331–33).

5. Spiritual Power and Institutional Support in the Catholic Church

As stated above, spiritual abuse consists of misusing 'spiritual power'. This particular type of power differs, for example, from physical power, because it should be subjectively recognized to be legitimate. Borrowing Weber's terminology, spiritual authority has some features of long-established and charismatic rule; this type of authority relies on a recognized long-established order of the institution and the admitted merits of the leader (Weber 2019). Spiritual leaders only have authority over the people who recognize them; therefore, this authority has a relational nature; it relies on voluntary recognition and not on physical coercion.

Where does this recognition come from? The authority of sect leaders is not taken for granted. There are neither institutions nor traditions that support it. For this reason, they must display charismatic qualities to attract people and gain followers. Their authority then relies on their personal features. By contrast, in the Catholic Church, spiritual power does not stem only from personal charisma but also from the long-established order. In Catholic culture, the institutional aspect is crucial to the point that it guarantees the authority even of leaders who do not have charismatic qualities. For example, ordained ministers and appointed superiors have a recognized authority in the Church, regardless of their personal qualities. This institutional authority can certainly increase by virtue of the charismatic gifts of the leaders, but the institutional support is sufficient to back their authority. Catholic leadership always needs some kind of ecclesiastical support.

The critical issue is not whether the power holder is a member of the clergy or not, but whether he or she, lay or ordained, is backed by the Church as her representative. In fact, 'religious abuse may also occur when the perpetrator is not a clergy member' (Cashwell and Swindle 2018, p. 183; cf. De Lassus 2020). Thus, clericalism is a very important factor, but not the center of the problem: spiritual abuse revolves around the spiritual power supported by the Church, no matter who misuses it. Accordingly, proper or improper exercise of spiritual authority in Catholic culture is never an issue between two individuals; it always has an ecclesial dimension. Hence, spiritual abuse 'has to be placed in a complex system' (De Dinechin and Léger 2019, p. 163; Leimgruber 2022).

Furthermore, since the Christian faith is not individualistic, Catholic teaching calls on the believer to listen to the voice of God through ecclesiastical mediation. As part of the People of God, believers are called to live their faith and to hear the voice of God through the Church. Catholic teachings and the culture direct the faithful to trust ordained ministers, superiors, and in general, supported spiritual leaders. Unfortunately, Catholic

culture often tends to absolutize the ecclesiastical mediation and forget that it must interact with other mediations, especially that of the personal conscience (Fernández 2020).

What happens when this spiritual authority backed by the Church is misused? To what extent is the Church part of the spiritual abuse? Is it possible to claim that spiritual abuse in the Catholic setting is just an issue between two individuals? There are different answers to these questions. Regarding the wider crisis of sexual abuse, abuse of power and abuse of conscience, the bishops of France stated that they 'recognize the institutional responsibility of the Church for the violence suffered by so many victims' (Conférence des Évêques de France 2021). On the flip side, Chilean bishops stressed that the responsibility for the abuse belongs to the perpetrators (Conferencia Episcopal de Chile 2021); however, since spiritual abuse consists of the misuse of a spiritual authority, which, in the Catholic setting, is always backed by the Church, it is never an issue between two individuals, but always implies an ecclesiastical responsibility.

Beyond the theological and ecclesiological arguments developed above, the testimonies of victims and survivors are eloquent on this point. A survivor says that his abuser 'was sheltered and protected by Catholic doctrine' (Prochaska 2022, p. 67). People trust a spiritual leader because the Catholic Church backed him or her as someone trustworthy. The claims of survivors can be illustrated as follows: 'I trusted him because he was a representative of God, supported by the Church'; 'I believed that what she told me was the will of God because she was my legitimate superior'. The faithful are taught to trust the Church and her representatives. Phrases such as 'people who obey do not err' or 'the voice of the bishop is the voice of God' are repeated in the Catholic culture (Fernández 2021); therefore, victims should not be blamed for trusting ecclesial representatives. On the contrary, when spiritual abuse occurs, the Church should be held responsible for encouraging believers to trust in people who, eventually, did not deserve such authority grounded on ecclesiastical support.

6. Intentionality, Individuals and Systems

6.1. Abusive Individuals

The problem of intentionality has a significant implication in understanding the institutional dimension of spiritual abuse. As stated above, some authors affirmed that it occurs because abusers wish to benefit themselves. It is evident that using spiritual authority for personal benefit is abusive; however, is the abuser's selfish intention an essential characteristic of spiritual abuse? In other words, does the intentionality of the abuser belong to the essence of the offence? Nelson put the emphasis on the perpetrator's selfishness: 'The harm caused by spiritual abuse is the by-product of selfish "ministry" activity. Therefore a good definition of spiritual abuse should include the aspect of selfishness' (Nelson 2015). Perpetrators often misuse their spiritual power because they look for a benefit, use followers for their own sake, and exploit the victims to satisfy their needs. Selfishness is recurrently behind abuse. Accordingly, some authors attempted to outline the profile of abusive individuals. Narcissism, selfishness, clericalism, manipulative personality, egocentrism, and other characteristics are presented as key attributes (Poujol 2015). This is frequently the case, but is it always the case? Is the perpetrator's quest for personal gain always behind the abuse? Moreover, other definitions focus on the harm that spiritual abuse produces in the victims. The key question is then whether spiritual abuse should be defined by the perpetrator's actions or by the victim's harm. The vast majority of authors defined spiritual abuse by the damage that it brings to the victims. Accordingly, what defines spiritual abuse is the harm suffered by the victim and not the intention of the perpetrator. Moreover, 'it seems questionable that research supports the notion of intentional harm as a defining feature of abuse' (Oakley and Kinmond 2013). My contention is not that intentionality is irrelevant; it is most certainly relevant for assessing the imputability of this fault and for other reasons; however, from the victim's perspective, the crucial topic is not the good or bad will of the perpetrator but the damage caused by the misuse of spiritual authority.

6.2. Abusive Systems

This conclusion raises a further question: can spiritual abuse occur without the perpetrator's perverse intention? In other words, is it possible to harm a person by an unintentional misuse of spiritual authority? The answers to these questions have crucial implications for ecclesiology and canon law; however, to provide a complete answer to these issues, empirical and ethnographic research is needed, in addition to theological reflection. Unfortunately, there appear to be no such studies on this specific topic in the Catholic setting. Nevertheless, it is possible to draft a provisional answer based on the testimonies of victims and survivors, and on the theological reflection and preliminary results of an ongoing research (*Encuesta nacional de adversidad y abuso sexual en la niñez*, Centro CUIDA, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile 2022, forthcoming).

In the Catholic setting, spiritual abuse can occur even if the person who causes it is not looking to benefit. There are indeed abusive individuals, but there are also abusive systems in the Church. There are Catholic institutions, communities, statutes, and cultures that facilitate abuse (Chartier-Siben 2021b). Catholic culture tends to absolutize the spiritual authority of her representatives and her teachings. To identify the voice of the ecclesial representatives with that of God, or the regular teaching of the Church with that of God is abusive. For example, in a religious community that professes a narrow idea of obedience, even if the superior is not moved by selfishness, she can misuse her spiritual authority and harm the nuns severely. In this case, behind the spiritual abuse, there is no perverse individual but an abusive system. There are not only abusive individuals but also abusive structures, practices, institutions, and teachings. Again, a spiritual director who mechanically imposes as the will of God his rigid understanding of the moral teaching of the Church, even with good will, misuses his spiritual authority and can harm believers. When a Christian community identifies the conclusions of the general chapter, the writings of the founder or the decisions of the bishop with the very will of God, it can become an abusive system. When the distance between God and his mediations is lost, abusive systems can emerge. For instance, a rigid application of the objective moral law that does not pay attention to concrete situations and gives no room for discernment could harm the faithful deeply. Once again, the spiritual authority of these institutions is backed by Catholic culture. A victim of abuse stated: 'I joined that community because it was Catholic, recognized by the Church, with canonical statutes signed by bishops. When we made our vows, it was in the presence of the bishop' (De Dinechin and Léger 2019, pp. 171–72). People trust a community because the Catholic Church backed it as trustworthy. No matter the intentionality of the agents, the misuse of spiritual authority can engender grave damage to the faithful. In summary, spiritual abuse can be caused by both abusive individuals and abusive systems.

7. Conclusions

Spiritual authority, as a relational power, affects only those who recognize it as legitimate. Generally, this recognition depends on the charismatic qualities of the leaders and their institutional support. In sectarian settings, the authority of the leader is dependent only on his or her personal qualities. On the contrary, in the Catholic context, institutional backing alone is sufficient to give spiritual authority to leaders who are recognized as representatives of God and the Catholic Church; however, having charismatic qualities can reinforce their spiritual authority. Due to this ecclesiastical backing, the exercise of spiritual authority in the Church is never a private matter between two individuals; it always has an ecclesiastical dimension. In addition, since spiritual abuse is defined by the damage that is engendered in the victims, it can also be caused by abusive systems, even when there is no abusive individual. In this case, there is an ecclesiastical responsibility as far as the Church supports these systems. Thus, the misuse of spiritual authority in the Catholic setting always implies an institutional responsibility; therefore, the institutional aspect and the concept of the representative of God and the Church must be integrated into the definition of spiritual abuse in the Catholic setting. The following definition could

work for other Christian denominations if the idea that institutional cultures differ from community to community is taken into account. Thus, I offer a definition of spiritual abuse in the Catholic setting:

> Spiritual abuse in the Catholic context is the misuse of spiritual authority that controls the victim to the point that the abuser, taking the place of God, obstructs or nullifies the victim's spiritual freedom. This type of abuse is perpetrated by an individual or a system supported by the Church as trustworthy. Hence, it always has an ecclesial dimension. This kind of abuse can harm the person at the spiritual, psychological and physical levels.

In conclusion, victims are not guilty of what they have suffered. On the one hand, what makes spiritual abuse possible is not a fault of the victims but their openness to others. To trust and to be open to others implies vulnerability, which is a condition, not a deficiency of human beings. Therefore, victims are not guilty; they are abused not because they are defective but because they are humans. On the other hand, victims are not guilty because they trust persons and institutions supported by the Catholic Church. Victims of spiritual abuse are not to blame. The blame lies with the abusive individuals who have misused their authority for their own benefit and with the abusive structures that have harmed the believers. More empirical research is necessary to identify the structures, theological ideas, strategies, and mechanisms that foster spiritual abuse in order to prevent it; therefore, the Church has an institutional responsibility for spiritual abuse as far as she invites the faithful to trust people and institutions that, eventually, are not trustworthy. The Church, then, must guarantee that her representatives and structures—cultures, rules, statutes, teachings—do not foster abuse but care.

Funding: This research was funded by Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The Loss of the Self—Spiritual Abuse of Adults in the Context of the Catholic Church

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Abstract: Interest in spiritual abuse is a fairly recent phenomenon in research. Originally, it received attention only in the context of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the clergy in the Catholic Church before it was recognized as a specific form of abuse in its own right. In line with Paul Ricœur, I agree that a narrative best describes a person's identity. I, therefore, give space to the voices of three women who were spiritually abused as adults in France in the context of new religious communities that originated after the Second Vatican Council: Sophie Ducrey, Anne Mardon and Marie-Laure Janssens. The social constructionist method allows the uniqueness of each of their narratives to be recognized, while also accounting for shared experiences such as the dynamics of control, desocialization and intrusion into the private spheres of life. Spiritual abuse, which is at the hinge point between the moral and spiritual and the psychological realms, is perpetrated by a spiritual leader who has power over women. The abuse serves to fulfill the psychological or sexual needs of the leader. Abuse of the conscience, theology and spirituality are the spiritual means used, alongside the psychological ones, to cause the women to become dependent. In the process, their desire for God and the affective needs that some may have are abused. The consequences are many, but the loss of self, of which faith is the core, summarizes it well.

Keywords: Roman Catholic; spiritual abuse; sexual abuse; adults

Citation: Demasure, Karlijn. 2022. The Loss of the Self—Spiritual Abuse of Adults in the Context of the Catholic Church. *Religions* 13: 509. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060509

Academic Editors: Ute Leimgruber and Doris Reisinger

Received: 7 April 2022
Accepted: 1 June 2022
Published: 2 June 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

In this article, I intend to explore, from a practical theological point of view, the spiritual abuse some women suffered in new religious communities that originated in the context of the Catholic Church. I situate my practical theological approach within the hermeneutical paradigm that is further expanded by social constructionism and postfoundationalism (Demasure 2006; Demasure and Müller 2006). A narrative is constructed based on actions but also allows feelings and thoughts to be explored. The answer to the question "Who am I?" (Ricœur 1985, p. 355) is best responded to by telling stories, because stories, more than concepts, respect the individuality of a person. After all, concepts can be applied to many individuals, while a person's story is unique. According to Paul Ricœur, one cannot understand him or herself in a direct way but only through the "detour" of the life story; therefore, he does not use the concept of "I" but that of the "self" (Ricœur [1960] 1969). In a postfoundational approach, context is not only part of the interpretation but is central to it. Wentzel Van Huyssteen (Van Huyssteen 1997) is the founder of the postfoundational theology. Postfoundationalism is situated in the hermeneutical paradigm but expands it further (Demasure and Müller 2006). It acknowledges that reality is always interpreted but adds that contextuality plays a crucial role in this interpretation. The postfoundationalist approach invites us to firstly listen to the stories of people struggling in real-life situations. After these experiences are carefully listened to, they are then described within their specific and concrete context. Although the "local" is central in a postfoundational approach, at the same time, it points beyond the confines of the local (Müller 2009). The question can be raised as to what extent the elements that make up a person's specific story can be generalized. Abuse of women in the western world may be different from, e.g., abuse of

women in Africa. Nevertheless, some common elements can usually be identified and can, therefore, convey meaning in another culture. Social constructionism introduces the notion of power in practical theology. Every society creates master narratives that form the framework in which we live and interpret our own experiences. Master narratives are shared stories that express and guide thought, beliefs and behavior. These stories are not about individual, personal experiences but instead serve as broad, cultural templates for how to tell particular types of stories, both in content and in structure. Thus, the construction of one's own life story is influenced by the master narratives that circulate in society.

The interpretation of experiences is always influenced by tradition and what Ricœur calls "prefiguration". One always interprets, from previous knowledge, an initial understanding. Each exploration of the subject has the potential to lead to a better understanding and, thus, to a transformation. Stories normally use innovation and sedimentation. In other words, they are unique while using existing narrative frameworks that are available in the culture. Master stories are, therefore, important (Cf. Demasure and Müller 2006). In western culture, master stories circulate in which women who say they were abused as adults by members of the clergy are considered not to have been abused but to have seduced the priests. Another master narrative states that all relationships between adults are consensual. In such a context, disclosure is very difficult because the responsibility is put on the victim. Therefore, the creation of a counternarrative in which women's voices are heard is important.

Indeed, telling a story has the potential to lead to a transformation for the listener, as well as for the person who tells it (Ricœur 1983, 1985). A story is, first and foremost, about actions; therefore, transformation leads not only to a redescription of reality but also to a change in the field of actions (Demasure 2004, pp. 104–54; 2006, 2012; Demasure and Müller 2006).

With this contribution, I hope to participate in the creation of a counternarrative that is based on both reading the books in which three women in France tell their story and listening to their voices in interviews available on the internet. Counternarratives give voice to alternative ways to tell a story. They dispute dominant narratives that are powerful and recognized as "truth" by offering new perspectives. Often, dominant narratives exclude the voice of the marginalized or the oppressed, while a counternarrative wants to restore the dignity and agency of those formerly denied in the dominant narrative (Given 2008).

In 1989, Sophie Ducrey came across the Community of Saint John. The Community of Saint John brings together three religious congregations: the Brothers of Saint John (1975), the Apostolic Sisters of Saint John (1982) and the Contemplative Sisters of Saint John (1984), as well as oblates (lay-people who follow this spirituality). The community of Saint John was founded by the Dominican priest Marie-Dominique Philippe (1912–2006). When Sophie Ducrey met the community, she was 16 years old. Having strong spiritual aspirations, she confided in a priest who became her guide. In her book "*Étouffée. Récit d'un abus spirituel et sexuel. Témoignage*" (Ducrey 2019), she testifies to the psychological hold she fell into, as well as the spiritual and sexual abuse she suffered, from the time she was 18 years old by the priest Brother Lamorak (not his real name). It has to be noted that he denies these claims.

Marie-Laure Janssens was a religious sister of the Contemplative Sisters of Saint John. The community was founded in 1982, also by Marie-Dominique Philippe. Janssens entered the community when she was 23 years old and left after 11 years in 2010, a year after the Vatican intervened and tried to stop the abuses in her congregation. In her book "*Le silence de la vierge. Abus spirituels, dérives sectaires: une ancienne religieuse témoigne*" (Janssens and Corre 2017), she testifies to the spiritual abuse she experienced in this community.

Anne Mardon found the faith when she was 20 years old. She was baptized at l'Arche by Thomas Philippe (1905–1993), brother of Marie-Dominique Philippe. Pierre-Marie Delfieux founded the community of the Monastic Fraternities of Jerusalem in 1975, of which Mardon became first a postulant, and, later, she took the religious habit. The

community includes two separate religious institutes of monastic inspiration—one for men and one for women. She describes the spiritual and sexual abuse and the reaction of the hierarchy in two books: "*Quand l'Église détruit*" (Mardon 2019) and "*Silences dans l'Église: par action et par omission*" (Mardon 2020a).

2. Defining Spiritual Abuse

Interest in spiritual abuse is a recent phenomenon in research. Originally, it received some attention in the context of sexual abuse perpetrated by the clergy as one of the methods used in the grooming process (Applewhite 2014; Farrell and Taylor 2000; Joulain 2018; Spraitz and Bowen 2019).[1] Members of the clergy or religious communities try to convince the child to commit or submit to sexual actions by using spiritual justifications. While, within the Protestant context, spiritual abuse has already been addressed (Johnson and Van Vonderen [1991] 2005; Oakley and Kinmond 2013; Oakley and Humphreys 2019; Poujol 2015), spiritual abuse has only received more attention in the Catholic Church with the broadening of the range of recognized victims from just children to other vulnerable persons (Cf. Pope Francis 2019). Also, for adults, spiritual abuse, at first, was discussed in the context of sexual abuse before it became recognized as a specific form of abuse in its own right (de Dinechin and Léger 2019; de Lassus 2020).

As interest in spiritual abuse came in the wake of sexual abuse, definitions often link both forms of abuse. For example, in the following quote from de Dinechin and Léger: "spiritual abuse does not always lead to sexual abuse, (. . .) but it is the antechamber to it" (de Dinechin and Léger 2019, p. 19)[2]. Anne Mardon speaks in the same vein:

> "There is the temptation to possess the soul of the other, and when one is master of the soul, there is a gradual shift towards the body. This taking of total possession is more pleasurable than sexual abuse alone. If the priest is not very vigilant, not very balanced, not aware that this phenomenon is almost inevitable, the relationship deviates". (Mardon 2020b, p. 8)

Thus, there may be a shift in the relationship from spiritual to sexual abuse, sometimes without premeditation. Celine Hoyeau, a journalist who investigated the abuses in the new communities in France, also reflects this position: "(. . .) these sexual abuses were only extensions, so to speak, of a more profound spiritual hold and undoubtedly as much deleterious, because it touched the soul" (Hoyeau 2021, p. 124). She does not, however, express an opinion as to whether premeditation occurred.

Marie-Laure Janssens, who was not sexually abused, does not link spiritual abuse and sexual abuse. She defines spiritual abuse as: "a religious variant of emotional and psychological domination. A hijacking of the most intimate dimension of the human being: his relationship to the transcendence" (Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 15). Poujol also gives a definition of spiritual abuse that is not necessarily linked to sexual abuse. He writes: "[. . .] spiritual abuse is an abuse of authority that is further aggravated using divine authority to dominate one or several persons" (Poujol 2015, p. 12). This domination may, then, have the aim of sexual abuse, as well as potentially serving to feed the narcissistic core of the person abusing. Thus, the abuse serves the needs of the abuser, which can be psychological or sexual.

Poujol's definition includes two elements; it is about dominating, and it is performed while invoking divine authority. Divine authority may have its origin in the use of biblical texts or theological arguments to justify the abuse, but the divine authority can also be found in the position of the abuser. Mark Stibbe writes that John Smyth (the leader of the group) defined his own position as follows: "God is our father in heaven, but not on earth, and therefore he, Smyth, had to be that father to us" (Stibbe 2019, p. xvii). That is, setting oneself up as God, assuming a divine position.

Referring to a previous publication, Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys write that "Spiritual abuse is coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context [. . .]" (Oakley and Humphreys 2019, p. 16). This definition puts the emphasis on the

context as the core element of the abuse. The authors avoid including the term "leader", although, in the first attempts to define spiritual abuse, the "leader" was identified as the abuser. However, their experience showed that leaders themselves can also be victims of spiritual abuse, which is why Oakley and Humphrey avoid the term and replace it with "spiritual context". Spiritual abuse, according to their definition, can, therefore, take place in an individual, spiritual accompaniment, as well as in a spiritual, sectarian group or a religious community. The abuse can be committed by the leader of the group, the superior, but also by a spiritual director, a novice master or a mentor. However, the person who abuses must, in some way, have a position of power over the victim, since abuse necessitates power.

For the purpose of this article, I work with the following definition: spiritual abuse is the manipulation, domination and coercion by one person of one or several persons within the context of the Catholic Church for the purpose of fulfilling the psychological or sexual needs of the abuser.

Spiritual and psychological abuse are closely related. I do not want to go so far as to view spiritual abuse as a form of psychological abuse, as Oakley and Humphreys (Cf. Oakley and Humphreys 2019, p. 31) and Janssens (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 15) do, but spiritual abuse has proven difficult to separate from psychological abuse. Indeed, if behavior is coercive, controlling and dominating, then we are talking about psychological abuse. However, the spiritual element whereby the perpetrator's almost divine position or biblical and theological texts are used to demand submission is, for many, the most traumatizing aspect of the abuse. Moreover, the consequences of the abuse are not only psychological but also affect the spirituality and faith of people. I agree with how Celine Hoyeau puts it: spiritual abuse is situated "at the hinge between the moral and spiritual field and the psychological field" (Hoyeau 2021, p. 153). Hoyeau locates the abuse of conscience not as part of the spiritual abuse but as an element that is positioned on the same level as the spiritual field. In this article, I consider the abuse of conscience as a form of spiritual abuse because I define spiritual abuse as a coercion, which includes the abuse of conscience, and because of the religious context in which it appears.

Poujol points out that spiritual abuse can be perpetrated by a single person—for example, in spiritual accompaniment—or it can be systemic. In the latter case, this concerns religious communities that have deviated from the greater tradition to which they belong or communities that often arise around a charismatic leader. There are similarities between spiritual abuse in individual accompaniment and abuse in communities, but there are also differences. In this contribution, I focus my analysis on abuses in religious communities that originated after the Second Vatican Council as those were the communities of the women to which I was listening.

All forms of spiritual abuse lead to the loss of the self. Mardon writes that they abdicated all reason, that they were asked to get rid of their own will because it was the cause of all vices and that this spirituality "was gradually taking away all common sense, all reference points, all instinct of conservation" (Mardon 2019, p. 47). Sophie Ducrey puts it as follows: "I am worthless" (Ducrey 2019, p. 58). Anne Mardon says: "I was no longer a person" (Mardon 2020b, p. 4). Marie-Laure Janssens says that they were "dispossessed of themselves" and that she "has been erased in the service of the community" (Janssens 2019).

How can it come to this? Two topics need to be explored: the dynamics of abuse and the position of the leader.

3. Dynamics of Spiritual Abuse

I will discuss several dynamics: dynamics of control, desocialization, the intrusion into all facets of personal life and the prohibition to criticize the one in charge.

3.1. The Dynamics of Control

Sophie Ducrey and Marie-Laure Janssens entered the religious community because they had a longing for God (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017; Hoyeau 2019). Ducrey also

mentions that she had affective needs, as did Anne Mardon. Anne Mardon came from an atheist family and had no knowledge at all of Catholicism. Captivated by the liturgy in the church of Saint Gervais (Paris), she was approached by Pierre-Marie Delfieux who said he perceived her religious longings. Anne Mardon was marked by a difficult childhood, with parents who did not get along. Her father died when she was 12 years old. She stayed home from school for four years and lived in a fusional relationship with her mother. She was looking for a father figure. Those flaws were exploited by Pierre-Marie Delfieux (Cf. Mardon 2021). Sophie Ducrey tells of the maltreatment she suffered at home when she was a child and how she also was looking for another "Father". She became, as she testifies herself, the ideal prey. She was looking for the truth, a meaningful life, for God, and, at first, she found the spiritual food she was looking for. She thought she was in heaven (Cf. Ducrey 2021). She fell in love with the priest, and he took up all aspects of her life. Marie-Laure Janssens, on the other hand, was raised in a Catholic family. She does not talk about affective needs as Sophie Ducrey and Anne Mardon do, but she did have strong religious longings that originated in her Catholic education. She wanted a life in which she could encounter God. When planning to study theology at the "Institut Catholique" in Paris, she was advised by Brother Régis Marie to go to St Jodard (France), the Centre for Formation of the Community of Saint John.

In the first phase, the women feel very welcome and supported, and those positive experiences make it very difficult to recognize the harmful behavior that follows (Cf. Oakley and Humphreys 2019). Slowly, a web is woven through which the person becomes more and more dependent on the spiritual leader. What follows is a game of attraction and repulsion, in which the victim is humiliated and made to feel guilty only to be approached positively again afterwards. Although there were some difficulties from the very beginning, Mardon experienced the first few years as a honeymoon. She and Pierre-Marie talked a lot, traveled together and went for walks in the countryside (Cf. Mardon 2019, p. 36). Later, "Pierre-Marie, for his part, did not slacken his vigilance, passing from blackmail to caresses, from anger and threats to indifference" (Mardon 2020b, p. 3). Sophie Ducrey explains the mechanism of attraction and rejection quite well:

> "To that end, [to empty the inner freedom of the person] he uses, in particular, the game of the alternation between proximity and distance, warm and then cold feelings, compliments followed by making the person feeling guilty and denigration. All this to the point of driving the victim crazy, which he will blame on her flaws". (Ducrey 2019, pp. 107–8)

Ducrey is of the opinion that spirituality was used to mask the psychological manipulation. It is important to note that Mardon points out that being under the power of someone, being manipulated, does not necessarily mean that the victim loses her critical sense. However, she allows it because she does not want to lose the person who means everything to her and takes up all parts of her life (Cf. Mardon 2021). She only felt free of his invasive power when Pierre-Marie Delfieux died and, only then, could she disclose the abuse.

3.2. Desocialization

Members of abusive communities are cut off from the outside world. They form a family as God intended and, therefore, consider themselves an elite group. The world outside must be avoided and fought against because it is evil. Information from the outside is filtered by those who pull the strings. Parts of reality remain hidden, and the group lives in a parallel world that does not tolerate outsiders that have a critical perspective of it. Janssens writes that they had no radio, no newspapers and that it was only through some homilies that they heard some news from the outside world[3] (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 117). Communication at the horizontal level, between members of the group, is not permitted (Cf. de Lassus 2020, pp. 101–6) or is at least strictly regulated. As Marie-Laure Janssens writes: questions and doubts should not be expressed with other novices and personal difficulties or feelings should not be shared with lay-people who were close to the

community. This vertical structure led to a vast solitude, she says. They lived next to one another without even knowing each other and without being able to support one another (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017, pp. 56–57).

This isolation places members of the community completely under the control of the one who abuses them. Contact with family and friends is controlled or limited. The community in which one lives is defined as the real family, which is worth more than the original family. Anne Mardon writes that Pierre-Marie Delfieux did not forbid contact with her family. On the contrary, he encouraged it, while at the same time saying that her old family was obsolete (Cf. Mardon 2019, p. 96). She felt alienated from her family of origin and contacts remained superficial. She never opened up about what she experienced, and, even when they saw that she had no interest anymore in things that she enjoyed before, they did not say a word (Cf. Mardon 2020a, p. 51). Marie-Laure Janssens describes visits to her family as theater. The visit had to be perfect, so she faked that everything was fine. By being cut off from external relations, as well as relations within the religious community, Janssens points out that everything became focused on Sister Marthe, novice mistress. To fulfil her need to talk to someone, to have someone she could trust, someone with whom she could have a privileged relation, she became the assistant of Sister Marthe, and the communion with God transformed in a fusion with Sister Marthe (Cf. Janssens 2019).

3.3. The Spiritual Intrusion in All Aspects of Life

Every aspect of life is spiritualized, as Marie-Laure Janssens testifies in an interview with Yves Casgrain:

> "Everything is spiritualized in these communities. I think this is one aspect of spiritual abuse. Everything is judged and looked at by a spiritual standard. The way you walk down the halls, the way you eat, the smile you have or don't have on your face, the mail you send to your family, your reading, your studies, etc. Everything, everything, everything is looked at from a spiritual perspective". (Janssens 2021, p. 76)

Moreover, total transparency is asked in the name of obedience. Of course, this gives the one in charge considerable power. Janssens had to open up her heart about her mistakes, doubts, evil thoughts, etc., to someone she did not choose. Mardon reveals that the "petites laures"[4] as they were called, and of which she was part of, had to write down their activities, their feelings and their questions by the hour and report everything weekly.

3.4. Prohibition to Criticize and Obedience

Sophie Ducrey states: "in the community of Saint John, we do not criticize. We just follow, blindly, the teachings of Father, the founder" (Ducrey 2019, p. 11s). Uniformity is mandatory, and different points of view are not accepted, because the power of the superior is considered to be of divine origin.

While the leader's view is considered to be of divine origin, critical comments from members are identified as coming from the devil, the great Divider. Those who hold a different opinion are isolated and possibly ostracized from the community. Furthermore, because of confusion in roles, it is difficult to criticize. Pierre-Marie Delfieux was, at the same time, the founder, the prior, the novice master, the confessor and the spiritual guide (Mardon 2020c). Even during an apostolic visitation, members of the group were pressured not to speak—Delfieux was constantly walking up and down the corridor so that the members did not feel free to speak out.

4. The Spiritual Leader

Spiritual leaders who commit abuse can be male, as in the case of Anne Mardon and Sophie Ducrey, but they can also be female, as in the case of Marie-Laure Janssens. The superior of the community of the Contemplative Sisters of Saint John to which Marie-Laure Janssens belonged was Sister Alix (Parmentier). She was, however, not the person in power. Marie-Laure names Sister Marthe as the one who pulled the strings and who served as a

combination of many roles; she was the general assistant to Sister Alix, the novice mistress for the mother house (Saint-Jodard in France), the referent for the novitiates abroad and, for the young sisters, she was the only teacher (at least in France), the spiritual mother of most sisters and the person in charge for the constructions of the congregation. "She was for us a mother, a superior, a confidante, a formator, a teacher, a model, a living model, and the person close to Father [Marie-Dominique]" (Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 73s), the only person to really confide in. She knew all secrets and sometimes betrayed them (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 58).

For Anne Mardon, the leader was Pierre-Marie Delfieux (1934–2013), who was the founder of the Monastic Fraternities of Jerusalem. She describes him as being obsessed with his foundation, easily enraged and someone who put people under pressure. In the newspaper *Lacroix*, she says: "Very quickly, Pierre-Marie became everything for me, my father and my mother, I could not do without him" (Hoyeau 2019). For Sophie Ducrey, it was Brother Lamorak who had a hold on her. He had a lot of influence, which made it difficult to denounce him.

Leaders of new communities are often charismatic figures. Marie-Laure Janssens speaks about the exceptional charisma of Sister Marthe. Charismatic figures have the ability to persuade people to join the community or to remain in it. The first time Sister Marthe saw Marie-Laure Janssens, she said: "Your place is with the sisters, when are you going to join the congregation?" (Janssens 2019). Most often, charismatic leaders make people dependent through seduction but, sometimes, as in the case of Anne Mardon, by coercion, after she had become emotionally and spiritually dependent on Delfieux. For some leaders, their spiritual authority resides in their priesthood. Sophie Ducrey states that Christ lives in priests and that, by consequence, they reach the divine perfection of God. Therefore, they are called "father", as God himself is called "Father" (Ducrey 2019, p. 20). Their spiritual aura is above mortals, which the group recognizes (Cf. Hoyeau 2021, p. 61). In other cases, it is not the ordination but the charismatic aura that gives the leader power. They claim that their insights and interpretation of the Bible stem directly from God. To obey them is to obey God (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 25s; Mardon 2019, p. 32). However, for Anne Mardon, obedience was a problem from the start. Officially, she says, it was about the glory of God, but unofficially it was about obedience to the organization, its founder and the superior. She did not want to disown herself (Cf. Mardon 2019, p. 32). She rebelled during the entire period that she was a part of the religious community, while, at the same time, doing what Pierre-Marie Delfieux asked of her. He was convinced that her opposition was diabolical and wanted to bring her back into line with neuroleptics, the opening of the chakras and exorcism and then sent her to a hermitage (Cf. Mardon 2020a, p. 83). Although she realized that he was always focused on himself and his foundation, that he considered himself chosen and sent by God and that people were just pawns to him, she felt that she needed him—and that is what made her dependent on him.

Hoyeau shares the psychological analysis by Gerard Ribers of such leaders. Ribers distinguishes between those leaders who are perverts and those who suffer from narcissism. The first group does not recognize laws except those they have made themselves. They justify those laws that ensure their omnipotence with arguments such as: "others cannot understand that. We should not throw pearls before swine". Or they invoke divine law. They enjoy controlling and "owning" their disciples and, eventually, destroying them. Sophie Ducrey's therapist states in a similar vein: "The great majority of abusers deny the facts, in order to be able to continue in their perversity and thus not be deprived of their power and pleasure, which are the only things that count for them" (Ducrey 2019, p. 98). It is the suffering of the person that precedes their enjoyment. Anne Mardon writes that the (female) superior made it clear to her that "to see me annihilated will give her a certain satisfaction" (Mardon 2019, p. 33).

Those Ribers calls narcissistic—Poujol terms egocentric (Cf. Poujol 2015, p. 16)—have a need they seek to fulfil. They suffer from an affective or sexual deficit that they seek to satisfy but unfortunately cannot (Cf. Poujol 2015, p. 17). Their narcissism is strengthened

by living in a community that glorifies the leader, which prevents him or her from facing reality (Cf. Hoyeau 2021, p. 159s). The alterity of the followers is not recognized by the leader. Followers are only perceived as an extension of his or her narcissism: as pawns in a game.

Each of the three women experienced a privileged relationship with a leader. Anne Mardon agreed to join the religious community because of this relationship. He spoke to her in the following terms: "my darling little girl I will never, ever leave you" (Mardon 2019, p. 42). She addressed him with "daddy dearest". She felt unique even when she figured out that she was not the only one to have a privileged relationship (Cf. Mardon 2019, p. 84). That was not the case for Sophie Ducrey. She perceived that several young girls gravitated toward Brother Lamorak and that a rivalry developed between them. The ones who obeyed him most, and, thus, obeyed God, were the preferred ones (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 25). Later, she realized that she was only an object to him, replaceable with anyone else (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 55).

The community that responds to such a leader is portrayed as an elite group. The Community of Saint John was established by God to prepare for the approaching end times, and Ducrey was happy to belong to the privileged few (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 33; Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 7). Janssens protests at the contempt of some friars for diocesan priests and religious of other congregations (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 38). The group has blind trust in their leader, or at least obedience, which results in a cult of the leader who becomes the ultimate reference in both action and thinking.

5. The Abuse of Theology, Spirituality, and Conscience

In the case of the three women, the theology of Marie-Dominique and Thomas Philippe, both Dominican priests, played a role in enabling spiritual and sexual abuse. Although, in 1956, the Vatican, following a canonical investigation, forbade Thomas Philippe to exercise any priestly ministry, which deprived him of his capacity to carry out any public or private ministry—celebration of the sacraments, spiritual direction, preaching, etc.—he nevertheless continued his activities more or less in a clandestine way (L'Arche International 2020). The mystico-erotical theology that the Philippe brothers developed promised a religious experience through sexual activities with them or their followers. Their spirituality, or at least the interpretation thereof, focused on "amour d'amitié" (friendship love) (Ducrey 2019, pp. 27–32), which asserts the physical–erotic overlap as part of spiritual accompaniment and divine pedagogy. Those experiences should, however, be kept quiet because outsiders would not understand this "special grace" (Hoyeau 2015). Brother Lamorak points out that it is not the corporal, but the spiritual virginity that is important (Ducrey 2019, p. 28). Mary at the cross was offered by Jesus to John. Therefore, women are made to be given, to sacrifice themselves. This is, after all, the real holiness for women (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 31).

Sophie Ducrey also elaborates on the spiritual arguments that are used to enable sexual abuse: "Be like Mary who said yes to everything, even before understanding" (Ducrey 2019, p. 28). Brother Lamorak encouraged her to give up her critical mind. In addition, how people live inside the community should had to be kept a secret because outsiders would not understand it. "To understand, one must enter into the spirit of St. John and the pearls must not be cast before the swine" (Ducrey 2019, p. 30). However, in her interview, she also points to the beautiful elements they were taught. She appreciated many of Philippe's writings—they answered her needs and her quest for meaning and truth—but that is exactly how one becomes trapped. The fundamental problem for her was that the beautiful and true words and the abusive actions did not match. Those words were merely used as a seduction strategy (Cf. Ducrey 2021). Marie-Laure Janssens took a class with Marie-Dominique Philippe who taught them "philosophical realism": Aristotle for philosophy, Thomas Aquinas for theology and Saint John for mystical wisdom. The Bible had to be read intuitively and with love. This intuitive reading allowed for the manipulation of the gospel of John. The relation between Jesus and his disciple John was interpreted in a quasi-physical way. Clearly influenced by those ideas, Pierre-Marie Delfieux saw his

relationship with Anne Mardon as a mystical union and their relationship as the image between the bridegroom and the Church, identifying himself as Christ and Anne Mardon as the Church (Cf. Mardon 2019, p. 38).

Spiritual abuse can also occur when a victim wants to reveal their sexual abuse. In the case of Sophie Ducrey, it was pointed out by a fellow Brother that, if there was no rape, it was a shared "weakness". Thus, she should ask for forgiveness for her part in the abuse and stop slandering the reputation of Brother Lamorak who was widely respected. By slandering the Brother, Ducrey was told, she was besmirching the whole community, as well as the Church (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 79).

Both Mardon and Janssens experienced abuse of conscience: officially joining the community or taking vows under pressure. Janssens wrote a startling testimony about this. In a letter to her parents, she wrote: "The choice to spend my life in this community was no longer mine. I put it in the hands of my superiors, who would know perfectly well how to decipher the signs that I was not receiving" (Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 52). The will of God was expressed through her superiors. She considered them to be the only ones who had the grace to discern (Cf. Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 85). Mardon reports the words of Delfieux when she hesitated and opposed wearing the liturgical cloak and, later, the monastic habit: "if God is, he is everything, and that in this case, we must give everything" (Mardon 2019, p. 41). Pierre-Marie Delfieux said her intuition betrayed her and that he knew better what her deepest desire was, even when she told him clearly that she did not want to vow chastity, poverty and obedience (Cf. Mardon 2019, p. 47).

During an interview with Anne Mardon by the independent commission that investigates abuses in the Catholic Church (CIASE), CIASE's president Marc Sauvé summarized: "It seems clear that there was a hold on you, an abuse of consciousness and power. The taking of the habit that you relate in your book was of great violence. All this in the context of an emotional relationship" (Mardon 2020b, p. 13).

6. The Loss of the Self

The narratives of the women show that spiritual abuse leads to loss of the self. That is probably the worst thing that can happen. Sophie Ducrey says: "I have to feed my passion [for people and for life] not to become ashes that scatter in the wind" (Ducrey 2019, p. 11); "We don't talk about ourselves, we forget ourselves" (Ducrey 2019, p. 12); "I am the shadow of myself" (Ducrey 2019, p. 53); "I am worthless" (Ducrey 2019, p. 58); "I am only rottenness" (Ducrey 2019, p. 99). During the sexual abuse, she dissociated, which she describes as death (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 109). She was an object in the hands of the priest—she did not exist as a unique person. He could have had sex with anyone.

The sexual abuse left Ducrey with a feeling of being dirty, and, although Janssens does not consider her relationship with Sister Marthe to have been sexually abusive, she said that her caresses and kisses made her feel very ambiguous about her sexual identity. The sexual relationship between Anne Mardon and Pierre-Marie Delfieux is more difficult to describe due to her history, which had made her very vulnerable—she had had a sexual relationship with a Jesuit that led to a pregnancy and abortion. As for Delfieux, she did not see him as a sexual predator, limiting himself to kisses and caresses. He was afraid of sexuality and, as long as nothing happened at the genital level, in his opinion, there were no gestures that violated chastity. However, this physical relationship contributed to her dependence on him, kept her chained carnally, and she confirmed that she was troubled by this, not knowing where she was, who she was and what her place was (Cf. Mardon 2020a, p. 123). Mardon says that she no longer knew who she was, that she was absent from herself, that she had to live a life that was not her own. She had to reconstruct her identity, although she prefers to use the phrasing "construct her identity". This took her 20 years because she had to face all the time she lived in Jerusalem and accept this as the basis on which to construct her identity.

During her stay in the Philippines, Marie-Laure Janssens experienced this time as a new freedom until Sister Marthe comes to visit. "My soul (. . .) fell back into her trap, like

a butterfly irresistibly attracted by the light that will burn its wings" (Janssens and Corre 2017, p. 134). She summarizes her experience of abuse as follows: "I was dispossessed of my own judgment, of my discernment and of my personality" (Cf. Janssens 2019).

Faith is the most profound part of our identity, and the abuse also affects faith, touching what is most intimate. Janssens did not lose her faith; however, she is no longer a part of the Catholic Church.

Sophie Ducrey convinces herself to go to Mass but can no longer pray, and this makes her anxious. Her abuser celebrated Mass immediately after the abuse. He assured her that every time one attends Mass or celebrates it, one is forgiven. For her, this is both an abuse of the sacrament and an abuse of God (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 146s). She wonders how one can celebrate the sacrament of unity after he himself created division in the victim who, to escape the horrible reality of abuse, dissociates by leaving her body.

In her book "*Silences dans l'Église*", Anne Mardon writes that she completely abandoned religious practice without giving up the search for God (Cf. Mardon 2020a, p. 112s). In her interview with Pascal Hubert, however, she testifies that she can identify the moment she lost her faith. She compares it with lights going out. First, they dim and then it is dark, and she knew: "I have no faith anymore" (Cf. Mardon 2021). The pressure to take vows and the ambiguous relationship with Pierre-Marie Delfieux led to Anne Mardon being sent to consult with a psychiatrist. He had been chosen by Delfieux and took a dim view of medical confidentiality. Mardon wanted to die, the final loss of the self. For some victims, suicide is the only way out and, although both Sophie Ducrey and Anne Mardon struggled with the thought of taking their own life, they finally found the strength to go on living.

There were also physical consequences: Sophie Ducrey tells of her back pain and her chronic fatigue. These were interpreted by Brother Lamorak as attacks from the devil. She became anorexic (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 30). In her married life, she experienced sexual blockages and panic attacks. She felt any sexual gesture as dangerous and any pleasure a possible path to death (Cf. Ducrey 2019, p. 56). Even after a long journey of counseling and of seeking justice, she writes: "I do not even know if my husband will ever be able to touch me again. The disgust is so intimate. Even contact with my children has become problematic" (Ducrey 2019, p. 184).

Anne Mardon reports depression and feeling like a zombie. When she finally had to leave the community, she did not know how to eat anymore or sleep. She was haunted by anxieties, taking too many medications which caused hallucinations. She summarizes by saying that she did not know how to live anymore (Cf. Mardon 2021).

7. Conclusions

Although the women's stories contain unique elements, such as whether spiritual and sexual abuse were combined or if they were abused by a man or a woman, there are some common threads that run through all three stories. All three reveal how their identities came under such pressure, which can be summarized as the loss of the self at both the individual and the social level.

At the individual level, the pressure to integrate into the community and conform to its rules was experienced as an invasion of conscience. The identity had to be molded, and individuality had to disappear. Obedience was interpreted as submitting to the norms of the leader and community. The strategy to make this happen was to make the women dependent on the leader by seduction, affection and threats. Even when they gained insight into the process, leaving was difficult because of the losses they might suffer. Moreover, they might no longer know how to live outside the community because their social identity had become virtually nonexistent. Previous relationships with friends and family were either forbidden or severely limited. Horizontal relationships within the community were frowned upon or outright forbidden. Relationships were limited to the leader. Even the sacrament of confession was regulated—it was indicated to whom one could go for confession or one could eventually confess only to the leader.

Paul Ricœur's insights indicate that, by telling their stories, a transformation has taken place. First, the stories of Sophie Ducrey, Anne Mardon and Marie-Laure Janssens demonstrate how they managed to integrate this experience into their life stories after having been silenced. They talk about the loss of the self, while, at the same time, creating a new self. By giving voice to their experience of abuse, they construct a new narrative identity. Furthermore, a transformation also takes place in the reader. As Ricœur points out, one addresses a text with an initial understanding. This prefiguration is formed by master narratives, conversations and reading texts on the subject. The prefiguration determines the categories with which one approaches the text. However, exploring new readings and listening to formerly silenced voices can open up new categories. The initial understanding is different for every person. Reading and exploring the texts of Ducrey, Mardon and Janssens can lead to a deeper understanding of the experience of spiritual abuse and its consequences. It can also lead to changes in the master narratives about the abuse of adult women in the context of the Catholic Church.

The current master narrative of the abuse of adult women within the Catholic Church is constructed by the perpetrators and/or by the institutions that protect the perpetrator. This discourse puts the responsibility on the victim by claiming that decisions were made in total freedom, ignoring the asymmetry in power, and accusing women of seduction. This research indicates some important elements that should be taken into account in the creation of the counternarrative. The women did not seduce their leaders; on the contrary, they were seduced by the charisma of the leader. Ducrey, Mardon and Janssens were victims of the abusers—not consenting partners. The psychological and spiritual dynamics made them dependent on the leader who possessed all the power. The asymmetrical aspect of the relationship invalidates any so-called consent. Furthermore, the master narrative on sexual abuse that states that only sexual abuse—and, more specifically, penetration—harms is put into question. The experiences of Sophie Ducrey, Anne Mardon and Marie-Laure Janssens bring to light their feelings of being desecrated, deceived, manipulated, seduced and destroyed, despite no sexual abuse or penetration taking place. Spiritual and psychological abuse can be as damaging as sexual abuse.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 The text of M. Applewhite is used in the e-learning program of the Centre for Child Protection at the Gregorian University, Rome. The education program on Child Protection has been distributed worldwide since 2018. The topic of cognitive distortions, including religious and spiritual distortions, is addressed in the sixth unit: Keeping Children Safe. Understanding Perpetrators.

2 All originally French citations have been translated by the author.

3 She also discloses that when elections were announced, a priest told them how to vote, which is another abuse of conscience.

4 Pierre-Marie created "les laures". The word is borrowed from Eastern traditions and indicates a group of sisters living in solitude in rooms around the church.

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ISBN 978-3-0365-6248-3