

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# “I Confided in My Mother and She Called the Archdiocese”: Parents and Clergy Sex Abuse

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## Abstract

Scholars have acknowledged that there is a systemic aspect to Catholic clerical sex abuse that acts as a type of grammar structuring behaviors and responses. Feminist critics in particular stress the patriarchal nature of the abuse that connects bishops, priests, and boys together. This essay argues that in addition to public systems dominated by men, there are also private structures that facilitate abuse. Using the extensive primary documentation assembled by BishopAccountability.org, I focus on the space of the home and the unique orientations of mothers and fathers to better understand the dynamics of clerical sex abuse in the American Catholic church. The essay begins with the abuse of a Milwaukee priest who tormented his parishioners from 1945 until his forced “retirement” in 1970. Drawing on themes found in this case, I examine other abuse narratives—focusing on how the Catholic understanding of *alter Christus* and mid-twentieth-century gender roles made the “good Catholic home” a particularly vulnerable place for abuse. Since public and private systems overlap, it is essential that the domestic aspects of clergy sex abuse also receive a full analysis.

**Keywords:** clergy; sex abuse; mothers; fathers; home; priests

Scholars (and even the media) agree that there is a systemic nature to clergy sex abuse. The Catholic sex abuse crisis is not simply the result of a “few bad apples” motivated by individual pathologies. Rather, there is an institutional culture that enables abuse and permits its continuance. The systemic nature of clergy sex abuse acts as a type of grammar that structures behaviors and responses. For conservative Catholics, the configuration is one of the chaos and moral relativism surrounding the Second Vatican Council. They credit the permissive culture of the 1960s as leading to the acceptance of homosexuality (and other forms of sexual nonconformity) in clerical communities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>An early appraisal is the section “Traditionalists” in Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 101–104. For a more recent summary, see “As Catholic Sex Abuse Crisis Deepens Conservative Circles Blame Gay Priests,” narrated by Tom Gjelten, *NPR*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/19/647919741/sex-abuse-scandal-deepens-divide-over-gay-priests> and Nicole Winfield, “Retired Pope Benedict Wades Into Clergy Sex Abuse Debates,” *AP News* April 11, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/c98a296cd9be4da4aabbdd626403d7a4>. Many

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Progressive Catholics point to an authoritarian patriarchal system where celibacy, homophobia, and clericalism combined to harden the hearts of church authorities.<sup>2</sup> Such a structure allows the suffering of victims to go unheard while simultaneously protecting the brotherhood of priests. While postulating the existence of a culpable culture does not absolve individuals, infrastructures do help explain behavior. Critics—traditionalists and progressives—argue that clergy sex abuse cannot be solved without fundamental change to wider systems.

Conclusions about the systemic nature of clergy sex abuse circle around a trinity of males: corrupt bishops, predator priests, and innocent boys. The triangle may be squared with the introduction of a fourth side: a legal system dominated by male lawyers, judges, and police.<sup>3</sup> This geometry also structures the “toxic masculinity” of other exploitative, public systems: Big Government, Big Military, Big Business. All these systems thrive on the same patriarchal fuel: rigid hierarchies, competition for scarce material benefits, authoritarianism, domination, secrecy, and sexism.<sup>4</sup> Even conservative writers, who are unpersuaded by feminist critics of patriarchy, structure their narratives around public institutions dominated by men.

While the patriarchal nature of systemic clergy sex abuse is undeniable, my intention in this article is to shift our attention to other types of systems, other types of fuels. In addition to the public world dominated by bishops, priests, and lawyers, there is another influential infrastructure that has enabled, and may continue to enable, clergy sex abuse. This is a private system, made up of mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. Centered on the home, it is defined by Catholic domestic ideology. This system, dominated by women and dependent on mid-twentieth-century gender roles, has not been explored by scholars or the media. However, the availability of thousands of pages of documentation of clergy sex abuse provides a rare glimpse into the family life of a subset of American Catholics.

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conservative reflections on clerical sex abuse are self-published; one of the most extensive is Leon J. Podles, *Sacrilege: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Baltimore, MD: Crossland Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup>For a feminist criticism of power asymmetry, see Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Philip Jenkins in *Pedophiles and Priests* also has a chapter on feminist responses, “Sins of the Fathers’: The Feminist Response,” 113–124. In addition, Jenkins’ section on “Clergy Abuse as a Liberal Issue” (105–111) refers to the groundbreaking work of Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not Into Temptation* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) and Elinor Burkett and Frank Bruni, *A Gospel of Shame: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church* (New York: Viking, 1993). Bruni argues that clergy sexual abuse is a “manifestations of a structural crisis” (110).

<sup>3</sup>Richard Sipe in *Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995) lays out the “systemic nature” of the sex abuse crisis: celibacy, blame, belonging to a superior (and purer) group, power and separate rules for the pure group, subjugation, appealing to nature and “God’s will” (161–180).

<sup>4</sup>Patriarchy and speculations about its “fuel” entered American scholarship with the feminist movement of the late 60s and 70s. A good survey of this early period is Harris Mirkin, “The Passive Female the Theory of Patriarchy,” *American Studies* 25 (Fall 1984): 39–57. During the 1980s, the term was attacked for being incapable of dealing with difference in place, era, or race, although Sylvia Walby in her 1989 article “Theorising Patriarchy,” *Sociology* 23 (1989): 213–234 disputed these claims, arguing in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) that “patriarchy” was an indispensable term for analyzing gender inequality (1). Still, the term fell out of use until the late 2010s with the #MeToo Movement and the election of Donald Trump. Cynthia Enloe in *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017) argues that the fact that people have shied away from using the term “enables it to survive” (15) and it is “stunningly adaptable” (16). The concept now has a prominent place in recent studies, such as Valerie Bryson, *The Futures of Feminism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2021), 50–63.

This article argues that the private Catholic world that revered the priest as *alter Christus* instilled gender essentialism, mandated heterosexuality, and made Catholic families vulnerable to priest predators. Documentation on clergy sex abuse reveals that mid-twentieth-century mores were quite enduring, despite the religious and cultural changes that occurred in the 1960s. Catholic families listened to church authorities who asked them to avoid “scandal,” and mothers in particular sought to care for priests even after the priests molested their children. The desire to create a “good Catholic home” filled with harmony at times leads to terrible secrets. When fathers made clerical abuse public, they often suffered mistreatment from other families. The increasing involvement of lay Catholics in the church following the reforms of Vatican II did not transfer into influence with episcopal authorities.

Obviously, private and public systems overlap. Family roles are structured by theological, historical, and organizational factors, just as public values are shaped by the intimate relations of the family. Church and home cultures are not distinct binaries but rather overlapping grammars, each reinforcing the other.<sup>5</sup> In the case of clergy sex abuse, however, the private sphere has been overlooked because the institutional crimes of priests and bishops are so glaring. Journalists and scholars struggle to unpack the basic narratives given the efforts of Catholic ecclesiastical authorities to obscure clerical abuse. Home life thus seems ancillary to the “real” actions of men. More challengingly, unveiling patterns of domestic behaviors that contribute to sexual abuse can come perilously close to “blaming the victim.” While this article reveals the ways that mothers and fathers seek to stop the abuse of their children, too often their efforts are either hollow or ineffective. Stories of parental agency exist but rarely ones of parental success.

Catholic mothers and fathers are critical at every point in the clergy sex abuse narrative. Sometimes parents are told of abuse when it happens, and they make appeals to church authorities at every level. They devise strategies to tell others (or not to tell) of the abuse, they hire lawyers, they narrate their experiences to media and the courts, they form support groups to comfort victims and activate community outrage, and they “pick up the pieces” when their children grow into adults with serious, sometimes even deadly, psychological problems. Parents, as much as survivors, are keepers of memories. While parental involvement is long-term and multifaceted, my intention here is far more limited. In this article, I focus only on the earliest stages of the sex abuse “constellation”—when the abuse is first detected, articulated, and expressed to church and legal authorities. My examination ends with the response (typically a non-response) of diocesan authorities. I leave it to other scholars to interpret the impact of abuse on families, and how the clergy abuse crisis has shaped what might be called “domestic” Catholicism.

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<sup>5</sup>The classic discussion on the public and its relationship to the private, particularly the family is Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, 1962, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). An early feminist exploration is Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). From the very start, the binary has been disputed. José Casanova in “Private and Public Religion,” *Social Research* 59 (Spring 1992): 17–57, examines what he calls the “ambiguous place of religion in the modern world” (32). Clarke E. Cochran, in *Religion in Public and Private Life* (New York: Routledge, 1990), argues that the public and private “are not radically separated” (3). Raia Prokhovnik in *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique of Dichotomy* (London: Routledge, 1999) unpacks the “repressive effect” (21) of the notion of dualism where, not surprisingly, the private (gendered female) part is considered less important than the public/male half.

This article also exclusively works with public documents, primarily those saved by BishopAccountability.org.<sup>6</sup> These materials are vast and diverse—but they only speak to the situation of a limited number of Catholic families. Sources range from personal letters sent to chancery offices, to legal dispositions, to newspaper stories, to diocesan “intake” reports summarizing abuse committed long in the past. The documents provide an unprecedented glimpse into the modern American Catholic home, albeit with distinct limits. In many primary documents, the names of victims and family members have been redacted so there is no access to information about the class, ethnicity, race, family size, or educational level of victimized families. At times, source materials contain internal descriptive data that give some clue to the social location of families, but even this information is self-reported. It also is impossible to ferret out if individual mothers and fathers “remember” correctly. Perhaps most importantly, the emotions, fears, and anxieties that spread through families after the abuse are only hinted at in letters and official documentation. Still, the documents available from BishopAccountability.org not only provide an extensive portrayal of clergy sex abuse, they also offer an extraordinary entrance into the private world of American Catholics.

### Milwaukee Molester

Let me begin with one case that I will return to throughout the article: In 1945, a distraught Wisconsin mother mailed a letter to an auxiliary bishop of the Milwaukee archdiocese. “I don’t know how to say it,” she explained, “but I’m desperate just now—something must be done about it and sooner if not sooner. A priest—A Catholic priest takes indecent liberty with girls in school and girls out of school—girls of 12 yrs to 19 yrs, and about 20 girls in all that I know about and could name by name, and from his parish.”<sup>7</sup> One of the girls was this woman’s daughter. “We took this man into our homes as one of the family,” she penned, “and what does he do? wrecks our homes, our families—the lives of our dear ones—our children! Oh My Lord I’m going plain nuts over all this,” the exasperated mother wrote, “I can’t stand it any longer—If this man is not removed from here immediately, I’m going to tell the world wide—if it must be a scandal, well, let it be a scandal—if it must hurt one and all it must—and I’m willing to take my share of suffering upon myself.” Aware of the ramifications of both her possible actions and the predator priest’s deeds, she reflected, “The pity is the children—they will be marked for life.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>BishopAccountability.org was established in 2003 with the goal of documenting the abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church, primarily by making available on the Internet the vast corpus of resources accumulating on the scandal. As of September 30, 2021, the database of those accused in the United States comprises more than 7,300 discreet records. That includes more than 63,630 pages of church files; over 121,000 news articles; a collection of investigative and other reports and studies totaling more than 100,000 pages. The documents concern more than 150 dioceses and over 25 religious institutes and provinces. For an introduction to this amazing archive, see <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/who-we-are/>.

<sup>7</sup>While I have kept the original spelling and punctuation in this quote, throughout the remainder of this this article, I have slightly adjusted spelling and punctuation for ease of communication. Most quotes will be cited using the BishopAccountability.org numbering system (BA), which states the diocese, then the offender, then the page(s) where the document is found. See <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/>. With the exception of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report and other linked sources, all of the documents cited may be found here: <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-cited-in-McDannell-I-Confided/>

<sup>8</sup>[Redacted] to Bishop Roman R. Atkielski., nd. (The date of 1945 is deduced from internal evidence, as the letter writer states that the perpetrator was forty-four-years-old at the time and Oswald G. Krusing was born in 1899.)

Four years later, in 1949, another mother wrote about the *same* priest only this time to the *archbishop* of the Milwaukee archdiocese: "I am appealing for the sake of the children," she began. Her concern was that the priest was *talking* inappropriately about sexual matters. To seventh graders, he speculated about "how large the Blessed Mother must have been with the Infant by the time she made the journey on the donkey to visit her cousin Elizabeth." From the pulpit, the priest gave "sermons on the sixth commandment [that] were so filthy we parishioners were completely shocked. With children attending the Mass, Father spoke of how probable it would be to have little seven- and eight- year-old boys sliding their hands up a girl's leg." The mother wanted the Archbishop to know that she was not a "confirmed crank," nor did she simply take the word of her seventh-grade daughter; she had "confirmation of such lessons." In the letter, we hear her disappointment and frustration: "We have been told time and time again that Catholic education is the only kind for a Catholic child, but I don't believe even a public school lectures on this subject without permission. With all the dreadful things we read in the papers," she continued, "we Catholic parents must curb and guide our children somehow, but we are absolutely hampered in our efforts out here." Their pastor had created a "miniature Russia," but the mother refused to be silent and begged "please protect our children, Your Excellency, and please help us!"<sup>9</sup>

No response came from the Archdiocese, at least none that it documented. So, in 1955, the president and the past president of the parish's men's Holy Name Society wrote a letter to complain about this same pastor. The men noted that the list they were sending was not "all encompassing" but rather was what they could document themselves or from witnesses who were of "unimpeachable veracity and character." The outline they compiled was nine double-spaced pages long. It began with the statement that their pastor "has an overwhelming preoccupation with sex" and ended with the conclusion that "the affairs of Holy Apostles parish are conducted with a violence which is of fear and hatred and that the integrity of souls is being thereby jeopardized and the possibility of grave scandal is imminent." A year later in 1956, the priest was transferred to Sacred Heart parish, fifteen miles east of Holy Apostle's parish.<sup>10</sup>

By 1962, it would be a lawyer who would write yet *another* letter to yet *another* bishop about the same predator priest who was now in yet *another* parish. A ten-year old girl had told her mother that the priest had invited her to his home to play cards, as he had done many times. The man then took her to his bedroom, "undressed her, undressed himself, masturbated in her presence, asked her to touch his penis, lay on top of her, kissed her on her lips, told her he loved her, and told her to say she loved him, and touched her at her breasts and vagina."<sup>11</sup> Almost the same description of abuse occurred in a 1947 document, also languishing in archdiocesan files.<sup>12</sup> That same month in 1962, something unexplained happened with a boy and a "school circumstance."<sup>13</sup> This time, the predator priest was removed from the parish,

<sup>9</sup>[Redacted] to Archbishop Moses E. Kiley, March 30, 1949. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-023.

<sup>10</sup>[Redacted] to Archbishop Albert G. Meyer, July 27, 1955. The introductory letter is found at BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-025, where the presidents mention "unimpeachable" witnesses. The outline begins at BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-026 and concludes at BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-034. The notification of transfer is [Albert G. Meyer] Archbishop of Milwaukee to Oswald G. Krusing, June 11, 1956. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-036.

<sup>11</sup>[Redacted] to Bishop William Cousins, March 15, 1962. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-040.

<sup>12</sup>[No name] to [No Name], October 31, 1947. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-015. It is unclear precisely what this document is, but it includes in the text the word "deposed."

<sup>13</sup>Oswald G. Krusing to Roman R. Atkielski, March 22, 1962. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-042.

sent to a Trappist monastery for “penance” and then to a psychiatric hospital for “treatment.”<sup>14</sup>

But two years later, the priest was appointed pastor of yet another parish. Then, in 1966, he became pastor of St. Rita’s parish, also near Milwaukee. Two years later in 1968, three women from St. Rita’s met with the Archdiocesan Personnel Board about their pastor. In their letter sent to the Board after the meeting, they called what they were enduring an “abominable situation.” “We detest,” the spokeswoman wrote, “the manner in which he is hurting hundreds of children and adults.” The women were ameliorated with the promise that the pastor would soon be retiring.<sup>15</sup>

It took until 1970, however, for the priest to retire. In spite of his decades of abuse, Archbishop William Cousins congratulated the priest on his past service. “You have served well and faithfully in your various assignments,” wrote the Archbishop in a letter marking the retirement, “and you have made a contribution to the Archdiocese that will remain a credit to your priestly zeal.” The bishop sought to express his “gratitude” and concluded, “I have valued you as a friend.”<sup>16</sup> The priest would then go on to collect his pension and live quietly. Twenty-five years would pass until in May of 1995, when changes in how the Catholic church dealt with sex abuse accusations would limit his sacramental ministry. Within five months, at the age of 96, the priest would be dead.

The case of Oswald Krusing is both typical and atypical of the ever-mounting documentation of Catholic clergy sex abuse. The case reflects the now all-too-common narrative of a relentless priest predator, a set of ignored victims, and a complicit Catholic hierarchy. It also is typical in that the parent most often mentioned is the mother. It is *atypical* in that eventually the fathers of the parish do get involved, only for reasons different from their wives. While the majority of clergy sexual abuse is directed toward boys and male teens, the female molestation and misogyny of Oswald Krusing is not unique. Girls and women frequently are victims of clergy sex abuse, but their stories are not as well publicized as those of boys. Because mothers began to write to the Milwaukee Archdiocese in the 1940s, the case is an unusually lengthy example of abuse occurring before the Second Vatican Council. The file presents sexual exploitation as one element—albeit the most shocking one—within a constellation of abusive behavior that a predator priest directed at his parishes. Still, the Milwaukee case mirrors a common pattern found throughout the United States: abuse, complaint, concealment, more abuse, therapy, transfer, more abuse, diocesan commendation, diocesan restriction of duties.<sup>17</sup> The depth of the file provides a rare entry into how average Catholic mothers *and* fathers responded to attacks on their children and parishes.

<sup>14</sup>“Timeline of Documents Regarding Oswald G. Krusing,” date “3/15/62” at page 4, <https://www.arch-mil.org/ArchMil/Resources/COMM/Reorg/Doc-Release/Krusing-timeline.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup>Mrs. [Redacted] to “Father Reiff and Board Members,” November 14, 1968. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-075.

<sup>16</sup>Archbishop William E. Cousins to Father Oswald G. Krusing, January 19, 1970. BA Milwaukee-Krusing-056.

<sup>17</sup>In addition to the sources on clerical sex abuse that generally reflect but also subtly modify this pattern, see Eugene Kennedy, *The Unhealed Wound: The Church, the Priesthood, and the Question of Sexuality* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002); Thomas G. Plante, *Sin Against the Innocents: Sexual Abuse by Priests and the Role of the Catholic Church* (Westpoint, CT: Praeger, 2004); Claire M. Renzetti *Clergy Sexual Abuse: Social Science Perspectives* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2013); John F. Wirenius, “‘Command and Coercion’: Clerical Immunity, Scandal, and the Sex Abuse Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 27 (2011–2012): 423–494; and Patrick S. Nash, “The Never-Ending Story? Or, Does the Roman Catholic Church Remain Vulnerable to Charges of

### Alter Christus in the Home

As with many cases of abuse, the story begins at home. In her 1945 letter, the first Wisconsin mother reported that she had welcomed a priest into her home and treated him like kin. This predator priest had been cared for and trusted. For many Catholic families, caring for priests was not unlike serving Christ himself. The priest was *alter Christus* (“another Christ”) who represented the highest order of sanctity in the parish.

The term *alter Christus* is often used in Catholic circles but its meaning and history is murky.<sup>18</sup> While the notion of followers imitating Christ (*Imitatio Christi*) is biblical (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1 and Gal. 2:20), actually being *another* Christ has its roots in the Middle Ages. Martyred saints and mystics, especially those who had experienced Christ’s wounds like Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), were thought to be *alter Christus*.<sup>19</sup> Holy suffering, rather than ordination, intimately connected one to Jesus and thus eternal reward. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), however, argued that only priests through their ordination had the power to consecrate the Eucharist in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*).<sup>20</sup> After the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent continued this distinction between priest and lay people. While all Christians should imitate Christ, only the priest was *alter Christus* because he was the same as Christ (*ipse Christus*) at the consecration. On a pastoral level, it would be the seventeenth-century “French School” of Pierre de Bérulle (d. 1629), Charles de Condren (d. 1641), Jean-Jacques Olier (d. 1657), and John Eudes (d. 1680) who brought *alter Christus* into clerical formation. Eudes used the term multiple times in his treatise on *The Priest*, writing that “A holy priest is a saviour and another Christ [*alter Christus*], taking the Master’s place on earth, representing Him, clothed with His authority, acting in His name, adorned with His qualifications, exercising His judgment on earth in the tribunal of penance.”<sup>21</sup> This orientation towards the priesthood would echo throughout the modern period, with

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Improper Handling of Clergy Child Sex Abuse?” *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 8 (June 2019): 270–299. There are regional and national differences regarding abuse; however, the universality of Catholic theological and ecclesiastical structures provides a certain amount of commonality. For a summary article that takes into account the international situation, see Karen J. Terry, “Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church,” in Alisa R. Ackerman and Rich Furman, eds., *Sex Crimes: Transnational Problems and Global Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015): 188–210. Excellent international case studies are Tracy Trothen, *Shattering the Illusion: Child Sexual Abuse and Canadian Religious Institutions* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012) and Helen Goode et al., *Time to Listen: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy in Ireland* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup>Diana Hiller writes in “Saintly blood: Absence, Presence, and the *Alter Christus*,” *Parergon* 32 (2015), “The concept of alter Christus is seldom defined. In a recent publication looking at some early figures seen as ‘the other Christs,’ Candida Moss fails to distinguish effectively between the terms ‘imitatio Christi’ and ‘alter Christus’” (188). Hiller is referring to Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>19</sup>H. W. van Os, “Saint Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting,” *Simiolus* 7 (1974): 115–132; Donal Cooper, “‘Love Not the World’: Saint Francis as an Alter Christus in Late Medieval Italian Painting,” *Ikon* 3 (2010): 199–209; and Donna C. Trembinski, “Non Alter Christus”: Early Dominican Lives of Saint Francis,” *Franciscan Studies* 63 (2005): 69–105. The medieval understanding of a mystical connection meant that women could also be *alter Christus* and this perspective continued into the early modern period; see Cristina Cruz González, “Beyond the Bride of Christ: The Crucified Abbess in Mexico and Spain,” *Art Bulletin* 99 (2017): 102–132.

<sup>20</sup>*Summa Theologiae*: Volume 59, Holy Communion: 3a. 79–83. ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 103.

<sup>21</sup>[Saint ] John Eudes, *The Priest: His Dignity and Obligations*, trans. W. Leo Murphy (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1947), 23.

Pope Pius XI (d. 1939) in his encyclical on the priesthood (1935) concluding that “the priest, as is said with good reason, is indeed ‘another Christ’; for, in some way, he is himself a continuation of Christ.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the mere fact of a priest’s ordination set him apart from (and above) ordinary men and women. Priests had special gifts and blessings that could not be tarnished. Priests were “signals of the transcendent God.”<sup>23</sup> Having a priest visit a home or share a family meal was an honor. While Catholic literature frequently chided families for their consumerism and materialism, the presence of a priest at the dinner table signaled their commitment to holiness.<sup>24</sup> When mothers were scolded for selfishly refusing to cultivate vocations, they could think about the many meals they prepared and served in order to introduce their sons to men of God.<sup>25</sup> Maybe, the mothers thought, if their sons got over their shyness and actually had time to interact with a real priest, the boys would cultivate positive feelings about religious life.<sup>26</sup>

And yet, for all the rhetoric that wove a story of how ordination made a man into something above other men, both clergy and laity knew something fundamental was missing from priestly life. This sacred man seemed to need the ministering of ordinary families. Even in the 1940s, when the power and independence of the priesthood was at its height, the Milwaukee mother rued the day when she and the other mothers let this man into their homes.<sup>27</sup> As much as families valued the presence of the priest, the priest valued the presence of the family: he ate their dinners, watched television with them, wrestled with the kids, and then tucked them into their beds. Predator priests gave children good night blessings, and one told the child he molested, “God loves you, I love

<sup>22</sup>Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* (December 20, 1935), no. 12.

<sup>23</sup>Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Myth: The Behaviors and Beliefs of American Catholics* (1990, New York: Touchstone, 1997), 225. For an overview of the formation of *alter Christus* in the United States, see Donna J. Drucker, “An ‘Aristocracy of Virtue’: Cultural Development of the American Catholic Priesthood, 1884–1920s,” *Religion and American Culture* 21 (2011): 227–258.

<sup>24</sup>Kathryn A. Johnson, “Taking Marriage: ‘One Day at a Time’: the Cana Conference Movement and the Creation of a Catholic Mentality,” Notre Dame Cushwa Center, Working Paper Series, 33 (Spring 2001), 14. A similar sentiment is shared by Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea in *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007): “Not infrequently there was a cadre of parish women who covertly but intensely competed with each other over which one of them had Father to dinner or about whose apple pie he raved about most” (186).

<sup>25</sup>According to Mary Henold in *The Laywoman Project: Remaking Catholic Womanhood in the Vatican II Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), Catholic mothers were blamed for the vocation crisis. Henold writes that “between 1958 and 1964 the Catholic media featured all manner of hand-wringing articles on the dearth of new priests, brothers, and nuns.” This was the result of the “obstructionist Catholic mother” (18) who did not encourage vocations because the mothers were not good Catholics themselves, they failed to promote Catholic values and devotions at home, and they selfishly clung to their children (19).

<sup>26</sup>While the primary source documentation on clergy abuse does not directly address the vocation issue, beginning in the late nineteenth century there was a push among parish priests to get to know boys in order to encourage vocations, see Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “‘God’s Representative in Our Midst’: Toward a History of Catholic Diocesan Clergy in the United States,” *Church History* 67 (June 1998): 326–349 at 341.

<sup>27</sup>In Tentler’s article, “God’s Representative in Our Midst,” she notes that during the early period of American Catholic history, because of the primitive state of the frontier church, priests were highly reliant on families for their physical substance (330). However, by the late- nineteenth century, parishes had developed to the point that priests “had achieved a greater remoteness in their life and work” (328). Tentler also explores clerical tensions in “‘To Work in the Field of the Lord’: Roots of the Crisis in Priestly Identity,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29 (Fall 2011): 1–18.

you, you are special to me.”<sup>28</sup> While abuse took place in many spaces, the home was under family control and contained layers of privacy that necessitated a shared trust between priest and parents. Like the body itself, the home was both highly protected and profoundly vulnerable.

The image of the predator priest worming his way into the safe confines of the home is a staple of the sex abuse narrative.<sup>29</sup> During the post-World War II era, predators easily hid within a clerical culture that existed both above and alongside the Catholic family. Priests sought out domestic comforts. Historians of Catholicism argue that postwar “priestly life” had become more difficult, pressure filled, and regulated.<sup>30</sup> The Catholic population had increased, but the number of priests could not keep up with church growth. Parish life became more complicated and less fulfilling. By the 1970s, the decline of men entering the priesthood and the increased number of those leaving made for empty rectories. Priests were lonely. Many found that their clerical brotherhood gave them little emotional sustenance but instead was a place of competition that sapped their energy and made them fearful of being less-than-perfect.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, both the Second Vatican Council and general changes in American society had narrowed the gap between priest and people.

What the family offered the priest was a respite from his official duties and a glimpse into a life made up of women and children, not just men. Parents believed they had something to offer priests, and priests were more than eager to accept the offer. Families responded to predator’s overtures because they believed *he* needed to be ministered to. There is a formality in some descriptions of clergy/family interaction that calls attention to the priest as *alter Christus*, with the family existing to serve him. Families were, in effect, his altar boys who offered domestic gifts that the priest made sacred by his mere presence. At the same time, *mothers* became a version of *alter Christus* as they acted as “saviors” to men who sought loving human kindness or support in a personal crisis. Psychotherapist and former priest A. W. Richard Snipe observed, “Many priests use women to prove their masculinity, to comfort their loneliness, and to relieve their sexual needs. Some priests have a group of women, each of whom thinks she is the one special friend who really understands him and his problems.”<sup>32</sup> To refuse a priest was to be profoundly uncharitable and predator priests exploited this value.

“Taking this man into our homes” did entail formal dinners and conversations about vocations. It also included informal and egalitarian encounters. Parents permitted access to the intimate spaces of the family not only because they wanted to uplift their children and create a sacred home. Parents and priests could interact as equals; they could become buddies. This leveling of parents and priests is poignantly expressed in cases where sex abuse comes after a heavy night of drinking. All of the children of a Meadville, Pennsylvania, family testified that a predator priest “and a previously unidentified deacon would come to their house and get intoxicated with their parents.

<sup>28</sup>Office of Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Services, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Sexual Abuse Intake Report, January 26, 2006. BA-Milwaukee-Budzynski-097.

<sup>29</sup>For a wider perspective on grooming, see Ann-Marie McAlinden ‘Grooming’ and the Sexual Abuse of Children: *Institutional, Internet, and Familial Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup>Tentler, “God’s Representatives,” 343–346.

<sup>31</sup>Raymond Hedin, *Married to the Church* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), especially 71–123.

<sup>32</sup>A. W. Richard *Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), 121.

Once the adults were sufficiently drunk,” the predator would “find the boys, who were usually alone, and prey upon them.” The priest and the deacon (a seminarian) also drank with other families in the area and abused their girls.<sup>33</sup> Near Pittsburgh, a priest became a part of a family and abused a boy over a period of three years. One summer evening, while “his father was working the night shift.” The predator priest and mother were “on the porch drinking,” and when the priest got drunk the mother encouraged him to stay the night. The Grand Jury report described how “After his mother went to bed, he and Dave performed oral sex on each other and then the victim got scared and ran away and hid in the basement.”<sup>34</sup> Drinking together cemented bonds between parents and predators. It also made it possible for parents to not “see” what was happening in their own homes.

### Making a “Good Catholic Home”

Opening one’s home to the visits of a priest—for dining or drinking—was a part of making a “good Catholic home.” In her 1945 letter, the Wisconsin mother insisted that the abused girls were brought up in “good Catholic homes.”<sup>35</sup> How to create a proper family was the preoccupation of many Catholic clerical and lay writers. Without a strong family, they argued, religion, the nation, and the economic structure would crumble. Catholic novelists of the late nineteenth century nostalgically presented both the Irish peasant home and the American urban abode as devoid of brawls, bickering, noise, or disorder. The home was a respite from a Protestant, unbelieving society. In the twentieth century, stimulated by the encyclical on marriage, *Casti Connubii* (1930), the domestic rhetoric that described the home as a sacred space became unavoidable in Catholic circles. Through their popular couples retreats of the 1940s and 1950s, Cana Conferences offered practical advice to improve marriages and build good Catholic homes. While less romantic than Catholic fiction, the Cana Conference movement still endorsed “a vision of married people working together with God to make their home a spiritual haven in a secular world.”<sup>36</sup> By strengthening couples, families would be preserved from materialism, secularism, and—particularly in the United States—communism.

Catholicism entered family life through ethnic customs, but in postwar America folkways were giving way to more institutionally based Catholic rituals. Homes that were “good” were not those where grandmas protected their grandchildren by sewing little sacks, stuffing them with something mysterious, and attaching them to clothing.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Report on Father Stephen E. Jeselnick, 40<sup>th</sup> [2018] Statewide [Pennsylvania] Investigating Grand Jury Report 1 Redacted. [abbreviated as PA Grand Jury], 421. The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report is 1,356 pages long and may be found at <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/>.

<sup>34</sup>Reverend David F. Dzermejko, PA Grand Jury, 648. For a discussion of social drinking (as well as alcoholism) in postwar America, see Lori Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women, and Alcohol in Post-World War II America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>35</sup>[Redacted] to Bishop Roman R. Atkielski [1945]. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-019.

<sup>36</sup>Johnson, “Taking Marriage One Day at a Time,” 3. See also her dissertation, “The Home is a Little Church: Gender, Culture, and Authority in American Catholicism, 1940–1962,” PhD diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1997).

<sup>37</sup>Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of Italian Americans* (1974; Toronto: Guernica, 2003), 220. See also Colleen McDannell, “Catholic Domesticity, 1860–1960,” in Karen Kennelly (ed.), *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 48–80.

In good Catholic homes, ethnic traditions were secondary (or perhaps parallel) to domestic rituals like mealtime prayers and family rosary, displaying images of the saints and Virgin Mary, and reading appropriate Catholic literature. Parents provided worthy examples to their children by the frequent reception of the sacraments.<sup>38</sup> Good Catholic homes did not permit disparaging comments about priests or questions about their commitment to celibacy. Adopting a priest as part of the family was one ingredient, albeit a special one, of making a good Catholic home.

By the mid-twentieth century, it also was assumed that good Catholic children attended parochial schools. Good Catholic schools upheld the moral superiority of sisters and priests. Teachers cultivated respect, obedience, and the emulation of those who had chosen the highest spiritual path. In 1949, the second Wisconsin mother echoed received wisdom by affirming “we have been told time and time again that Catholic education is the only kind for a Catholic child.”<sup>39</sup> However, a predator priest had debased such education through his smutty talk. How could a good home be created without the support of a good school and a good church? Not surprisingly, *alter Christus* would be expected to move seamlessly between those three spheres—sanctifying them all with his presence. Whether families had the emotional or physical resources to create a good Catholic home was not the issue. At every level they were told that making homes sacred was intrinsic to securing their very salvation. How could they refuse a priest who knocked on their door?

### The Realm of the Mother

The good Catholic home, according to some postwar Catholic organizations, sought to create egalitarian, companionate marriages where domestic decisions and responsibilities were made jointly by mothers and fathers. For instance, the Christian Family Movement sought to bring men and women together to discuss religious issues as well as family or neighborhood problems. In their perfect world, the public domain of the father and the private domain of the mother should intersect. More conservative Catholic organizations sought to establish the father as the one who would lead his family in both spiritual and material matters. As the head of the household, the father was to be responsible “to God for those under their care.”<sup>40</sup> In both cases, Catholic culture—not unlike secular postwar popular literature—sought to bring men more fully into the home.<sup>41</sup>

Men were not to spend their time exclusively socializing with other men, as they might have done in tightly knit ethnic communities. Nor were they to focus solely on building a career by concentrating exclusively on the world of work. Yes, men were to be breadwinners and carry on ethnic traditions, but they were also to be involved with childrearing and home maintenance. They needed to be involved in their parishes. Men were to be alert to the emotional needs of their wives and children.

<sup>38</sup>Henold, *Laywoman Project*, 21. See also Jeffrey M. Burns, “Catholic Laywomen in the Culture of American Catholicism in the 1950s,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5 (summer 1986): 385–400.

<sup>39</sup>[Redacted] to Archbishop Moses E. Kiley, March 30, 1949. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-022.

<sup>40</sup>Henold, *Laywoman Project* 124. On the Christian Family Movement, see Henold, *Laywoman Project*, 87; and Sara Dwyer-McNulty, “Moving beyond the Home: Women and Catholic Action in Post-World War II America,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 20 (Winter 2002): 83–97 at 88.

<sup>41</sup>The classic treatment is Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). He calls this “masculine domesticity” (89; 116f) and the “new fatherhood,” (88–118) that he sees beginning in the early twentieth century and flourishing between 1945 and 1965.

They were to solve domestic problems and create a stable future for their households. Or so it was said.

What is clear—if we take seriously the documentation of clergy sex abuse—is that the Catholic home (good or not) was run by women and not men. Neither the egalitarian marriage of modern advice books nor the soft patriarchy promoted by more conservative Catholic organizations had succeeded in decentering mothers in importance. The private space of the family, in spite of the major social changes in postwar America, was the realm of the mother. Within that sphere, mothers were to oversee the practical running of the household as well as see to the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of their children. They maintained lines of communications between relatives, saw to the balancing of the family budget, and coped with daily problems. And, most importantly, they were to create harmony by managing domestic strife—at no matter what cost. Good Catholic homes required the diligent attention and continual sacrifice of mothers.<sup>42</sup>

If we assume that the documentation of clergy sex abuse reveals the activities of real parents, then men played a minor role in either discovering abuse or in responding to it. Fathers were disconnected from the problems occurring in their households. The letters from the Wisconsin mothers followed this pattern: Mothers first saw the abuse and then tried to alert Catholic authorities. While many letters imply that the women were married and that the victims' fathers were aware of the abuse, their husbands were not actors in the unfolding drama. "I confided in my Mother," another Wisconsin survivor tersely summarized, "and she called the archdiocese." He made a point to explain that he came from a "strong Catholic family with 2 wonderful parents."<sup>43</sup> However, it was his mother to whom he told his secret and who took action.

Mothers noticed abuse that eluded fathers. A predator, who would eventually become a cardinal, befriended a family early in the 1970s when he was a mere monsignor. He would come over almost every week for dinner, often saying Mass in the home and always playing with the children. The father was "on Cloud 9" with the attention of such a notable cleric and "never acted as though he saw anything wrong." However, one evening when the mother was preparing dinner, she came out of the kitchen and saw the predator with "one son on each side of him and he had a hand on each one of them," rubbing their thighs. "It was more than strange. It was abnormal. I almost dropped the casserole dish I was holding in my hands." In her telling of the story, her husband (who was sitting in a chair directly across from the predator and the boys) "appeared oblivious" to the behavior. The mother, however, recalled that "I nearly fainted." Later that evening, the upset mother told her husband that "we need to get him out of our lives." But her husband "just refused to understand." From her perspective, the predator had charmed her husband and children. Her husband had been born in Ireland, revered priests, and simply could not imagine that one who was so "anointed" and who paid attention to his children could harm them. The mother would eventually write anonymous letters to church officials. She would become furious when nothing came of her reports.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Johnson, "Taking Marriage," 23.

<sup>43</sup>"Statement," April 29, 2005. "I confided," BA-Milwaukee-Budzynski-144 and "Wonderful parents," BA-Milwaukee-Budzynski-143.

<sup>44</sup>"Anonymous Allegation During Tenure as Bishop of Metuchen (Mid-1980s)," *Report on the Holy See's Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick (1830 to 2017)*, 37–47, [https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2020\\_11\\_10\\_Holy\\_See\\_McCarrick\\_Report.pdf](https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2020_11_10_Holy_See_McCarrick_Report.pdf).

In 1992, a memorandum from the Diocese of Harrisburg described an awkward meeting held between church leaders, a father, and an abuse victim. The father reported that his wife was not there because they had had a “spat.” She wanted to bring along a female friend, and he believed “the matter was a family affair, and he did not want others from outside the immediate family to know all the details.” The official at the meeting noted that the father said “he really did not know any of the details of the story, except that Father Giella did improper things to [redacted].”<sup>45</sup> This report from the 1990s contains similar elements from the letters written in the 1940s. Even when men were aware of abuse, they did not feel comfortable telling the stories of their children, in both of these cases a daughter. Children are (or at least should be) the problem of women.

Mothers may have known of abuse, but they did not always act on it. Some constantly denied the truth of their children’s stories.<sup>46</sup> A common response was to tell their children to keep away from the predator. Survivors often attributed this to their mother’s respect for priests. “I felt stupid,” explained a victim, “because I had not realized what he was up to [ . . . ] I told my mother first. She was a devout Catholic and told me to stay away from him.”<sup>47</sup> In 2004, a mother contacted the Diocese of Harrisburg and admitted that decades earlier a priest who was a “constant guest at her home” fondled her daughter. Seeing her seeing him, the molester “calmly put his coat on and left the home,” but he continued to visit the family. The mother reported that she did not tell her husband or any church officials of the incident, which “caused a rift between her and her daughter for years.”<sup>48</sup> Secrets were kept not only by survivors but by family members as well. Anger, disappointment, and shame circulated in families. Just as victims often had no name for what happened to them, and assumed that nobody had ever experienced what they had experienced, so did mothers.

Some mothers who were told of the abuse refused to believe their own children. Mothers, in effect, legitimated the warnings that perpetrators told their victims: “no one will believe the word of a 13-year-old boy against a priest.”<sup>49</sup> After a boy told his mother of being photographed in his underwear, “she did not believe him,” and the abuse continued until he was a freshman in high school.<sup>50</sup> When a New Hampshire boy told his mother the priest had hurt him, “his mother slapped him and told him not to lie about the church.”<sup>51</sup> Mothers may have been told about the abuse because of their relationship with their children, but they did not necessarily acknowledge the truth of those reports. Upholding the harmony of the home took precedence over the care of individual members. Sometimes this was a long and winding

<sup>45</sup>Paul Helwig to Nicholas Dattilo, July 21, 1992. PA Grand Jury, 162.

<sup>46</sup>The rare treatment of this phenomena in scholarship is found in Christine Adams, “Mothers Who Fail to Protest their Children from Sexual Abuse: Addressing the Problem of Denial,” *Yale Law & Policy Review* 12 (1994), 519–539 and a brief mention about the “power of denial” can be read in Frawley-O’Dea, *Perversion of Power*, 188.

<sup>47</sup>“Affidavit,” February 23, 2004. BA-Davenport-Janssen-1-141, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/documents-BA-Davenport-Janssen-1-109-110.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup>Reverend Frederick Vaughn, PA Grand Jury, 583.

<sup>49</sup>Peter Isely and Jim Smith, “The Sexual Abuse of Children in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee,” 43, [https://www.bishopaccountability.org/reports/2004\\_02\\_10\\_Isely\\_TheSexual.htm#Culture\\_of\\_secretcy](https://www.bishopaccountability.org/reports/2004_02_10_Isely_TheSexual.htm#Culture_of_secretcy).

<sup>50</sup>Reverend John P. Maloney, PA Grand Jury, 698.

<sup>51</sup>Office of the Attorney General, Report on the Investigation of the Diocese of Manchester [New Hampshire] 2003. Paul Aube [molester], D. John Doe LIX [victim]—Claremont, NH at 29, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/resources/resource-files/reports/ManchesterReport03Aube.pdf>

road. Maryetta Dussourd, whose three boys and four nephews were abused by John Geoghan in her home, was so devout that her children kept silent, believing that she loved the church more than she loved them. Geoghan encouraged them in this view. Dussourd certainly saw her faith as “upholding the harmony of the home,” but in her family, this had a negative effect by a surprising path.<sup>52</sup>

Mothers were particularly responsible for maintaining the good Catholic home, which was highly dependent on the proper sexual behavior of all of its members. Secrets would need to be kept in order to project the proper image. A predator priest who was tutoring a girl at the rectory molested her, and the girl begged her mother to take her out of St. Joan of Arc school. When the abuse continued, the girl complained to the principal who in anger contacted the mother and insisted the child be removed from school. When the girl tried to talk to her mother, she replied, “we’re not going to talk about this. I don’t want anyone thinking that this was our fault.”<sup>53</sup> The use of the pronoun “our” is significant. Sexual indiscretions, even in modern America, cast a shadow over the whole family. Illicit heterosexual activity was a constant fear because such temptation was understood to be a common, natural urge of all people. Especially in the case of girls, there were assumptions made about the culpability of the victims—even if they were pre-teens. Mothers not only assumed that girls had reputations to maintain (which could be sullied), but they were not always convinced of the sexual innocence of their daughters.

In the Catholic culture that serves as the backdrop to clerical sex abuse, there are at least two reasons why mothers dominate the narratives. In many ethnic communities, a sex-segregated structure divided women’s worlds from men’s worlds. For instance, because of economic and social conditions in nineteenth-century Ireland, marriages were delayed, and permanent celibacy was common. While the Irish married more often and at younger ages in the United States, other social issues—like alcoholism or injury or desertion—often left women with the primary care of their families.<sup>54</sup> All immigrants found that simply surviving meant long hours of work, typically with others of their same sex. Even if urban life in twentieth-century America provided more leisure time for men and women to socialize, men understood their primary focus was work. Women (even when they worked) felt most comfortable with other women and in the home.

What the clergy sex abuse narratives reveal is that this male/female division was not fully overcome in a post-immigrant, post-urban world. Catholic mothers and fathers had divided up their worlds and had distinct spheres of influence where they were the experts. In spite of American cultural tendencies toward companionate marriages and church efforts to get men involved with domestic problems and spiritual lives, the clergy sex abuse narratives reveal enduring ethnic and class patterns. Perhaps in times of crisis, families reverted to what felt familiar and secure to them.

<sup>52</sup>I would like to thank Terry McKiernan for this observation. “How America’s Catholic Church Crucified Itself,” *Sunday Times Magazine*, March 13, 2005.

<sup>53</sup>Reverend Timothy Sperber, PA Grand Jury, 579. On maintaining sexual purity in the Catholic home, see Emily Kahm, “Catholic Girls All Grown Up: A Practical Theological Exploration of Sexuality Formation in Young Adult Women,” PhD diss. (University of Denver, 2017) and for the philosophical underpinnings, Doris M. Kieser, *Catholic Sexual Theology and Adolescent Girls: Embodied Flourishing* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015).

<sup>54</sup>For a general survey, see Hasia Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

Underscoring this sociological explanation for separate spheres was a theological and philosophical commitment to gender essentialism. Catholic theology, advice literature, and fiction preached that women had special characteristics and responsibilities different from those of men. Perhaps Joseph McShane's survey of short stories published between 1930 and 1950 in Catholic magazines best summarized this orientation: In the stories, "the wife/mother becomes the icon of the community's highest value: selfless service to others, service which is motivated by faith. Moreover, in her daily performance of her duties, she becomes a visible model for all the members of the family to follow." Men were treated in the stories "sketchily and all too often in negative terms." God had made mothers to be the source of domestic faith and stability.<sup>55</sup>

Even when fixed notions of womanhood were changing in the wider American culture as well as being challenged by Catholic feminists, gender essentialism prevailed.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, feminism might have only reassured women, yet again, that they should be in charge. Mothers took on the responsibility to either tell or not tell of their children's abuse. Mothers assumed that they, and not the fathers, had more insights into how to make the family harmonious and functioning. Catholic domestic ideology supported their conviction that women were to make their homes cheerful, peaceful, and orderly for men and children. This was a mother's "natural" orientation. And, from both church culture and their own mothers, they knew that women's lives entailed suffering and sacrifice. For some women, the way to maintain harmony at home meant keeping terrible secrets. Catholic domestic ideology promised women that their faithfulness—both in religion and in motherhood—would protect their family from physical and emotional harm. This promise would be repeatedly shattered.

### Fathers and the Social Body

While mothers appear the most frequently in clergy sex abuse narratives, fathers also make appearances.<sup>57</sup> Typically, fathers are lumped into the generic "parent" who reports or complains. However, when fathers become the primary actors, they often show different patterns of behavior from mothers. Fathers who contacted parish pastors or diocesan officials reflect fears appropriate to their spheres of influence. Mothers become concerned when their children's bodies are abused or sexual propriety transgressed. Fathers enter the narrative when there are clerical threats to the social body or when men seek to threaten the bodies of perpetrators.

In 1955 Wisconsin, two leaders of the Holy Name Society (an influential all-male parish organization) wrote the Archbishop of Milwaukee about Oswald Krusing. As with the women who wrote in 1945 and 1949, the men were disgusted with the pastor's constant references to sexual matters. The Holy Name presidents' extensive, legalistic memo outlined specific instances when the pastor made statements like if girls were permitted to wear shorts (even three- or four-year olds) and they were "ravaged by a

<sup>55</sup>Joseph M. McShane, "Mirrors and Teachers: A Study of Catholic Periodical Fiction between 1930 and 1950," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 6 (Spring-Summer 1987): 181–198 at 192 and 193.

<sup>56</sup>See Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>57</sup>For example, the Chicago Archdiocesan files that I examined comprise 9,318 pages and have 525 instances some version of "mother" and 149 instances of some version of "father." I have not counted instance where "father" or "mother" occurs next to "passed away" or "died" or "committed suicide." Milwaukee Archdiocese: 1,577 pages with 250 mothers and 156 fathers. Diocese of Davenport: 505 pages with 78 mothers and 31 fathers. I would like to thank John Hurdle for helping compile this data.

teenage boy,” then the “crime would be that of the girl.”<sup>58</sup> While the mothers were affronted by such comments issuing from the pulpit, the men noted that a non-Catholic “neighbor” had asked one of them, “What’s the matter with Father Krusing? I don’t speak to him very often but every time I do, he talks about sex.”<sup>59</sup> The men were concerned that the pastor’s behavior was not simply an internal problem; it was becoming public. It was causing scandal.

The Holy Name memo reveals how seriously men took their roles as guardians of the public expression of religion. Long before the Second Vatican Council encouraged lay leadership, Catholic men had their eyes on parish life. Fathers may have left the business of the family to their wives, but overall church life was their concern. The Holy Name presidents described how the pastor not only made lascivious statements, but he demeaned both his staff and important male parishioners. The pastor ridiculed an associate priest, calling him a “little Pollak” and saying that he “didn’t walk like a man, talk like a man, or act like a man.”<sup>60</sup> The men respected this younger priest, but the pastor had removed him from almost every contact with parishioners.<sup>61</sup> Laymen nominated for church committee chairmanships were unreasonably vetoed by the pastor. A former Holy Name president was told that if he did not “drop his activities” that “there probably wouldn’t be room in the school for [his] children.”<sup>62</sup> The list went on and on. Their pastor, the men concluded, “conducts parish affairs on the basis of a police state and disposes of persons not presently useful to him by means of character assassination.”<sup>63</sup> The men did not mince words.

When this predator priest abused the “body” of the parish, his activities came under the purview of men. What we would now call racism and misogyny (as well as dictatorial behavior) threatened the well-being of a group of Catholics. This abusive priest had moved out of domestic spaces, such as parishioners’ homes or his own rectory, and was now assaulting the cohesiveness of the parish. The Holy Name presidents thus felt justified to call on the influence of their own organization and appeal to more authoritative, Catholic men. Their report to the Archbishop—typed out as a dispassionate outline of truths—reflected male commitment to their own rationality and objectivity. The communal Body of Christ was being disturbed, and so the men appealed to its organizational head. If the bodies of children were attacked in the private space of the home, mothers acted. When the bodies of adults were attacked in the public space of the parish, men acted.

Individual fathers who actively pursued justice because of abuse often faced the condemnation of other men—who believed that *they* were the protectors of the body of the church. Men who fought for their sons or daughters were often confronted by their fellow parishioners. In one of the earliest public cases of abuse, a Louisiana father tried to warn other families about a predator and remembers being rebuffed, “sometimes rudely.” One parishioner came to his home and told him, “It takes a low-down son of a bitch to sue the Church.”<sup>64</sup> His crop-dusting business declined. Gender essentialism associated men with public order, so his actions had communal (not merely domestic)

<sup>58</sup>BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-026f. In the timeline posted by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee of the Krusing case, the letter is referred to as being from “an attorney and parishioner.” The memo uses terms like “corroborating witnesses” and “plaintiffs.” See “Timeline of Documents Regarding Oswald G. Krusing.”

<sup>59</sup>BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-027.

<sup>60</sup>BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-028.

<sup>61</sup>BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-029.

<sup>62</sup>BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-030.

<sup>63</sup>BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-029.

<sup>64</sup>Jason Berry, “The Tragedy of Gilbert Gauthé,” *Times of Acadiana* (Part II, May 30, 1985).

ramifications. In this same Louisiana case, another man not only lost his friends when he decided to sue, but his grain store suffered when customers stopped coming. He finally lost the business.<sup>65</sup> Men were supposed to maintain the communal harmony of their parish. If their actions regarding predators disrupted their tight-knit religious community, there would be public, not simply private, consequences.

From his appointment in 1944, Oswald Krusing had harassed the Catholics of Holy Apostle parish. It was not until a group of influential men wrote the Milwaukee archbishop in 1955 that the pastor was removed from that parish and sent to another one. That process took almost a year. Predator priests may have been transferred more expeditiously when parish fathers did not behave so rationally or act as spokesmen of the parish community. The sister of a 1960s Pennsylvania victim reported that when her father found out about his son's molestation, he "went to the rectory with a shotgun and told Father Paone that he better leave town." (The diocese sent him for an evaluation).<sup>66</sup> In the Chicago archdiocese, an enraged father called the mayor and threatened to "go with a shotgun to confront the accused cleric." (He was transferred the next day).<sup>67</sup> Even when predators were not immediately removed and fathers had to wait for long-overdue legal proceedings, men fantasized about doing violence to predator priests. "Let me tell you," one father announced at a sentencing hearing, "Give me 30 minutes in a locked room with him and a baseball bat with no repercussions in this life or in the next, and I am ready to call it a day."<sup>68</sup> An Iowa survivor put the concern most succinctly as to why he only told his wife about the abuse decades later: "I had a deep respect for my father and knew if I told my father, he would kill Father Janssen and I would lose my father over the incident."<sup>69</sup> Mothers may have taken on the responsibility for addressing clergy abuse because they feared what their husbands would do.

### Maternal Care

Mothers may have also fantasized about violence, but clergy sex abuse narratives present a different picture. For the most part, women who wrote to church leaders had two main goals: to remove the offending priest from parish life and to get him "help." Once a mother found that her children were being abused, many did not depart from their prescribed role as nurturer. In mid-century America, "help" meant psychiatrists and mental hospitals for those who were "sick." The assumption was that if the priest could get help early on, then he could be cured of his illness. The male language of sin and crime was replaced with a female language of caring, nurturing, and cure. Women embraced the public therapeutic culture, a culture that was run predominately by men.

Examples of mothers caring for the well-being of predator priests appear frequently in clergy sex abuse narratives. In 1981, a mother and some female co-workers found child pornography in a priest's office. They went to the bishop of Erie and explained that "they did not want to get Bower in trouble, they wanted him to get help with his issues with child pornography."<sup>70</sup> In her novel, *Assault on Innocence*, a fictionalized

<sup>65</sup>Berry, "The Tragedy of Gilbert Gauthier."

<sup>66</sup>PA Grand Jury, 225 as reported in 1994 but abuse taking place "in the 1960s."

<sup>67</sup>Memorandum from Leah McCluskey, April 2, 2007. BA-Chicago-Job-112, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/documents-BA-Chicago-Job-111-112.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup>Transcript of Proceedings – Sentencing, 64, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/criminal-trials-US-v-McGuire-2009-02-11-doc-227-Sentencing>.

<sup>69</sup>Affidavit by R. J. May12, 2004. BA-Davenport-Janssen-1-110.

<sup>70</sup>Reverend Robert F. Bower, PA Grand Jury 401.

account of the abuse of her son, Hilary Stiles [Jeanne Miller] has another mother explain, “We don’t resent or hate him at all. We think he’s a sick person and you can’t hate a sick person.”<sup>71</sup> In 1962, when yet another Wisconsin child was abused by Oswald Krusing, the predator priest wrote to the auxiliary bishop that the [abused] boy’s mother had called him and was “kind and reassuring” and had emphasized that there would be no “publicity or scandal.”<sup>72</sup> She sent him a relic and holy card of St. Rita “attached to a pretty handkerchief,” stating that she and her family “would ever pray for me, for my soul and that there be no scandal or trouble.”<sup>73</sup> While this predator easily could have been lying, both priests and diocesan officials relied on women to be charitable and forgiving. Church leaders trusted that patient mothers would seek harmony and healing. They depended on women to keep things in private, safely ensconced within the woman’s sphere.

And yet, mothers found that their accepting and nurturing orientation was never reciprocated. More often, their concern was exploited. Two days after the Erie mother went to the bishop about the child pornography, she was fired from her position working in the diocese.<sup>74</sup> She told the Pennsylvania Grand Jury that the bishop “preached to them and made them feel guilty to the point that they left the meeting in tears. They were told they were destroying Bower and the Church.”<sup>75</sup> In 1978, a mother had done the unusual act of calling the Pittsburgh police department and eventually filing criminal charges against a predator for molesting her two sons. However, when the case came up for a preliminary hearing, the charges were dismissed. The day before, the bishop had called her and told her that the priest would get therapy, as the church had good psychiatrists and doctors. “Let the church handle it,” he warned. The diocesan attorneys then scared her sons and demanded to know why she wanted to “hurt the church?”<sup>76</sup> She dropped the case.

Women who worked for the church were especially vulnerable to such intimidation. When another mother reported the advances of a predator, she felt she did so “at great risk to her employment” because she worked as a teacher in the diocese.<sup>77</sup> The Pennsylvania Grand Jury report summarized how, in the 1970s, a victim was told by a predator priest that his “mother would lose her job in the school kitchen, and he would be kicked out of school,” if he told anyone what was happening to him.<sup>78</sup> Women had been told on every occasion that the highest moral value was love and compassion. Many of them embraced and acted on those values. The shock of experiencing an intimidating and heartless clerical establishment must have been devastating.

### Fathers and the Fatherless

Mothers were told constantly that they were designed by God to nurture, especially their children. But nurturing, like most parental activity, was gendered. The rules of

<sup>71</sup>Hilary Stiles [Jeanne Miller], *Assault on Innocence* (Albuquerque, NM: B & K Publishers, 1987), 214.

<sup>72</sup>Oswald G. Krusing to Roman R. Atkielski, March 22, 1962. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-042.

<sup>73</sup>Oswald G. Krusing to Roman R. Atkielski, March 22, 1962. BA-Milwaukee-Krusing-080 [second letter sent the same day].

<sup>74</sup>Reverend Robert F. Bower, PA Grand Jury, 401.

<sup>75</sup>Reverend Robert F. Bower, PA Grand Jury, 402.

<sup>76</sup>Reverend Anthony J. Cipolla, PA Grand Jury, 618–621.

<sup>77</sup>Reverend Samuel B. Slocum, PA Grand Jury, 465.

<sup>78</sup>Reverend Jerry (John) Kucan, PA Grand Jury, 429.

gender essentialism divided child-rearing practices. Mothers could tend to babies and girls, but they could not raise boys up to become men. Boys would not—on their own—become “normal,” independent, breadwinning men unless they had appropriate male influence. Fathers needed to model the duties and responsibilities of manhood so that boys could take their rightful place in a growing American economy. It was also assumed that without a man in the home, a mother could not create an appropriate moral and religious atmosphere. No matter how well-intentioned mothers were, they could not fulfill the male role in the household.

Families where the father was missing—either by death, divorce, illness, or intense work responsibilities—were “broken.” The opposite of the good Catholic home was the broken home. In the broken home, an absent father made it such that boys could not easily be made into men. Obviously, the problem of broken homes and absent fathers was not unique to Catholics. In 1942, Philip Wylie warned in *A Nation of Vipers* about the inadequate father and the overbearing mother. Using Freud as his point person, Wylie condemn “momism.” A dominating mother would either produce a “mama’s boy” who is a homosexual or an aggressive juvenile delinquent. In 1959, George Kelly, a New York parish priest warned in *The Catholic Family Handbook*, that men who have “mentally divorced themselves” from the family had left their homes “in a state of anarchy or matriarchy.”<sup>79</sup> Postwar America—to this present day—was obsessed with how to compensate for the missing father and to avoid “matriarchy.” It was not simply that boys would not grow up to be men; it was that they would grow up to be homosexuals.

The church’s position on divorce made Catholics particularly susceptible to fears of broken homes. If a marriage failed, the divorced could only re-marry sacramentally if they pursued the cumbersome process of annulment. Good Catholics stayed married until death. Bad Catholics divorced and remarried. Until recent decades, with its more liberalized attitudes toward divorce and more available annulments, parents had a difficult time re-marrying and remaining fully Catholic. Mothers, who were expected to be the foundation of the family, were held particularly responsible when a marriage failed. Even if a woman had been deserted by her husband or had been abused, divorce signaled her moral failing. Divorced Catholic women were emotionally, financially, and spiritually vulnerable. Their sons were “fatherless.” No one was in the home to model appropriate Catholic masculinity.

Finding an appropriate father figure who could mentor boys was no easy task in postwar America. Beginning in the 1930s, Americans became wary of the unattached, single male. The economic instability of the Depression created fear of the unemployed, transient “wolf” who preyed on “lamb”—young, fatherless boys. The Kinsey Report of the 1940s only made matters worse by noting the widespread nature of homosexual behavior. By the 1950s, Americans worried that sexual perversion might be seeping into their fatherless homes. Popular culture warned of a “homosexual menace” of single adult men who lured young boys into an underworld of hustling, pornography, and prostitution. Homosexuals had even “infiltrated” the government. Postwar sex panics cultivated a heightened fear of strangers, making mothers even more worried about their “fatherless” children. Catholic mothers knew that they could not sufficiently model manhood. Success in finding the appropriate male “substitute father” and avoiding “smother love” was a fraught process.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup>George Kelly, *The Catholic Family Handbook* (New York: Random House, 1959), 19.

<sup>80</sup>On the origins of the worries about single men, see Margot Canaday, “‘Most Fags are Floaters’: The Problem of ‘Unattached Persons’ during the Early New Deal, 1933–1935,” in *Straight State: Sexuality*

It was not, then, simply because families were chaotic and disorganized that predator priests entered into homes. Rather, it was also the desire of mothers and sons to find safe “father figures” that enabled priests to be trusted with children. By definition, priests had the moral and educational virtues needed to be cultivated in boys. These special men were conduits to different classes, to different lives. Good Catholics did not believe priests had undesirable masculine traits. Their commitment to celibacy supposedly freed them from sexual attraction to single mothers. While mothers might have hoped that a vocation might be cultivated by contact with *alter Christus*, they also simply wanted trusted male figures to help them rear manly men.

Victims frequently mentioned that their trust had been crushed by such “father figures.” A Pittsburgh boy, who was molested for four years, first served as an altar boy to a predator who he recalled “became a father figure” to him.<sup>81</sup> Another boy’s mother allowed him to stay overnight at the rectory of a predator because “his father was no longer around. She wanted him to spend time with a man, particularly a priest, for a role model.”<sup>82</sup> In New Hampshire, a boy’s father had died, and “his mother thought that he needed a male mentor.” She invited the priest into their home and asked him “to help her son.”<sup>83</sup> In Milwaukee, a boy knew that what he was doing with a priest predator was wrong, but he was “afraid to confront it because he looked up to Fr. Marv as a father figure whom he needed.”<sup>84</sup> The priest and the mother formed an unspoken alliance to craft a boy into a worthy man, which could open the family up to abuse.

Predators took boys bowling, fishing, camping, and waterskiing—all manly activities. One bought his victim a dirt bike, hockey equipment, and even a drum set.<sup>85</sup> Predators justified their over-involvement with children as being misinterpreted because they were “taking the role of father too seriously.”<sup>86</sup> Priests, too, were searching for ways to be fathers. Gender essentialism not only taught that mothers could not raise their own sons because they might turn their boys into “sissies,” but it gave priests the right by

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*and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 107ff. On the impact of the Kinsey Report, see Vern L. Bullough, “Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Report: Historical Overview and Lasting Contributions.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 35 (1998): 127–131. On the postwar fears of homosexuality, see John D’Emilio’s classic “Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America” in his *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57–73; and Stacy Braukman, “‘Nothing Else Matters but Sex’: Cold War Narratives of Deviance and the Search for Lesbian Teachers in Florida, 1959–1963,” *Feminist Studies* 27 (Fall 2001): 553–575. On stranger anxiety, George Chauncey, Jr., “The Postwar Sex Crime Panic,” in William Graebner, *True Stories from the American Past* (vol. 2) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 160–178. On homosexuals “infiltrating” the government, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). The terms “substitute father” and “smother love” come from the table of contents for Father Kelly’s *The Catholic Handbook* as it is reprinted in the EWTN “Catholicism Library,” <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/catholic-family-handbook-10441>.

<sup>81</sup>Reverend Anthony J. Cipolla, PA Grand Jury 622.

<sup>82</sup>Reverend Robert Castelucci, PA Grand Jury 607.

<sup>83</sup>Office of the Attorney General, Report on the Investigation of the Diocese of Manchester [New Hampshire] 2003. Paul Aube [molester], D. John Doe LIX [victim]—Claremont, NH, 28, <https://www.nishop-accountability.org/resources/resource-files/reports/ManchesterReport03Aube.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Definitive Sentence in the Case of Marvin T. Knighton,” BA-Milwaukee-Knighton-130.

<sup>85</sup>Reverend Charles J. Chatt, PA Grand Jury 614.

<sup>86</sup>Archdiocese of Chicago, Vicar of Priests, to “file,” July 10, 1990. BA-Chicago-Holihan-279, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/documents-BA-Chicago-Holihan-279.pdf>.

their *mere gender* to be fathers. Thus, priests claimed access to their victims. What mothers could not provide, pretend-fathers would.

While mothers looked for priests who could be “fathers” and model appropriate masculinity, boys were drawn to predators who behaved like naughty uncles. Boys, too, sought male companionship but not the type that would have been approved of by their mothers. Predator priests may have taught boys how to fish and water ski, but they also introduced them to the illicit (yet desirable) behaviors of men. Often a small group of “chosen” boys were offered “perks” that would not be available at home. To keep boys returning for more abuse, predator priests offered alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, pornographic magazines, and dirty movies. They initiated boys into sex, willingly or not. It was the very “perverted” masculinity their mothers worried about that predator priests sought to teach their sons. Predators also told their victims that only *they* understood what the boy was really all about, and only *they* would listen to youthful problems. Predator priests offered boys a key element of manhood: independence from the family—for a price, of course.

Priests may have had access to boys because their mothers believed these predators to be gentlemen, but boys might stay with their molesters because they indulged them in the dark arts of masculinity. Predators offered boys a chance to experience life away from home. Mothers may have hoped their sons were transforming into choir boys like those pictured in *Going My Way* (1942), who crooned with Father Chuck in the church basement. A group of boys aligned with a predator, however, became a gang with a secret. “The youngster is chained to secrecy,” Richard Sipe observed, “because he has indulged in a whole series of ‘forbidden’ things, not just sex.”<sup>87</sup> Boys stayed with predators because they, too, sought to become “men”—only men different from what their mothers wanted. The rectory or the cabin became a male space out of the control of women. The longing for masculinity fueled the predator/victim relationship.

## Conclusion

Catholic clergy sex abuse preceded the tumultuous period of the 1960s and 1970s and continued through the more conservative 1980s and 1990s. What is clear from the abuse narratives is that no matter what period Catholics lived in physically, many continued to live in the world of mid-century America. The skepticism of the 1960s, which challenged the institutions of government and religion as well as gender roles, seemingly made little impact on the mothers and fathers who were responding to the “abnormal” things happening in their homes. Likewise, the election of the first Catholic president and the movement of Catholics into the professions did not give the laity enough confidence to confront their clergy. The “spirit” of Vatican II, which asked Catholics to be more involved in their church and permitted them to be more “modern,” also appears to have had little influence on how these families responded to abuse. Indeed, liberal changes in church life seemed to signal (unjustly it seems) that church leaders actually *cared* about their parishioners. If the parish priest was friendly and shared authority, shouldn’t the bishops as well? In spite of consistent reports of abuse, many Catholics continued to respect their clerical leaders, find security in rules, and doubt the reports of their children.

The majority of Catholic families did not encounter clerical abuse. Cultural and religious changes after World War II certainly altered Catholic homes, as they did the

<sup>87</sup>A. W. Richard Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis: A Secret World Revisited* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), 217.

homes of all Americans. Still, what is significant about the sex abuse documentation is how enduring many mid-century values were to a subset of Catholic families. Even in the period of suburban, post-ghetto Catholicism, parents responded positively to the hierarchy's desires to avoid "scandal." Catholic problems needed to be kept in-house. Indeed, the one threat that parents had—and that they consistently voiced in frustration—was that they were going to make the abuse "public." In other words, to move the narrative from the domestic, private, space of the home (or middle ground of the church) into the public spaces of police, lawyers, judges, newspaper reporters—the imagined "non-Catholic" world. When parents did "go public," they risked ostracism from their parishes and communities. Fathers especially had not kept the problem "at home" and instead opened up the church to scandal. Postwar Catholics left the ethnic "ghetto" but elements lingered.

Likewise, the embracing of modern notions of healing, like psychiatry, did not seem to stop predator priests from attacking children in the most brutal ways. Mothers, convinced of the naturalness and virtue of charity, accepted the effectiveness of therapeutic culture. Mothers cared for priests in their homes, and if a priest became a predator, mothers wanted him to be cared for in hospitals and retreat houses. Clergy sex abuse narratives not only document how bishops assumed modern psychiatry would "cure" predator priests, but they also illustrate how average parish women lived out Christian ethics in their homes and churches.<sup>88</sup>

When a crisis occurred, mothers and fathers responded in highly gendered ways. Mothers sought to create harmony in their homes, often isolating both their husbands and the victims from being part of the narrative. Good Catholics (even those who drank too much with priest buddies or who were divorced and raising "fatherless" sons) responded in ways that indicated that they accepted notions of home life and gender essentialism reflective of mid-century values. Priests were considered to be *alter Christus*, with all the supernatural specialness that this entailed. Priests were also accepted as "substitute fathers" because gender essentialism told single mothers they certainly could not properly transform boys into men. The intense fear that a boy could become a homosexual only underscored the fear of gender confusion, a fear that reflects Cold War homophobia rather than post-Stonewall gay liberation. Boys themselves wanted to learn the dark arts of masculinity and thus became vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Girls endured abuse because they had "reputations" that needed to be "upheld." In his 1955 handbook on family life, Father George Kelly includes a section called "What

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<sup>88</sup>On the key role of caring in supporting patriarchy and the misogyny that results when men feel they are not cared for by women, see Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) especially her discussion of "himpathy," the excessive empathy for male perpetrators of sexual violence (196) and how it enables less concern for the actual victims of that violence (201). Within Catholicism, the idealization of Mary makes selfless, unconditional love a highly valued maternal trait. An earlier feminist reflection on this is the section "Mother" in Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976). The conflation of the Virgin Mary with the virtuous aspects of all women was articulated by John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, where he wrote "In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement," [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031987\\_redemptoris-mater.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html).

to do if your family is ‘disgraced.’”<sup>89</sup> A decade later, the sexual and cultural revolution appears not to have kept mothers and fathers from feeling “disgraced.” It is notable that Father Kelly’s book is currently available, on-line, in the ETWN Catholicism “library” under “family life.” Girls may have received treats or toys from their abusers, but, unlike boys, they were not being transformed into “women.” The gender essentialism that permitted a predator priest to bring boys to his cabin on the lake prevented the predator from taking a coterie of girls. Father might be celibate, but he still was a man.

The Catholic domestic system told parents they should pursue a righteous and spiritual home life. For most Catholics, this infrastructure *did not* result in the abuse of children. However, in many cases the desire to care for priests, to uphold distinct gender roles and heteronormativity, and to avoid scandal both in the parish and the home opened up families to predators. The Wisconsin mothers were very concerned that the bishop knew they were good Catholics who sent their children to Catholic schools and who were not “cranks.” Mothers believed they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, and yet their homes were not places of safety and spirituality. Their very embrace of a system of domestic Catholicism had opened them up for abuse.

This article is the result of collaboration with a working group sponsored by the Cushman Center at the University of Notre Dame, “Gender, Sex, and Power: Towards a History of Clergy Sex Abuse in the U.S. Catholic Church.” I would particularly like to thank the project organizers: Kathleen Sprows Cummings, Peter Cajka, Robert Orsi, and Terence McKiernan.

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<sup>89</sup>This is a subsection of Chapter 10, “Where to Get Help When in Trouble,” in George Kelly’s *The Catholic Family Handbook*. George Anthony Kelly was born in 1919 in New York City and was ordained in 1942. In 1955, Francis Cardinal Spellman appointed him director of “Family Life” for the New York Archdiocese. Kelly had recently completed a doctorate at Catholic University in the social sciences. In 1958, Random House published Kelly’s *The Catholic Marriage Manual*. According to Monsignor Michael Wren it sold “a quarter-million copies and netted him almost a quarter-million dollars in royalties,” which Kelly donated to a charity. Michael Wren, “Remembering Msgr. Kelly,” *Catholic Culture*, last modified October 1, 2004, <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=33159>. Pleased with the sales, a year later Random House published *The Catholic Family Handbook*, which contained a forward by Cardinal Spellman. Paperback editions were published in the early 1960s, but as late as 2019 “Katie” on the site “Goodreads” called it an “excellent book” and “Amy” wrote it was “another gem for the Catholic family.” Kelly would eventually publish five bestsellers for Random House. Kelly was on the conservative side of post-Vatican II controversies over birth control. He was appointed to the Pope Paul VI birth control commission and sided against altering Catholic anti-contraceptive views. Kelly, however, was a progressive when it came to labor (*Church and the American Poor*, 1976). His *The Battle for the American Church* was published by Doubleday in 1979 and reprinted by Ignatius Press in 1995. From that point, he was a favorite writer of Catholic traditionalists. Kelly’s autobiography, *In My Father’s House*, was published 1989 by Doubleday. He died in 2004.

**Cite this article:** McDannell, Colleen. “‘I Confided in My Mother and She Called the Archdiocese’: Parents and Clergy Sex Abuse.” *Church History* 92, no. 1 (March 2023): 122–144. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640723000689>.