

A PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE ON CLERICALISM AND CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

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INTRODUCTION

The dangers of clericalism are not limited to the context of celibate ministry. Thus, eliminating celibacy from the equation does not eliminate the problems of abusive clergy and institutional coverup. Even a cursory look at non-celibate contexts reveals that clerical celibacy and enforced sexual chastity, as problematic as these aspects of the Roman Catholic priesthood may be, cannot account for the wider problem of clergy sexual abuse.

This chapter, written from a Protestant viewpoint in which married clergy are the norm, addresses clericalism as a structural issue of distorted power relations within the church. A professional ethics standpoint, focusing on the fiduciary duty and sacred trust of the role of clergy, provides the necessary grounding for understanding power and accountability in ministry. The problem of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy provides a focal point for discussion. When clericalism is understood as a distortion of power, abuse prevention and response must focus on prioritizing the needs of victim-survivors and redistributing power in just ways. Church structures that create barriers to justice for victim-survivors compound the problem of clericalism through institutional betrayal, a concept of betrayal theory that describes the psychological distress caused by a trusted institution that protects itself and its leadership rather than those persons harmed by the institution.

While power-laden attitudes about sex and gender are part of the social context enabling clericalism in both celibate and non-celibate contexts, this chapter focuses on the power of the clerical role as a factor common to both. Reforming clericalism necessitates the creation of institutional structures and spaces for victims to be heard, believed, and supported. Of particular importance to overcoming clericalism is the full inclusion of laity in practices of accountability and justice-making in the church. Dismantling clericalism involves all members of the faith community engaging in practices of institutional courage. All members of religious institutions must exercise moral responsibility for the problem of clericalism by leveraging the resources of the community to recognize, name, call out, remediate, and redress sexual abuse by clergy, prioritizing justice for victim-survivors.

I. CLERICALISM AND ABUSE

Clericalism has individual, collective, and institutional aspects. *Clericalism* is a combination of institutional structures, group dynamics, mindset, and an ethos in which clergy are accorded influence and privilege disproportionate to their accountability and authority. The term *clergy* refers to persons ordained as bishops, deacons, and presbyters (priests). However, the concepts in this chapter pertain to persons in any ministerial role of leadership authorized by or representing the church, whether paid or unpaid. Individually, clergy exhibit the problem of clericalism when

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acting above the law or policy, without adequate checks on their behavior. Collectively, clergy exhibit clericalism when they collude to protect each other and the status of their role over and against the well-being of the people they serve. Institutionally, clericalism prioritizes protecting the church and its leadership over accountability, justice, and the best interests of its most vulnerable members.

Victims of sexual abuse by clergy are particularly susceptible to the dynamics of clericalism. Clericalism exacerbates and compounds the problem of inappropriate intimacy between clergy and the persons they serve, creating systemic barriers to justice and healing.

Evidence of sexual abuse by clergy is widespread. For example, an independent inquiry, established in 2015, completed its investigation of child sexual abuse in England and Wales in October 2022. Foremost of those institutions investigated were 38 religious organizations, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church.¹ In the United States, investigative journalists in 2018 and 2019 uncovered hundreds of allegations against independent and Southern Baptist ministers over a period of decades.² Pastoral offenders populate Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and all other Christian communions, as well. In an anonymous survey of thousands of United Methodist clergy, 50% reported having “served a church where sexual misconduct by a ministerial leader occurred in its history.”³ Clergy sexual abuse is not an isolated denominational problem.

Clericalism infects all churches to the extent that clergy and other ministers are recognized, set apart, authorized, and entrusted with spiritual and temporal leadership and not held accountable. Furthermore, Christian institutions hold no monopoly on abusive behavior. In a 2008 US national survey, Diana R. Garland and Mark Chaves found that 3% of women who had attended a congregation (of any faith) in the past month reported that, at some point in their adult lives, they had been the object of “sexual advances or propositions” by their own religious leader.⁴ Furthermore, they discovered, “92% of these sexual advances had been made in secret.” Incidents of leaders who abuse their power occur in all faith traditions and in every helping profession. Wherever and whenever persons in positions of power are not held accountable, the potential for abuse exists. Clericalism exacerbates the problem of abuse when faith leaders participate in dysfunctional relations to power, truth-telling, and intimacy.

¹ Alexis Jay, Malcolm Evans, Ivor Frank, Drusilla Sharpling, “The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse,” HC 720, October 2022, https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/31216/view/report-independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-abuse-october-2022_0.pdf.

² Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, John Tedesco, “Abuse of Faith: Investigation Reveals 700 Victims of Southern Baptist Sexual Abuse Over 20 Years,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 2019, <https://www.chron.com/news/investigations/article/Investigation-reveals-700-victims-of-Southern-13591612.php>; Sarah Smith, “Hundreds of Sex Abuse Allegations Found in Fundamental Baptist Churches Across U.S.,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 14, 2018, <https://www.star-telegram.com/entertainment/living/religion/article222576310.html>.

³ Unpublished survey data collected by the author.

⁴ Diana R. Garland, “The Prevalence of Clergy Sexual Misconduct with Adults: A Research Study—Executive Summary,” Baylor University, n.d., <https://socialwork.web.baylor.edu/executive-summary>. These researchers defined clergy sexual misconduct as behavior by “religious leaders who make sexual advances or propositions to persons in the congregations they serve.”

II. CLERICALISM AND POWER

In his 20 August 2018 letter to the people of God, Pope Francis directly acknowledged the suffering caused by sexual abuse of minors by clerics and persons consecrated by the Roman Catholic Church. In this letter, he implicated clericalism as an underlying factor in the worldwide sexual abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church. It was not a problem of isolated individuals but rather a systemic issue: Francis's letter was prompted by a report of a thousand victim-survivors. Thus, calling out clericalism as "a peculiar way of understanding the Church's authority," Pope Francis insisted, "To say 'no' to abuse is to say an emphatic 'no' to all forms of clericalism."⁵ Clericalism enables abuse through power relations that distort healthy relationships.

The dynamics of clericalism are found among all professionals who think they are inherently deserving of privilege and not accountable to anyone outside their guild. When the profession is ministry and the institution is the church, though, these dynamics take on divine sanction. As initially defined in the Introduction to this volume, clericalism is "the assertion or assumption of undue prerogatives by or on behalf of clergy." This dynamic creates a theological distortion in which the church (the body of Christ) is set against the laity (the people of God) and the interests of clergy (representatives of the church) are set against serving the most vulnerable (the least of these, with whom Jesus identified). When clergy understand their ministry in terms of power rather than service, clericalism becomes a stumbling block to the kingdom of heaven.

This distortion of power is a group dynamic rather than an individual problem. While one sexual predator in clerical garb is a grievous problem, that person's abusive behavior is enabled and encouraged by a communal ethos among clergy who see their power as deserved and unchecked. Clericalism creates church structures that favor the protection of clergy and the church as an institution over the well-being of laity and victim-survivors. Thus, clergy sexual misconduct is not solely a problem of individual sin. Treating it as such ignores the institutional context that condones, excuses, and colludes with abuse by clergy, undermining trust and accountability within the church.

Clericalism implicates clergy as a group as well as individual perpetrators and the institution that enables them. Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul J. Schutz offered a detailed and insightful analysis of clericalism through the project, *Taking Responsibility: Jesuit Educational Institutions Confront the Causes and Legacy of Sexual Abuse*.⁶ They argued that "hierarchical understandings of power" in the Roman Catholic Church are "inseparable from clericalism."⁷ This understanding of clericalism is similar to Ibram X. Kendi's description of racism as a structural rather than

⁵ Pope Francis, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God," 20 August 2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/08/20/0578/01246.html#ingl>.

⁶ Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul J. Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples': Understanding Clergy Perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem & Cultivating Strategies for Change* (Fordham University 2022), <https://takingresponsibility.ace.fordham.edu/santa-clara-structural-clericalism/>. On the culture of clericalism in the US Roman Catholic Church as a structural problem, see also Jason Blakely, "Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Clericalism," *America Magazine*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/23/sexual-abuse-and-culture-clericalism>.

⁷ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples'*, 8.

individual problem, deserving a structural solution.⁸ Where Kendi offered anti-racism, Rubio and Schutz offered anti-clericalism as a framework to address the problem, based on “a relational understanding of power.”⁹ They claimed, “anyone (ordained, religious, or lay) can be clericalist, and anyone can be anti-clericalist [because] clericalism is best viewed as a structural reality rather than an individual vice.”¹⁰ Thus, to address the problem of clericalism is not to blame clergy alone but rather to indict everyone who supports systems of distorted power relations in the church at the expense of the most vulnerable.

III. SEX, GENDER, AND POWER

To address the problem of clericalism adequately, we must account precisely for power within church institutions. Clericalism is not merely a group ethos. It is an institutionally sanctioned distortion of power benefitting persons in ministerial roles of leadership. It is the church protecting its own leadership at the expense of those the church is called to serve. In their systemic analysis, Rubio and Schutz identified three factors of clericalism linked to abuse: sex, gender, and power.¹¹ Their analysis resonates with that of Shaji George Kochuthara’s examination of the Roman Catholic sexual abuse scandal in India, found in this volume and elsewhere. Kochuthara suggested reforms addressing sexuality, structures of patriarchy, and priestly power.¹² When we recognize clericalism as an institutional dynamic, we are freed to consider how individuals—laity and clergy alike—can be complicit on a systemic level.

Christians of all traditions struggle with complicated legacies regarding sex and faith. Attitudes and teachings about sexuality among US Protestants ranges from “purity culture,” in which “sexuality education” is often limited to the message to abstain until marriage,¹³ to an in-depth, life-long sexuality education curriculum based on national educational guidelines.¹⁴ Thus, sex is “an ambivalent good,” according to Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton in a 1980s study of how white, mainline Protestant clergy handle their sexuality.¹⁵ These researchers observed that “power, role, and even our experiences of sexuality are socially constructed.”¹⁶ Thus, ecclesial setting significantly shapes our understanding of the sexuality of clergy.

Institutions and traditions matter. For example, The United Methodist Church declares that “sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons” and, until May 2024, prohibited the ordination of

⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist* (London: One World, 2019); Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond ‘Bad Apples,’* 9.

⁹ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond ‘Bad Apples,’* 8.

¹⁰ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond ‘Bad Apples,’* 1.

¹¹ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond ‘Bad Apples,’* 1, 8.

¹² Shaji George Kochuthara, “The Sexual Abuse Scandal and a New Ethical Horizon A Perspective from India,” *Theological Studies* 80 no. 4 (2019): 948, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919874517>.

¹³ See for example, Elle Thwaites, “The Impact of Christian Purity Culture is Still Being Felt – Including in Britain,” *The Conversation*, June 28, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/the-impact-of-christian-purity-culture-is-still-being-felt-including-in-britain-182907#>.

¹⁴ United Church of Christ, “Our Whole Lives,” https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/sexuality-and-our-faith/justice_sexuality-education_our-whole-lives/.

¹⁵ Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 12, 20.

¹⁶ Lebacqz and Barton, *Sex in the Parish*, 242.

“self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.”¹⁷ United Methodist clergy can be married, single, divorced, or remarried after divorce, reflecting a complicated and multivalent understanding of sexuality. Likewise, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Episcopal Church (US) allow ordination of single and partnered gay and lesbian persons. Nevertheless, Protestants generally share with Roman Catholics a pervasive cultural shame about sexuality, leading most to treat sexuality as a taboo topic of conversation.¹⁸

Protestant teachings about gender are equally problematic and diverse. As with sex, gender attitudes run the gamut, from hypermasculine images embedded within a strict gender binary to more inclusive understandings of gender as a spectrum of socially constructed identities. On one hand, many Protestant traditions do not ordain females and share with Roman Catholicism beliefs about gender complementarianism. These conservative churches operate with a gender hierarchy and rely exclusively on capitalized, third person masculine pronouns to refer to God. Liberal Protestant traditions, on the other hand, teach gender equality and explicitly reject complementarianism. Ordained offices and roles in liberal Protestant denominations are open to women and men equally, as well as, in some contexts, transgender and non-binary persons. Wider, cultural patterns of patriarchal power shape church ethos and practice, though, even in ecclesial settings that promote full gender equality.¹⁹

Understanding the power of clergy—and the accountability necessary for ethical exercise of their role—is essential to addressing clericalism. In their survey data, Rubio and Schutz reported, “respondents consistently identified positional power, or the use of authority and influence gained through ordination, as a key factor” in clergy perpetrated sexual abuse.²⁰ Likewise, Lebacqz and Barton developed a role-based sexual ethic for clergy, attentive to power and institutional structures.²¹ Clerical power is intertwined with sexuality and patriarchy in both Protestant and Roman Catholic contexts. Thus, an assessment by Rubio and Schutz applies equally to non-celibate contexts: “isolation, a lack of intimacy, and feelings of powerlessness or heightened power linked to a sense of moral superiority [are] potentially dangerous, abuse-enabling factors” among clergy.²² Ministry is an inherently power-laden endeavor, requiring not only a conceptual understanding of power but also vigilance in its application.

Clericalism exists when institutional structures enable and abet clergy in their misunderstanding and misuse of power. The problem is twofold. First, clergy have power in the ministerial role. To

¹⁷ *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), paras. 161.G and 304.3.

¹⁸ To address sexual shame in Christianity, we need truth-tellers such as: Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999); Marvin M. Ellison, *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012); and Mark D. Jordan, *Telling Truths in Church: Scandal, Flesh, and Christian Speech* (Boston: Beacon, 2003).

¹⁹ The detailed dynamics of sexuality and gender among clergy in Protestant contexts are deserving of their own analysis and are beyond the scope of the current chapter. For a discussion of sexuality and clergy ethics in United Methodism, see Darryl W. Stephens, *Methodist Morals: Social Principles in the Public Church's Witness* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2016), 145–76.

²⁰ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 22.

²¹ Lebacqz and Barton, *Sex in the Parish*, 98, 112. On role-based ethics, see also Karen Lebacqz, “Love Your Enemy: Love, Power, and Sexual Ethics,” in *Sex & Gender: Christian Ethical Reflections*, edited by Mary Jo Iozzio and Patricia Beattie Jung, 69–93 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 78.

²² Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 23.

imply an opposition between power and service risks ignoring the power inherent to the role of clergy. Clericalism is not due to power as such but rather to abuses of power and to power as an end in itself. Clergy should use their power in service to others, not to satisfy their own needs and desires. Second, clericalism is not merely a mistaken mindset. Misunderstanding power is not yet clericalism, even if this misunderstanding is endemic to clergy. Clericalism is present when power is distorted, leaving abusers unaccountable to institutionalized policies, procedures, and just practices.

IV. POWER AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Grounding our understanding of clerical power in a framework of professional ethics helps address the institutional structures of clericalism in both celibate and non-celibate contexts. Professional ethics pertains to the stated and unstated ethical obligations and moral responsibilities of a particular role. A central aspect of professional ethics for ministry is the responsible use of power in positions of leadership authorized by or representing the church, within the church or other settings. A clear articulation of the nature of power and professional ethics for ministry is necessary for creating appropriate structures of accountability for clergy.²³

Power is influence, the ability to sway another person's beliefs and behaviors. In their ministry settings, clergy have significant power in relation to the people they serve. Due to the power differential between clergyperson and congregant, the congregant is considered vulnerable in relation to the clergyperson. Power, power differentials, and the resultant vulnerability of laity are not inherently bad aspects of ministry; they are simply realities that must be recognized and handled responsibly.²⁴

Fiduciary duty describes the responsible use of power by a helping professional. To wield clerical power responsibly requires an awareness of the power of the ministerial role. Power is derived from resources. In matters of faith, a clergyperson has substantial resources, including theological education, pastoral training, institutional backing, and familiarity with spiritual disciplines. When a clergyperson serves someone in the context of ministry, the best interests of the person being served must be prioritized. The responsibility to act in the best interests of those served in ministry is a fiduciary duty, like that of other helping professions, such as law, medicine, nursing, social work, and financial advising. Unlike financial advisors, some of whom are not fiduciaries, all persons in ministry are entrusted to act in the best interests of those they serve.

The term *sacred trust* encapsulates this ethic. The relationship between laity and clergy is a sacred trust. In the covenant of church life, laity entrust clergy with certain responsibilities and clergy

²³ My understanding of professional ethics for ministry is greatly influenced by the work of Marie Fortune and the FaithTrust Institute. I have written about the ideas in this section previously: Darryl W. Stephens, "Fiduciary Duty and Sacred Trust," in *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*, edited by Darryl W. Stephens and Patricia Beattie Jung, 23–33 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

²⁴ See Richard M. Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010), 117–55; Lebacqz and Barton, *Sex in the Parish*, 93–112; Lauren D. Sawyer, Emily Cohen, and Annie Mesaros, eds., *Responding to Spiritual Leader Misconduct: A Handbook* (Seattle: FaithTrust Institute, 2022), 55–71, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240419163605/https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/news/new-resource-responding-to-spiritual-leader-misconduct>.

accept that trust.²⁵ This trust is sacred in that clergy represent the holy, the church, and the divine. Lebacqz and Barton referred to this aspect as “the numinous dimension” of the role.²⁶ As a “symbolic representative of the holy,” a clergyperson’s actions, opinions, and words have a “sacred weight,” increasing the power of their professional role.²⁷ Laity entrust clergy to maintain a connection to the holy, to guard the faith and represent the church, and to serve as divine intercessor, interpreter, or teacher. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the “sacred power” of the “hierarchical priesthood” distinguishes clergy from laity, expressed through teaching, ruling, and service to the faithful.²⁸ The Roman Catholic theology of a difference in “essence” between laity and clergy heightens this sense of sacred power.²⁹ While Protestants do not teach an ontological difference between laity and clergy, a sacred trust still characterizes their relationship.

The set-apartness of clergy is true even in Christian traditions that teach the priesthood of all believers and promote a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Clergy in all church traditions are recognized as having a close connection to the divine—a connection that laity yearn to be near and to share. Thus, clergy are perceived to be holy and representative of God, who is always good. This perception renders clergy—who are subject to sin as much as the rest of us—attractive and trustworthy, a potent combination that can easily be manipulated by clergy for their own desires. Laity entrusting clergy with the stewardship and guidance of spiritual life, individually and communally, “makes the ministerial relationship one of unequal power.”³⁰ To hold this sacred trust responsibly, clergy must always act in the best interests of those they serve.

V. POWER, TRUST, AND AUTHORITY

Clerical power derives from the sacred trust of ministry. Trust is social capital that is contextually valued. A clergyperson’s influence on an individual depends greatly on the degree of trust conferred. If a person does not trust a clergyperson, the clergyperson’s opinions on matters of faith will have little influence on them. For example, the influence of a young, part-time ministry intern fresh out of seminary would generally be much less than that of a senior pastor in her twentieth year of ministry. In addition to relative age and experience, factors such as gender, race, class, education, as well as height, other physical characteristics, and personality contribute to the degree of trust and power conferred to an individual clergyperson. A clergyperson conferred great trust in one congregation or ministry setting may be greeted with suspicion or distrust in a different setting. Thus, the same ministry intern might be accorded much greater trust by youth in the congregation who feel a disconnect with the older generation—including the senior pastor.

Whatever its contextual situation, however, power is reinforced by authority. In the person and role of clergy, we find a confluence of the three types of authority identified by Max Weber: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Clergy embody a traditional hierarchy of knowledge

²⁵ Gula, *Just Ministry*, 27.

²⁶ Lebacqz and Barton, *Sex in the Parish*, 110, 130.

²⁷ Gula, *Just Ministry*, 30.

²⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 10, 18.

²⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 10. Because it contributes to an unhealthy conception of priestly power, Kochuthara argued for a reconsideration of the Roman Catholic “theology of ontological difference brought about by the ordination.” Kochuthara, “The Sexual Abuse Scandal,” 938.

³⁰ Gula, *Just Ministry*, 29.

and power; they are often charismatic in both their role and personality; and church law provides them access and privilege not afforded others. In practical terms, clergy have institutional backing through identified roles and responsibilities. For example, clergy are authorized by the church to communicate the gospel, exemplify a life of discipleship, and teach and lead others in the life of faith. This authority carries significant influence on persons who look to the church and its clergy for spiritual guidance and a connection to the holy. When the presumed holiness of clergy is combined with the “positional power that accompanies ordination” in hierarchical church structures, the power differential is compounded.³¹ Clerical power is heightened by traditions that claim exclusivity in religious matters, such as teaching that there is no salvation outside of the church, that the church and its sacraments are the only channels of divine grace, that the church is the only true interpreter of scripture, or that certain rituals performed only by authorized clergy are necessary for securing one’s eternal salvation. Claims to represent, interpret, speak for, or intercede on behalf of God magnify the power accorded clergy, exacerbating the problem of clericalism.

Power is multiplied when authority is aggregated. Expansion of power occurs when authority over multiple areas of institutional functioning is consolidated in one person. For example, a clergyperson who not only preaches and leads worship but also hires and fires staff, presides over council meetings, and dictates budgetary priorities has much greater power within a congregation compared to a pastor whose sole role is pastoral visitation. Thus, in his Roman Catholic context, Kochuthara observed, “When the very concept of ordination is associated with power, the exercise of administrative and financial functions by priests results in too much concentration of power.”³² The same is true of non-Catholic contexts. Thus, when power is magnified, power differentials increase and the potential for abuse becomes greater.

Power is inherent to ministry, enabled by the sacred trust and authority given to clergy. However, the source of this power should not be forgotten: “it is on loan from the community.”³³ While clergy have only as much power as laity collectively give them, clergy cannot effectively perform ministry if they are not entrusted to do so. For example, when the laity lose trust in clergy or cease to recognize the church as an authority in their lives, the power of clergy (and the problem of clericalism) dissipates. If a person does not recognize the authority of a particular church or does not believe the religious claims of a tradition, the clergy of that church and tradition will have little influence on them. When laity cease to place trust in clergy, clergy cease to have influence in their lives. Ministry requires trust. While the absence of power eliminates the potential for abuse, eliminating the influence of clergy would severely compromise the church and its ministry. Thus, the answer to clericalism is not to eliminate the power of clergy but to regulate it. Clericalism results when the power of clergy is not balanced with an appropriate degree of accountability.

Clericalism is due to unchecked power. *Clericalism* is shorthand for the reinforcement, magnification, consolidation, and protection of power by clergy in ways that deny external and internal accountability. An institutional culture of clericalism creates unhealthy circumstances conducive to abuse. Thus, Rubio and Schutz concluded, “clericalism [...] creates conditions

³¹ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 30.

³² Kochuthara, “The Sexual Abuse Scandal,” 939.

³³ Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 60.

predisposed to the possibility of sexual violence.”³⁴ When clerical power is wielded in an institution lacking appropriate accountability and transparency, victims are betrayed not only by offending pastors but also by the church.

VI. BETRAYAL THEORY

When abuse is perpetrated by someone trusted by the victim, the trauma is compounded through betrayal. When a trusted institution, such as the church, is complicit in the abuse and subsequent cover-up, this is termed *institutional betrayal*. Jennifer J. Freyd and co-researcher Carly Parnitzke Smith defined institutional betrayal as the “institutional action and inaction that exacerbate the impact of traumatic experiences.”³⁵ Freyd developed the notion of *betrayal trauma theory* through the observation that “abuse perpetrated within close relationships is more harmful than abuse perpetrated by strangers because of the violation of trust within a necessary relationship.”³⁶ This is the case when the church and its leadership are the violators.

The church can become an agent of justice and healing by resisting these harmful dynamics, or the church can perpetuate and accentuate the initial harm. When churches choose the latter, typically as a form of institutional protection, they enact a form of betrayal that can be worse than the initial violation. *Betrayal blindness* is the tendency of persons within the institution “to preserve the relationships, institutions, and social systems on which they depend” by ignoring the violations rather than risk compromising the institution.³⁷ The institution, instead of protecting its vulnerable members, becomes complicit in the abuse. Thus, persons abused by the church often suffer twice: once through the initial violation and again when the institution betrays them.

When victim-survivors are ignored, disbelieved, or attacked, when truth-tellers are silenced, when perpetrators play the victim—institutions betray the trust placed in them. The phenomenon of institutional betrayal is identifiable by a predictable pattern that Freyd termed DARVO: “Deny, Attack, & Reverse Victim and Offender.”³⁸ The Southern Baptist Convention serves as an example. In response to widely publicized investigative reporting, the Southern Baptist Convention convened an advisory group and, eventually, contracted an independent investigation.³⁹ The May 2022 findings revealed a history of deflection, denial, and coverup by this denomination’s Executive Committee—those leaders with the most power in this organization. Survivors and

³⁴ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond ‘Bad Apples,’* 4.

³⁵ Carly Parnitzke Smith and Jennifer J. Freyd, “Institutional Betrayal,” *American Psychologist* 69, no. 6 (September 2014), 577, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037564>.

³⁶ Jennifer J. Freyd, *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), cited in Smith and Freyd, “Institutional Betrayal,” 577.

³⁷ Center for Institutional Courage, “Knowledge Base and Research Priorities,” <https://www.institutionalcourage.org/knowledge-base-and-research-priorities>.

³⁸ Center for Institutional Courage, <https://www.institutionalcourage.org/the-call-to-courage>.

³⁹ Guidepost Solutions, “Report of the Independent Investigation: The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee’s Response to Sexual Abuse Allegations and an Audit of the Procedures and Actions of the Credentials Committee,” May 15, 2022, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22031737-final-guidepost-solutions-independent-investigation-report>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Caring Well: A Report from the SBC Sexual Abuse Advisory Group,” June 8, 2019, <https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC-Caring-Well-Report-June-2019.pdf>.

others who reported abuse encountered “resistance, stonewalling, and even outright hostility.”⁴⁰ This is what deny and attack look like in institutional form. The reversal of victim and offender is revealed by noting who received institutional protection. In the wake of the independent investigation, Southern Baptist leaders released a 205-page list of accused ministers, information they had compiled and kept secret for fifteen years.⁴¹ The offenders had been protected by secrecy, as if they were the vulnerable ones.

The alternative to institutional betrayal is institutional courage. Freyd’s Center for Institutional Courage describes institutional courage as “an institution’s commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost.” Specific actions of courage include “institutional accountability, transparency, making reparations where needed, and a commitment to being responsive to its members.”⁴² Freyd’s Center lists eleven steps to promote institutional courage:⁴³

1. Comply with civil rights laws and go beyond mere compliance; beware risk management
2. Educate the institutional community (especially leadership)
3. Add checks and balances to power structure and diffuse highly dependent relationships
4. Respond well to victim disclosures (& create a trauma-informed reporting policy)
5. Bear witness, be accountable, apologize
6. Cherish the whistleblowers; cherish the truth tellers
7. Conduct scientifically-sound anonymous surveys
8. Regularly engage in self-study
9. Be transparent about data and policy
10. Use the organization to address the societal problem
11. Commit on-going resources to 1–10

These guidelines emphasize multiple features of a justice-oriented institution, such as education, accountability, transparency, information-gathering, and structures of accountability for managing power relations. Furthermore, institutional courage prioritizes the best interests of victim-survivors through trauma-informed response, truth-telling, and apology. Institutional courage creates structures of justice to protect and care for the persons most vulnerable to the abuse of power within the institution. The practices of institutional courage promote a proactive alternative to clericalism, redressing past harms and providing needed accountability for the power of clergy.

Freyd’s model for institutional courage is compatible with several other approaches to the problem of abuse of power. For example, a declaration of rights of Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power developed by the United Nations prescribes justice and fair treatment, restitution, compensation,

⁴⁰ Guidepost Solutions, “Report of the Independent Investigation,” 3.

⁴¹ <https://sbcec.s3.amazonaws.com/FINAL+-+List+of+Alleged+Abusers+-+SBC+REDACTED.pdf>.

⁴² Center for Institutional Courage, “Knowledge Base and Research Priorities.”

⁴³ Center for Institutional Courage, “Resources for Changemakers,” <https://www.institutionalcourage.org/resources-for-changemakers>. See also Jennifer J. Freyd, “When Sexual Assault Victims Speak Out, Their Institutions Often Betray Them,” *The Conversation*, January 11, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/when-sexual-assault-victims-speak-out-their-institutions-often-betray-them-87050>; Susan M. Shaw, “Institutional Betrayal, Institutional Courage and the Church,” *Baptist News Global*, July 26, 2022, <https://baptistnews.com/article/institutional-betrayal-institutional-courage-and-the-church/>.

and medical, psychological, and social assistance for victims.⁴⁴ Specific to cases of clergy sexual abuse, Marie Fortune, founder of the FaithTrust Institute, identified seven elements of justice-making: truth-telling, acknowledging the violation, compassion, protecting the vulnerable, accountability, restitution, and vindication.⁴⁵ The goal of this process is to restore right relationship within the community. Combining these conceptual frameworks is not difficult. The underlying principles focus on the needs and rights of the victim-survivor and the institution's responsibility for providing structures of transparency and accountability to protect those rights and provide for those needs.

Institutional courage is consistent with anti-clericalism. Rubio and Schutz recognized that some aspects of power are gendered. They named three “ways of resisting gendered aspects of clericalism: (1) Recognition of sexism, (2) critical awareness of gender constructs including gender complementarity, and (3) a commitment to gender inclusivity.”⁴⁶ These methods of resistance are important in all ecclesial contexts. Yet, even in progressive Protestant churches that call out sexism, reject complementarianism, and promote gender inclusivity and equality, clergy still abuse their power. Thus, sex and gender are part but not the whole of the power structures in a church. A courageous, justice-making church needs to account for all its power dynamics.

VII. ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH THE LAITY

Clericalism is a structural problem requiring a structural solution. As a structural feature, the exercise of clerical power requires the cooperation of both laity and clergy in relationships of trust and authority. Thus, Rubio and Schutz referred to “clericalism as a reality in which the whole Church participates.”⁴⁷ Laity as well as clergy are complicit in enabling distorted power relations, whether they are aware of it or not. Thus, “the internalized clericalism of lay people” is an essential part of the dynamic of power within church structures.⁴⁸ Thus, laity must participate in addressing the problem of clericalism.

To lessen the potential for abuse in ministry, both laity and clergy must be involved in accountability structures to check the power entrusted to the ministerial office. In the Roman Catholic context, Jason Blakely described accountability as follows: “Overcoming clericalism means creating open, transparent and equal relationships between priests and laity. Such a community is willing to allow moral correction of priests by the laity and not simply the correction of laity by priests. Such a community is open and willing to learn from all its members.”⁴⁹ This vision is in keeping with that of Pope Francis, who asserted, “It is impossible to think of a

⁴⁴ United Nations, “Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power,” adopted 29 November 1985, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-basic-principles-justice-victims-crime-and-abuse>.

⁴⁵ Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred? The Story of a Pastor, the Women He Sexually Abused, and the Congregation He Nearly Destroyed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 114–15.

⁴⁶ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 40.

⁴⁷ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 8; see also Blakely, “Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Clericalism.”

⁴⁸ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 30.

⁴⁹ Blakely, “Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Clericalism.”

conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People."⁵⁰ Thus, accountability for clergy cannot be left to clergy alone.

Empowerment of laity is essential to addressing clericalism. Rubio and Schutz described anti-clericalism as "a holistic orientation for ecclesial life [...] allowing power to be shared more equitably."⁵¹ Likewise, Kochuthara saw "the need for a more participatory church," inclusive of laity in decision-making and governance.⁵² Equitable power-sharing in a context of clericalism requires empowering the laity. Thus, Rubio and Schutz sought evidence of "power-sharing and collective decision-making in ecclesial life," promoting priestly empowerment of laity and collaboration between laity and clergy.⁵³ Specifically, they advocated for "consciousness-raising strategies" to equip all church members "to *describe* clericalism when they see it, *interrupt* the clericalist status quo, and *announce* new ways of being Church."⁵⁴ Laity must not only be empowered within church structures, they must also use their power to monitor and check the power of clergy and the church itself.

Lay involvement differs based on ecclesial setting, theology of ministry, and church polity. In Protestant settings, the distinction between laity and clergy is one of role, not "essence." Thus, structures of accountability may be based on the obligations and responsibilities of the role of clergy and other ministerial leaders, regardless of ordination status or title. The church must also be accountable to standards beyond itself, employing, for example, Freyd's steps for institutional courage, Fortune's elements of justice-making, and the weight of civil and criminal law.⁵⁵

VIII. COURAGEOUS PRACTICES

Addressing clericalism in non-celibate contexts requires courage within and beyond church institutions. Here, I offer a sampling of courageous institutional practices for churches seeking to prioritize justice and the needs of victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse. These practices focus on prevention, education, and response and incorporate the steps promoted by the Center for Institutional Courage. Each of these practices of anti-clericalism require the participation and empowerment of the laity. Courage is required at all levels of the church: congregational, judicatory, denominational, and ecumenical. Furthermore, the most courageous practices occur not *within* church structures but *despite* church structures, when multiple institutions hold churches publicly accountable for clerical power and its abuse.

Congregational Practices

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, "Letter," 20 August 2018.

⁵¹ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 38.

⁵² Kochuthara, "The Sexual Abuse Scandal," 941. Synodality and democratic participation in church structures are important anti-clerical practices in Protestant as well as Roman Catholic settings and are beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁵³ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 43.

⁵⁴ Rubio and Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples,'* 39.

⁵⁵ Leveraging the criminal justice system is one way of holding the church accountable outside of its own ecclesial structures. See, for example, Bradley J.B. Toben and Kris Helge, "Sexual Misconduct of Clergypersons with Congregants or Parishioners – Civil and Criminal Liabilities and Responsibilities," <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/96096.pdf>.

Safe church policies are the most widespread effort to prevent ministerial sexual abuse in recent decades. In Protestant contexts, programs such as Safe Sanctuaries, Safe Connections, and Safe Communities provide compliance-based guidance for congregations, camps, and other places of ministry to manage risk with children and youth. The two-adult rule or three-deep leadership rule prevent one adult from being alone with one child, reducing risk by reducing opportunity for abuse. Background checks, vetting procedures, and rules for reporting suspected abuse also contribute to safer environments for ministry with minors. In some states, clergy as well as adult volunteers are considered mandated reporters if they suspect that a child has been abused. As important as they are, these policies fail to evidence institutional courage if they do not go beyond mere compliance and risk management.

To combat clericalism, safe church policies must contribute to a cultural shift in the congregation, in which justice, the needs of the vulnerable, and empowerment of laity are prioritized. Regular, repeated training about the church's policies provides an opportunity for education, in which lay ministry volunteers and clergy can learn together. Case studies, role play, bible study, and discussion allow the community of leaders to share their wisdom and experiences. Furthermore, policies should be reviewed and revised annually. The task of writing and revising policies is an educational opportunity. When laity and clergy do this work together, power is shared.

I mention child protection policies first, not only because they are common practice, but also because they provide an entry point for more difficult discussions of power and vulnerability in ministry. It is clear to most people that children are vulnerable in relation to adults. An adult has more resources and influence than a child. Many people, however, have difficulty understanding how an adult can be vulnerable in relation to a clergy person. Miscategorizing sexual abuse perpetrated by a clergy person as “an affair” or “adultery” is evidence of this confusion. Congregational policies must include clear definitions of sexual harassment, abuse, and other violations of ethics in ministry.

The concepts of interpersonal power, relational vulnerability, and fiduciary duty must be taught and learned. Practicing this learning with a child protection policy can equip church leaders, laity and clergy alike, for the more difficult work of creating sexual ethics and professional conduct policies for staff and volunteers who minister with adults. Policies and procedures are not just roadmaps for response when abuse is suspected or confirmed; they are opportunities for lay participation and education—during development, revision, and implementation.

Policies and education must then become part of the ethos of the ministry of the congregation. After volunteers, staff, and other leaders are trained, policies must be communicated and explained. Rules about confidentiality, transparency, gifts, romantic relationships, time off, prior pastors, and so on should be regularly discussed in congregational newsletters and in administrative meetings. Opaque policies about windows in classroom doors, for example, do not illuminate an underlying ethos of safety. Furthermore, policies must be disseminated widely. Hidden policies create unnecessary power differentials between those in-the-know and those without access to that knowledge. Policy, as with law in general, must be made known and available to be empowering. Expectations for ethics in ministry and how to report violations should be easily accessible on the congregational website.

Judicatory Practices

Judicatory refers to the varied levels of bureaucratic structure beyond the congregation, such as districts, synods, conferences, councils, assemblies, or associations. Judicatories have the potential to provide consistency and accountability through resource provision, development of best practices, and common policies. Judicatories also have the potential to buttress the worst of clericalism, since judicatory personnel and offending clergy are often professional colleagues. The temptation protect the institution is strong—this is the dynamic of clericalism. Judicatories must therefore be intentional about including and empowering laity to recognize, name, call out, and call to account abuses of power. A well-run judicatory can provide accountability for congregations and clergy as well as strategic interventions and support in times of crisis.

Resource provision and training are basic functions of judicatories. For example, many judicatories require clergy to have regular, up-to-date boundary training. The FaithTrust Institute's "Healthy Boundaries 101" is a standard curriculum for this training.⁵⁶ In my ecclesial context, clergy typically participate in a six-hour workshop once every four years. However, if clergy only talk about healthy boundaries once every 1461 days, we are failing ourselves and our places of ministry. Furthermore, if laity are not included in these conversations and trainings, the problem of clericalism is compounded through an imbalance of knowledge. All persons with roles on personnel committees, church councils, trustees, and boards of ministry should be trained in healthy boundaries for ministry—and laity must be included in these roles if we are to root out clericalism. The power of education must be shared with laity to benefit the entire faith community.

Judicatories are particularly important for reporting and responding to abuse in ministry. When the pastor is the perpetrator, victims do not often feel safe reporting the problem to congregational leadership. Instead, victim-survivors look to higher levels of institutional structure for justice and accountability, such as the bishop, superintendent, conference minister, or credentialing body. Judicatory websites should provide clear definitions, policies, and reporting procedures. Best practices should be trauma-informed and provide victims with a trained, confidential advocate to accompany them through the process. First and foremost, a person making a report against a clergy person should be believed and welcomed as a "truth teller" advocating for a healthier church.

Procedures fail victims when distorted power, the root of clericalism, is not considered. Judicatory leaders occupy positions of power as much or more so than pastors and priests in congregations, particularly since most judicatory leaders are clergy. When a victim comes forward with a report of abuse by a church leader, they are essentially walking into the lion's den, approaching those persons responsible for appointing, assigning, and credentialing their abuser. Thus, stringent safeguards need to be put in place to protect the victim, who is reporting a crime, not an interpersonal conflict or misunderstanding. To invoke Matthew 18:15-17 or to require some kind of "mediation" between abused and abuser prior to determining that harm was done is form of institutional betrayal leading to revictimization. Matthew 18 is applicable only after sin is acknowledged; mediation is premised on equal power between the parties; neither is the case prior to a determination of guilt. And even then, a victim-survivor should never be pressured into or

⁵⁶ FaithTrust Institute, "Healthy Boundaries for Clergy, Spiritual Teachers, and Lay Leaders," <https://vawnet.org/material/healthy-boundaries-clergy-spiritual-teachers-and-lay-leaders>.

required to confront their abuser directly. The needs of the victim-survivor should always be prioritized.⁵⁷

Judicatories also play an essential role in congregational healing. Healthy communication and timely disclosure of information by the church and its leadership are necessary for laity to make informed decisions. A series of congregational meetings for disclosure and processing can alert the congregation to an allegation against their pastor, keep them informed about developments in the case, and help them through grieving and healing. A best practice is to offer the services of a trained crisis response team as well as an afterpastor (an interim pastor trained to restore trust in the ministerial office following sexual misconduct). Laity should be integral to each of these activities of congregational healing, and as with reporting and investigation procedures, the healing and recovery of the victim-survivor should be paramount.

Denominational Practices

Denominational structures can support (or undermine) the judicatory practices described above. As a positive example, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee facilitated data collection and truth-telling by hiring an independent investigation of its handling of sexual abuse complaints against clergy. Unfortunately, this denomination's attempt to support victims by establishing a denominational hotline has been met with distrust—a casualty of decades of DARVO practices and lack of transparency within this institution.⁵⁸ It takes years to rebuild trust when a church allows clericalism to override justice and the needs of the vulnerable.

Some denominations have established internal watchdog agencies and educational resources to address sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy. For example, the Church of England established a National Safeguarding Panel in 2014 to resource church leadership in preventing and responding to allegations of sexual abuse.⁵⁹ One must dig deep into this website to find the word *abuse*, though. Empowering laity requires equipping them with clear definitions and vocabulary to name abuses by clergy. The euphemisms *failings* and *safeguarding* on this website do not communicate adequately about sexual abuse by clergy; clearer language is provided in a separate publication.⁶⁰

Many other denominations have generated helpful resources, empowering laity and directly addressing the abuse of power by clergy.⁶¹ In 2015, in partial response to the history of abuse by a noted leader, the Mennonite Church USA adopted a “Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse,”

⁵⁷ Sawyer, Cohen, and Mesaros, eds., *Responding to Spiritual Leader Misconduct*, 135–36.

⁵⁸ Bob Smietana, “Dispute Over Abuse Hotline Reveals How Far the SBC Still Has to Go,” *Religion News Service*, January 11, 2023, <https://religionnews.com/2023/01/11/dispute-over-abuse-hotline-reveals-how-far-the-sbc-still-has-to-go/>.

⁵⁹ Independent Safeguarding Board, <https://independent-safeguarding.org/>.

⁶⁰ The Faith and Order Commission, Church of England, *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church: A Theological Resource for the Local Church* (London: Church House, 2016), <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/theologicalresourcefaocweb.pdf>.

⁶¹ See, for example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Report Misconduct,” <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Vocation-Become-a-Leader/Report-Misconduct>; Mennonite Central Committee of Canada, “Abuse Response & Prevention,” <https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/>; United Church of Christ, “Abuse Prevention Resources,” https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/team/leadership/abuse_prevention_resources/.

including commitments and actions for congregations and other levels of the institution.⁶² In The United Methodist Church, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women provides internal accountability, including explanations of victim's rights, the complaint process, and a confidential phone number for support.⁶³ Significantly, these resources come out of a commission that advocates for the full inclusion of women at all levels of leadership in the church, since most adult cases involve a male clergy person perpetrating abuse on a female congregant. Even denominations that do not ordain women can develop just gender practices by ensuring that women are fully included in decision-making bodies that determine who is and is not eligible for ordination and who is or is not removed from that position of authority due to misconduct or abuse.

Denominational bodies are also instrumental in developing and communicating standards for ethics in ministry. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provided an exemplary document of ethical standards, with separate sections for members, employees and volunteers, and ordained officers.⁶⁴ The "integrated version" is remarkable for including multiple references and examples of behavior, both positive and negative. This is a teaching document at its best. Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association's guidelines and code of ethics is clear about the problematic relationship of sex, power, and ministry, prohibiting sexual relationships between ministers and those they serve in ministry.⁶⁵ In 2012, The United Methodist Church, informed by work of the Unitarian Universalist Association, developed goals, competencies, and content areas of study for professional sexual ethics, to be required in seminary and other training programs for clergy and other ministerial leaders.⁶⁶

Ecumenical Practices

There are many aspects of abuse prevention, education, and response that can best be accomplished through shared, ecumenical initiatives rather than denominationally specific programs. Safe church protocols for the protection of children and youth are one area in which churches, scouting organizations, camps, and other institutions have found widespread agreement. These efforts have been driven largely by lawyers and insurance companies concerned about liability and risk management. Nevertheless, the result is a baseline of care that serves communities well. Such is not yet the case when addressing abuse of adult parishioners by clergy. When churches generate competing standards (or none at all), they create confusion abetting clericalism. Knowledge is power. Collaborative ecumenical efforts can raise awareness, create shared standards, and empower laity to recognize, name, and call out abuses by clergy.

⁶² Mennonite Church USA, "Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse," reprinted in *Liberating the Politics of Jesus: Renewing Peace Theology through the Wisdom of Women*, edited by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht and Darryl W. Stephens, 213–31 (New York: T&T Clark, 2020).

⁶³ Resource UMC, "UM Sexual Ethics," <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/partners/um-sexual-ethics/home>.

⁶⁴ The Special Committee on a Professional Code of Ethics, "Professional Code of Ethics," Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998), Louisville: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004, https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/publications/ethical-conduct.pdf.

⁶⁵ Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, "The UUMA Guidelines for the Conduct of Ministry," <https://www.uuma.org/page/guidelines>.

⁶⁶ The United Methodist Church, "Sexual Ethics as Integral Part of Formation for Ministerial Leadership," in *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 146–52.

Developing standards for professional ethics in ministry is a project ripe for ecumenical collaboration. Fiduciary duty, sacred trust, power, and confidentiality are concepts that apply to all helping professions, including clergy. There is no reason that an institution such as the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and similar bodies around the world cannot develop substantive, shared standards for ethics in ministry. Parachurch organizations must be careful, however, that their effort to reach agreement does not result in a statement devoid of substance. For example, the Code of Ethics for Pastors by the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States adopts aspirational language and speaks in generalities, offering no definitions of sexual abuse or power in ministry. Instead, the code instructs clergy to “use power and influence prudently and humbly”; “Avoid sinful sexual behavior and inappropriate involvement. Resist temptation.”⁶⁷ Churches adopting this code of ethics must fill in their own definitions of which behaviors are prudent and which are inappropriate and sinful. In the vacuum of an ecumenically articulated, substantive code of ethics for clergy, other institutions must fill in the details.

Development of shared training resources is another ecumenical project of anti-clericalism. When will churches join in efforts initiated by non-ecclesial institutions? In North America, the FaithTrust Institute has provided a common language and standards for over forty years. Furthermore, the FaithTrust Institute’s Sacred Trust and Healthy Boundaries curricula provide consistent and substantive resources for training clergy of many denominations and faith traditions, including Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish. The issues of power and fiduciary duty are the same across religious traditions.

Crisis response team ministry is a complex and still unrealized arena for ecumenical cooperation to combat clericalism. A response team assists a congregation through a process of grieving and healing in cases of alleged or actual abuse by a clergy person.⁶⁸ A team includes trained clergy and laity with diverse professional specializations, such as pastoral care, psychology, social work, counseling, communications, conflict transformation, law, church polity, congregational systems, afterpastoring, and so forth. A response team’s role is pastoral, addressing the needs of the affected congregation. It is not investigative or judicial. Response team ministries are typically restricted to the judicatory involved. However, partnering ecumenically could provide significant benefits for response team ministries, enhancing other efforts toward anti-clericalism. Conflicts of interest would be reduced, abuse could be identified and defined more objectively by persons outside of the denomination’s politics, multiple theological perspectives would enhance conversation, and smaller judicatories without the resources to convene and train their own team would benefit from shared resourcing.

Safe church protocols, codes of ethics for clergy, healthy boundaries training curricula, and response team ministries are just a few areas ripe for ecumenical collaboration. Each of these areas

⁶⁷ National Association of Evangelicals, “Code of Ethics for Pastors,” <https://www.nae.org/code-of-ethics-for-pastors/>.

⁶⁸ Resources for response team ministry include: Beth Ann Gaede, *When a Congregation is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006); Nancy Meyer Hopkins and Mark Laaser, eds., *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995); Jan Erickson-Pearson, *Healing in Congregations After Clergy Sexual Abuse: A Resource to Assist Synodical Leaders and Local Congregations* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division for Ministry, rev. 2005), <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Vocation-Become-a-Leader/Report-Misconduct>; Sawyer, Cohen, and Mesaros, eds., *Responding to Spiritual Leader Misconduct*.

provides the potential to empower laity, seek the best interest of the vulnerable, and rectify the distortions of power that characterize clericalism.

Extra-ecclesial Institutions

The above practices, when they are implemented, display institutional courage. However, the most courageous practices of anti-clericalism occur despite church institutions, not through them. In a pluralistic, democratic society, diverse institutions function to hold each other accountable. Survivor support networks, public media, courts, and criminal statutes illustrate the courageous practices of multiple institutions beyond the church to reform the church.

When victim-survivors come forward to report sexual abuse by clergy, they bear witness not only to their own trauma but also the trauma of countless others. These acts of advocacy are the most courageous of all practices of anti-clericalism. When victim-survivors and their advocates collaborate to confront the church about sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy, they combat clericalism. Organizations such as the FaithTrust Institute, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, Bishop Accountability, The Hope of Survivors, and Into Account provide support for victim-survivors while they attempt to call the church to account.⁶⁹

When journalists of the *Boston Globe*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and other media outlets conduct investigative reports exposing widespread clerical abuse and cover-ups, their courageous work provides facts and data to expose the problem of clericalism.

When churches fail to adopt just standards of practice or to live up to a community standard expected of other helping professions, victims sometimes find their only recourse is to utilize civil and criminal courts. When victim-survivors file lawsuits and leverage the courts to achieve the justice denied them within the church, they are courageously saying ‘No!’ to clericalism. In 2009, the National Organization for Women in the United States called for the criminalization of clergy sexual exploitation of adults in their care, since churches had proven ineffective in monitoring the behavior of their own leaders.⁷⁰ In some cases, criminal statutes can provide definitions of *abuse* and *meaningful consent* when churches lack the resolve to do so.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined clericalism through a framework of professional ethics, finding many commonalities between celibate and non-celibate contexts. Clergy of all traditions participate in dysfunctional relations to power, truth telling, and intimacy when there exists a distortion of power by church leaders and the institutions that authorize them. The resulting structural dynamic of clericalism is experienced by victim-survivors as institutional betrayal, a form of revictimization in which the church protects clergy at the expense of those who have been harmed by clergy. The concept of anti-clericalism addresses abuse prevention and response by focusing on redistributing

⁶⁹ <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>; <https://www.snapnetwork.org/>; <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/>; <https://www.thehopeofsurvivors.org/>; <https://intoaccount.org/>, See also <https://independent-safeguarding.org/>; and <https://www.acctoo.ca/>.

⁷⁰ National Organization for Women, “Call to Criminalize Sexual Exploitation of Women by Clergy,” <https://now.org/about/conference-resolutions/2009-national-now-conference-resolutions/#call>.

power in just ways among the laity and prioritizing practices of accountability and justice-making for victim-survivors. Practices of institutional courage are required at all levels of the church: congregational, judicatory, denominational, and ecumenical. Furthermore, courageous practices of diverse social institutions beyond the church can be leveraged to address clericalism.

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