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Spiritual Violence, Gender, and Sexuality: Implications for Seeking and Dwelling Among Some Catholic Women and LGBT Catholics

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Spiritual Violence, Gender, and Sexuality: Implications for Seeking and Dwelling among Some Catholic Women and LGBT Catholics¹

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1. Introduction

In his opening essay of *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Charles Taylor attributes widespread mistrust of institutional Catholicism among spiritual seekers to their perception that the Church has no place for seeking.² Seekers pursue questions, invite dialogue, and negotiate their spiritual identities over time as they search, in all manner of places, for an experience of spiritual reality. The official Church seems to push “already worked-out answers,” to have little capacity to listen, and to offer a faith bound by absolute rules and universal laws leaving little room for discussion or negotiation.³ Spiritual seekers perceive that the Church has nothing to offer them, that is has, as it were, come down on the side of dwellers who look to religious authorities for timeless truths, absolute moral rules, and firmly delineated sacred space. Taylor explains that seekers

¹ The inclusion of the determiner “some” in the title is meant to indicate that not all Catholic women or gay or lesbian Catholics experience spiritual violence within the Roman Catholic tradition. Moreover, the movements this essay tracks focus primarily on people in the United States and Western Europe, which is the audience to whom Taylor primarily addresses his work on secularization.

² Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks – to Whom?” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, eds. Charles Taylor, Jose Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), pp. 17-25.

³ Taylor cited in George McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, eds. Charles Taylor, Jose Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), p. 5.

presented with a faith on these terms “all too easily give up on it and search elsewhere.”⁴

While this is surely part of the explanation, in this essay I suggest that another major source of mistrust of the Church, especially among many American Catholic women and LGBT Catholics, is the spiritual violence they have experienced through their participation in the ritual life of the Church. Spiritual violence does not name the use of physical force to inflict material harm in the name of God or for religious purposes as, for example, in a religiously motivated war. Rather, in spiritual violence sacred symbols, texts, and religious teachings themselves become weapons that harm a person in her spiritual formation and in her relationship with God. In recent decades, both Catholic women and LGBT Catholics have used the term ‘spiritual violence’ to name a range of such harms.

Taylor explicitly references Church teachings on women’s ordination and homosexuality as examples of the Church pushing “pat and ready-made answers,” foreclosing prospects for discussion, and thereby failing to engage seekers.⁵ What I want to emphasize is that for many the problem is not merely dissatisfaction with authoritarian and paternalistic modes of presentation, but rather with experiences of being spiritually harmed as a result of spiritual formation within a religious community that aligns these teachings with the will of God and implements them in liturgical and ritual life. Victims of spiritual violence are charging that an institution, which should be (and claims to be) shepherding people into loving relationship with the divine, is often instead erecting significant barriers to this relationship. For these people the issue is not just that the Church seems out of touch or irrelevant, but that the Church has been a conduit for spiritual violation. Their mistrust of the institution stems from an experience of a church that has inflicted devastating spiritual injury on people trying to seek or dwell within its bounds.

In light of these considerations, this paper has two broad aims: First, I foreground spiritual violence as a pervasive form of church-based violence that has gone unrecognized in the larger church as violence and needs to be examined as a serious obstacle to the moral and spiritual authority of the church. Secondly, I examine spiritualities of

⁴ Taylor, “The Church Speaks,” p. 19.

⁵ Ibid.

seeking and dwelling through the experience of spiritual violence and, conversely, I explore the experience of spiritual violence through the lenses of seeking and dwelling. I examine how one's spiritual orientation as a dweller or seeker may impact her response to spiritual violence. For example seekers may be more inclined toward anger and dissent, whereas dwellers may be more prone to internalize the harm or compartmentalize tensions in an effort to dwell securely within the fold. I also suggest that the experience of spiritual violence may be one influence responsible for a shift in spiritual orientation among many American Catholic women and LGBT Catholics from dwelling to seeking. I suggest that survivors of spiritual violence often end up cultivating a hybrid spirituality as either a dweller/seeker or seeker/dweller, and that their experiences thus serve as an important resource for a church interested in bridging the disjunction between seekers and dwellers.

The structure of the paper is as follows: In §2, drawing from several sources, I clarify my understanding of the terms 'seeking' and 'dwelling' in order to lay a groundwork for my analysis. In §3, I present a basic account of spiritual violence as victims are using this term, and in §4 I draw from victims' experiences to illustrate some of the spiritual consequences of victimization by this mode of violence. In §5 I examine how one's spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller may influence her experience of and response to spiritual violence, and how experiences of spiritual violence may impact shifts in an individual's spiritual orientation from dwelling to seeking. I conclude with some brief remarks about prospects for hope and healing under the new leadership of Pope Francis.

2. Seeking and Dwelling

Robert Wuthnow uses the terms 'dwelling' and 'seeking' to describe two distinct spiritual orientations, and to trace a measurable shift in the American public in the second half of the 20th century from the former to the latter.⁶ Seekers and dwellers represent ideal spiritual types, perhaps a bit like personality types, which are characterized by certain features or markers. And like personality types, many people

⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

who may partake primarily in one orientation very often exhibit features associated with both.⁷ Seeking and dwelling, then, are rough characterizations rather than precise concepts, but they are nonetheless useful categories for demarcating two palpably distinct ways of orienting one's life to the transcendent.

As Wuthnow describes it, dwelling is a spirituality of habitation. For dwellers, "God occupies a definite place in the universe and creates a sacred space in which humans too can dwell; to inhabit sacred space is to know its territory and to feel secure."⁸ Seeking, by contrast is a spirituality of negotiation, whereby "individuals search for sacred moments that reinforce their conviction that the divine exists, but these moments are fleeting; rather than knowing the territory, people explore new spiritual vistas, and they may have to negotiate among complex and confusing meanings of spirituality."⁹ For seekers spirituality is metaphorically a journey one chooses to embark on; for dwellers spirituality is metaphorically a place one inhabits. We can clarify further these spiritual types by contrasting them along five dimensions of spiritual life.

Relationship to a Faith Tradition and Congregation

The general characterization offered above, if not qualified, is a bit misleading for it gives the impression that seekers are never closely affiliated with a religious community or tradition, and this is not necessarily the case. For one thing, it would rule out the possibility of seeker clergy, people who are clearly tied very closely to a particular faith tradition in so far as they vocationally have devoted their lives to the community, but who may nonetheless gravitate toward a

⁷ Moreover, Wuthnow and Taylor both note that the Christian tradition has emphasized elements of both orientations, as best seen in the lives of the saints many of whom were deeply anchored to the tradition, in the manner of spiritual dwellers, but also questioning and challenging the bounds of that tradition and their own spiritual experience within it, in the manner of seekers. Taylor references Teresa of Avila and St. Francis de Sales ("The Church Speaks," p. 18); Wuthnow references the rule of St Benedict with its call to both stability and conversion (*After Heaven*, p. 5).

⁸ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, pp. 3-4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

spirituality of seeking.¹⁰ Dwellers are, by definition, tied to a particular faith tradition and engage in regular and consistent participation in the liturgical life of a congregation within that tradition – they are churched. But what distinguishes the dweller’s close tie to the faith tradition is how her view of the sacred binds her to that tradition. Dwellers maintain that God is encountered in Church-designated sacred places, and that divine truths are revealed exclusively through the teachings of the Church, and so they are tied to the Church in a rather fixed way, viewing the Church as the exclusive conduit for communion with the divine, the sole path to salvation. They are anchored, as it were, with a very short chain.

Seekers, on the other hand, have a more complex relationship with faith communities. Some seekers, those who Drew Christiansen calls “the spirituals,” may or may not be affiliated with a faith tradition or congregation.¹¹ There is a sense of spiritual homelessness that attends this way of seeking but this should not be interpreted necessarily to mean that one does not belong, although it can mean this for some. What better distinguishes the spirituals is not their membership status but conditions for membership. As Christiansen notes, for the spirituals, the standard for belonging “is not the religious authority of any church as a repository of revelation,” as it is for dwellers, “but rather the satisfaction of their own often inarticulate searching.”¹² Whereas dwellers belong on the basis of perceived spiritual and moral authority of the community and its leaders, the spirituals belongs on the basis of how well a community satisfies the needs and desires of their spiritual search – their relationship with a faith tradition is instrumental.

However, not all seekers view their relationship to a particular religious tradition as instrumental. Not all seekers have a free-floating spiritual identity that can land just anywhere. Some seekers experience themselves, like dwellers, as anchored to a particular faith

¹⁰ It would also fail to account for encounters, such as the one described in this *America* article by James J. DiGiacomo between a seeker clergy and dweller parishioner, in which a key difference between a seeker and a dweller arises from a difference in the way each understands *how* we should search for the truth at <http://americamagazine.org/issue/533/article/little-gray-cells>.

¹¹ Drew Christiansen, “Engaging the Spirituals: The Secular Challenge to the New Evangelism” in *America*, March 26, 2012, pp. 17-19.

¹² Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 18.

tradition and understand their spiritual identity to be deeply bound up with that tradition. Yet they are not tied to the tradition in the same way as dwellers are tied. The difference turns on their different view of the sacred as fluid rather than fixed, their belief that God may manifest in any number of places and experiences, and that divine wisdom may be revealed in any number of religious or spiritual traditions. These seekers are anchored to the faith, but with a very long chain that enables them happily to drift with curiosity and openness beyond the boundaries of their professed faith, to seek divine encounter in nature, or in the holy sites or texts of other traditions. One thinks here of figures such as Thomas Merton who, as a Trappist monk and Catholic priest, was on the one hand clearly anchored within Catholicism, but on the other hand was unambiguously a seeker, encountering the divine especially within nature and within the wisdom of the Zen Buddhist tradition. A distinctive feature of seekers in this camp is the fluidity of their spiritual identity. They have a spiritual identity that is, in one sense, clearly rooted in a particular spiritual home, but they seek out wisdom and spiritual experience outside the boundaries of their religious home and allow those encounters to influence their understanding of the faith on offer in that home, as for example, the way Merton's Buddhism shaped his Catholic spirituality.

We might summarize the three possibilities here metaphorically: Dwellers are anchored to a faith tradition with a very short chain; some seekers are anchored, but with a long chain; other seekers, the spirituals, are not anchored at all, and of this group those who "belong" to a faith community are tied loosely to it with something akin to a slip knot, ready to easily move on when the community no longer serves their spiritual needs.

Relationship to the Sacred and Experience of the Divine

Accordingly, the orientations of dwelling and seeking differ in their relationship to the sacred and the divine. Dwellers take the sacred to be fixed and emphasize clear and fairly rigid boundaries distinguishing the sacred from the profane and protecting sacred space from its surroundings. Dwellers emphasize buildings, such as churches, and places within buildings, such as altars and sacristies, as sites to encounter the divine. Dwellers might access the sacred in

Eucharistic adoration, for example, but not, typically, in the mundane activities of ordinary life. For seekers, by contrast, the sacred “is fluid, portable, and spirituality must be pursued with a sense of God’s people being dispersed.”¹³ Seekers draw fewer or no boundaries demarcating the sacred from the profane. For seekers, rather “than being in a place that is by definition spiritual, the sacred is found momentarily” in almost any experience – even in activities like mowing the lawn or viewing a full moon.¹⁴

Spiritual Formation and Faith

Dwellers and seekers have distinctly different understandings of the process of spiritual formation and correspondingly different understandings of faith. For seekers, spiritual formation is a matter of an individual choosing her path, struggling to define herself in relation to the transcendent and to develop an authentic spiritual self. For dwellers on the other hand, the path has already been charted and spiritual formation involves conformity to rituals and rules in order to habituate oneself into a spiritual tradition already established and handed down. Whereas dwellers experience faith as an inherited given, seekers experience faith as something one strives for; it is not taken for granted, but is an option one has to choose.¹⁵

Relationship to Religious Leaders and Institutions

Seekers and dwellers also relate differently to religious authorities and institution. Christiansen offers an apt description of the spirituals (one class of seekers) on this score:

¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5. These differences can also be seen in how seekers and dwellers relate to liturgy. Seekers typically don more casual attire, which “blurs the lines between liturgy and everyday life” whereas dwellers are more likely to dress up as an act of distinguishing liturgy from the everyday. And dwellers are likely to prefer a liturgy that is “highly uniform” and texts and music that emphasize heaven as a place where God is located and where believers are headed, whereas seekers are likely to resonate with liturgies that are highly variable and texts and music that deal more with momentary experiences of the divine in everyday life (*After Heaven*, p. 9).

¹⁵ McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” p. 5.

What they reject is conformity in a rules-bound institution ... They resist reinforcement of ritual distinctions between the ordinary faithful and the ordained. They want to explore the world of faith and plumb the depths of the spirit in the company of like-minded people. They welcome the company of the officially religious who can help them but balk at rigid orthodoxies, imagined or prescribed in the name of tradition.¹⁶

Seekers who are more firmly anchored in a faith tradition may value its rules and traditions more deeply than the spirituals. Nonetheless, they are likely to emphasize the spirit of the law over the letter of the law, so to speak, and to value flexibility and adaptability over time rather than rigid constancy. Dwellers, by contrast, seek “the constant guidance available in a Church tradition and the desire to have this articulated as amply as possible” by religious authorities who are perceived as having spiritual and moral authority over and above the laity.¹⁷ For dwellers, the church is at its best “not when it is questioning, adapting, changing, but when it stands firm on its age-old answers”.¹⁸ Dwellers appeal to the moral and spiritual authority or religious leaders for answers, and “see the long tradition of the Church and the certainties of its teaching, as the road to salvation.”¹⁹

“Believing Still” vs. “Believing Again”

Taylor suggests another way of drawing distinctions between dwellers and seekers as between those who “believe still” and those who “believe again” respectively. One feature of the secular age, which is also the backdrop for this distinction, is allegiance to what Taylor calls the immanent frame. Those who “believe still” are those who have never bought entirely into the immanent frame, which understands the world and human experience to be completely explainable in terms of the causal laws of empirical science. For those who “believe still”, religious faith has never been threatened by the

¹⁶ Christiansen, “Engaging the Spirituals,” p. 18.

¹⁷ McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” p. 5.

¹⁸ Taylor, “The Church Speaks,” p. 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

immanent frame. Taylor likens these to the spiritual dwellers. Those who “believe again” are those who have questioned or confronted the real possibility that religious faith is not an appropriate or viable stance in the modern world, but who nonetheless come to believe that there is something more in human experience than can be explained by the immanent frame, and so come to choose the stance of religious faith in a kind of conversion experience. Taylor likens these to the spiritual seekers.²⁰

Spiritual Orientation of Institutions

Finally, religious institutions can also express a spiritual orientation that emphasizes either seeking or dwelling. Institutions which emphasize dwelling are “tightly bounded and hierarchical, prescribing behavior through a formalized set of rules; individuals [are] expected to conform to those rules, indeed, to internalize them.”²¹ By contrast, institutions which emphasize seeking involve “looser connections,” encourage diversity and diffuse power arrangements, and maintain that “practical activity takes precedence over organizational positions. Rather than rules, symbolic messages prevail.”²²

3. Spiritual Violence

Taylor posits that mistrust of the Church among spiritual seekers is rooted in their experience of a church that not only favors dwelling but that is hostile to seeking. He references Church teachings about women’s ordination and homosexuality as two contemporary examples of the authoritarian, dogmatic attitude and tone the Church has taken, which has undermined its credibility with seekers. However grass-roots movements among American Catholic women and LGBT Catholics suggest that their mistrust of the Church is also rooted in their experience of spiritual violence perpetrated by the Church through these teachings. Taylor emphasizes epistemic and spiritual foreclosure in the way the Church presents its teachings as the problem; these movements emphasize the spiritual violence of the

²⁰ Taylor, “The Church Speaks,” pp. 21-23.

²¹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, pp. 8-9.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

teachings themselves and the double-violation of then being silenced or censured by Church leaders for questioning religious teachings that one experiences as spiritually abusive.

In the first decade of the 21st century, both Catholic women and LGBT Catholics used the term ‘spiritual violence’ to name a distinct form of violence that uses sacred objects, texts, teachings, or rituals to violate a person in her spiritual self and harm her relationship with God. Spiritual violence is violence in the sense of violation of persons and so has resonance with psychological violence to the extent that it can be inflicted without the use of physical force.²³ Yet spiritual violence is distinctively spiritual in terms of both its means, which are the symbols, texts or rituals that mediate a person’s relationship with God, and in terms of what it harms, namely, a person’s spiritual self – her sense of and posture toward the transcendent. The kind of spiritual violence members of these groups have identified manifests structurally. They are not charging that a particular Church leader or group has intentionally engaged in targeted acts of spiritual abuse, though some have. Rather, their claim is that the religious institution of Roman Catholicism is a spiritually violent place for women and LGBT persons because norms that violate the spiritual personhood of members of these groups partially constitute the institution, its traditions and rituals, and the understanding of God it promotes.²⁴

In 2001, the LGTB Catholic group Dignity USA, teamed up with the interfaith group Soulforce, to launch a “Stop Spiritual Violence

²³ Elsewhere I propose that violating harms are agent-caused harms that express an attitude of disrespect toward or degradation of the other and are capable of inflicting deep and enduring damage to the self. Theresa W. Tobin, “Spiritual Violence” *under review*.

²⁴ Moreover, not all spiritually harmful institutional norms are violations. We have to distinguish between aspects of the institution that are violent and aspects of the institution that themselves may not be violating but that support violence. Sexist or misogynist interpretations of scripture are violent on my account because they are agent caused, express spiritually demeaning attitudes toward women, and are capable of extensively damaging the spiritual identities of women who pursue formation in this community. Theological teachings that valorize suffering as a way to draw closer to God may not be violating, even if it turns out they are otherwise psychologically or spiritually harmful, because they do not satisfy the disrespect condition of a violation. However, in conjunction with other aspects of the institution, these teachings may function to enable or support violence.

Campaign.” This campaign called on the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to end the use of sacred texts and religious teachings to advance false and degrading views about homosexual persons and relationships. In a press release about the campaign, the Rev. Mel White from Soulforce highlighted official Church teachings with which the group takes issue, which include those teachings that call “same-sex unions ‘a deplorable distortion’ and adoption by gay parents ‘a grave danger’”, as well as teachings that “describe homosexual orientation as ‘objectively disordered’ and homosexual acts as ‘intrinsically evil.’ ... Vatican statements have reaffirmed the Church’s views that homosexuals should not be allowed to adopt, teach, coach, be married, ordained, or serve in the military.”²⁵

The Executive Director of Dignity USA, Marianne Duddy, charged that Church teaching about homosexuality amount to a kind of holy war against sexual minorities which has left “suicide, wasted lives, ruined relationships, broken families, discrimination and physical violence” in its wake.²⁶ The campaign draws special attention, however, to the distinctively *spiritual* harm LGBT Catholics endure when their faith and their relationship with God is damaged as a result of what Rembert Truluck calls the “pollution of spiritual resources.” As Truluck puts it:

When policemen become criminals, what happens to law enforcement? When firemen become pyro-maniacs, what becomes of fire protection? When preachers and religious leaders become spiritual abusers and deceivers, what happens to faith, hope and love? The pollution of spiritual resources by homophobia and radical distortions of the truth about the Bible and God has cut off millions of people from the spiritual encouragement and help that they need and deserve.²⁷

The “pollution of spiritual resources by homophobia and radical distortions of the truth about the Bible and God” which has cut off millions of people from loving communion with the divine is the

²⁵ <http://www.archives.soulforce.org/2000/12/05/vatican-waging-holy-war-against-sexual-minorities/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rembert Truluck, “Spiritual Violence” online at: <http://www.whosoever.org/v5i6/violence.html>.

phenomenon of spiritual violence. The sacred texts, symbols and worship practices through which a person comes to experience and know God are the very same means through which she is actively degraded and debased. When this happens, a person is at great risk of experiencing her degradation and debasement as delivered or sanctioned by God. Dignity USA and Soulforce are charging that spiritual formation through the Church places LGBT Catholics at risk of experiencing God as an abuser rather than as a loving presence, and encourages a relationship with God rooted in inappropriate shame and self-loathing, rather than humility, love, and gratitude.

Some Catholic women have leveled a similar charge that the Church perpetrates spiritual violence against women. In 2010, the Vatican released a document condemning the attempt to ordain women into the Roman Catholic priesthood as a crime, and as grave as the sexual abuse committed by Catholic clergy against children.²⁸ Church leaders were careful to distinguish these two crimes as different in kind: attempting to ordain women is a crime against the sacraments, whereas pedophilia is a serious moral offense. Yet the document designates both as *delictio graviora* – the most egregious sins in the Church – linking the two in perception even if not in fact, and giving the impression that within their respective domains the two are equally grave. Media outlets focused on this as a public relations debacle for the Church, but many Catholic women experienced profound spiritual and emotional pain upon hearing this report and some have called it a manifestation of spiritual violence against women. In a *National Catholic Reporter* editorial Jaime Manson writes this:

For women across the globe ... this is a statement of profound spiritual violence against half of the human race already routinely victimized on the basis of their God-given anatomy [T]he church's statements only reinforce the idea that female bodies are not of equal value in the eyes of God, that they do not hold the same potential to be a sacred vessel of the life of God in our world Women, and those who attempt to ordain them, were classified as committing crimes against the

²⁸ <http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2010/07/modifications-made-in-normae-de.html>.

sacraments. Such crimes are metaphysically serious in that they constitute any action that desecrates the Eucharist. Not only can God not work through the body of a woman, now, it seems, women's bodies actually defile the Eucharist [F]or those women struggling to worship or work in the Catholic Church, these latest norms demonstrate unequivocally a painful truth: the church can be, and often is, a very toxic place for women.²⁹

Manson's charge is that Church officials build in to sacramental life the idea that women's bodies would defile or desecrate the Eucharist. Catholic women's pursuit of connection with the divine through the ritual life of their faith tradition is mediated by the message that their God-given material nature is defective, a sacramental pollutant, and that God Himself set things up this way. Individuals vary in their ability to resist or work around these influences, but Manson is charging that the church as an institution is spiritually violent to the extent that it erects spiritual obstacles to loving communion with God for women, and places women who pursue spiritual formation within its bounds at considerable risk of spiritual injury.

4. The Spiritual Impact of Spiritual Violence

In this section, I draw from both scholarly sources and victim testimony to examine more closely the spiritual injury that can result from the kinds of spiritual violation just described. I highlight elements of victim testimony that are suggestive of the person's spiritual orientation as either a seeker or dweller. These details serve as groundwork for exploring how a person's spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller may impact her experience of spiritual violence, and conversely how experience of this kind of spiritual violation may impact a person's spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller, both of which I take up in the next section.

²⁹ Jaime L. Manson, "New norms are much more than a PR disaster," in *National Catholic Reporter* online at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/new-norms-are-much-more-pr-disaster>.

The Spiritual Impact of Spiritual Violence against Gay Catholic Men

Dignity USA advocates for the spiritual wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Catholics. Here I discuss the experiences of a well-known political blogger who is also a gay Catholic man and who has written quite publically about his own struggle to reconcile his gay identity with his Catholic faith identity.³⁰ In his 1994 essay, "Alone Again, Naturally" published in the *New Republic*, Andrew Sullivan presents a measured and quite moving account of his struggle to live authentically as both gay and Catholic, and chronicles the journey which eventually convinced him that the Church's position on homosexuality is deeply flawed and that it is, to use the language of this paper, spiritually violent.³¹

Sullivan recounts that although no one discussed it openly, but only in derogatory, veiled language, he learned early on from broader cultural influences, from his family, and from his Church that homosexuality was an abomination. At 15 years old, as he "filed up to the Communion rail to face mild-mannered Fr. Simmons for the umpteenth time" he asked God to help him with "that."³² "That" was his as of yet unnamed but known homosexual orientation. Despite "knowing" at this early age that his sexuality was something to be ashamed of and something to hide, it was also something he took first to God.³³ For Sullivan the challenge was not "how to make what [he] *did* conform with what the Church taught [him] ... but how to make who [he] was conform with what the Church taught [him]."³⁴ This

³⁰ Lesbians, bisexual and transgendered persons likely experience spiritual violence differently from gay men given the complex interactions between gender identity and sexual identity within a larger context which valorizes maleness and masculinity but demonizes homosexual or bisexual orientation. Gay men may, for example, may experience relative privilege in so far as they function as men, whereas lesbians may suffer the double disadvantage of spiritual repression on the basis of both gender and sexuality. I do not intend the remarks in this section to be easily generalizations to all LGBT persons, although I imagine there are at least some similarities in the kinds of spiritual violation members of these groups experience.

³¹ Andrew Sullivan, "Alone Again, Naturally," *The New Republic*, vol. 211, issue 22, 1994, pp. 47-55.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

distinction is important because it indicates that the struggle is not merely to modify behavior but to become a certain sort of self.

In his battle to make who he is comport with Church teaching about who he ought to be, Sullivan engaged in serious and prayerful study of the church's teachings on homosexuality.³⁵ Despite a deeper intellectual understanding of the Church's position, however, over time his attempts faithfully to live out these teachings led Sullivan to conclude that the Church was ultimately leading people into "two simultaneous and opposite directions: a deeper respect for homosexuals, and a sterner rejection of almost anything they might do," – the familiar, "Love the sinner, hate the sin" line.³⁶

As an adolescent and young adult, Sullivan tried to tackle the "love the sinner, hate the sin" paradox by suppressing and denying his sexual identity, a move which had devastating consequences both for his psyche and for his faith. He found ways to "expunge love from life"; he developed "intense intellectual friendships" ... but kept them "restrained in a carapace of artificiality to prevent passion from breaking out"; he "adhered to a hopelessly pessimistic view of the world" in order to explain his "refusal to take part in life's pleasures, and to rationalize the dark and deep depressions that periodically overwhelmed [him]."³⁷ The impact on his faith was equally stark. He describes his faith and his sexuality as entering a dialectic in which "faith propelled me away from emotional and sexual longing, and the deprivation that this created required me to resort even more dogmatically to my faith."³⁸ The struggle to suppress his sexual identity sparked "an intense religiosity that could provide me with the spiritual resources I needed to fortify my barren emotional life."³⁹ His faith took on a "caricatured shape, aloof and dogmatic, ritualistic and awesome. As time passed, a theological austerity became the essential complement to an emotional emptiness."⁴⁰

Based on these experiences, Sullivan eventually concluded that,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52. Sullivan references in particular the 1975 "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" and the 1986 Pastoral Letter, "On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

... the Church's teachings created a dynamic that in practice led ... to pathology; by requiring the first lie in a human life, which would lead to an entire battery of others, they contorted human beings into caricatures of solitary eccentricity, frustrated bitterness, incapacitating anxiety – and helped perpetuate all the human wickedness and cruelty and insensitivity that such lives inevitably carry in their wake. These doctrines could not in practice do what they wanted to do: they could not both affirm human dignity and deny human love.⁴¹

In Sullivan's experience, Church teaching on homosexuality encouraged a habitual renunciation of his most basic capacity to love, which led to the perversion of his spiritual and moral character and to disordered relationships both with other people and ultimately with God. The experiences Sullivan describes are what Rembert Truluck is referring to when he speaks of the "pollution of spiritual resources" which cuts a person off from loving communion with God. Sullivan did not come to reject official Church teachings about homosexuality

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54. Sullivan targets specifically the comparison the Church draws between alcoholism and same-sex desire as analogously objective disorders. Both homosexuals and alcoholics are counseled to stunt the development and expression of their disordered conditions by renouncing homosexual acts and alcoholic acts, respectively. Yet the former has to do with one's fundamental capacity to love; the latter does not, and this difference makes all the difference. It is worth quoting Sullivan (p. 54) at length on this point:

"If alcoholism is overcome by a renunciation of alcoholic acts, then recovery [still] allows the human being to realize his or her full potential, a part of which ... is the supreme act of self-giving in a life of matrimonial love. But if homosexuality is overcome by a renunciation of homosexual emotional and sexual union, the opposite is achieved: the human being is liberated into sacrifice and pain, barred from the matrimonial love that the Church holds to be intrinsic, for most people, to the state of human flourishing ... In other words, the gay or lesbian person is deemed disordered at a far deeper level than the alcoholic: at the very level of the human capacity to love and be loved by another human being, in a union based on fidelity and self-giving. Their renunciation of such love is not guided toward some ulterior or greater goal – as the celibacy of the religious orders is designed to intensify their devotion to God. Rather, the loveless homosexual destiny is precisely toward nothing, a negation of human fulfillment."

Here Sullivan points out that renunciation of homosexual emotional and sexual union is ultimately renunciation of a central aspect of a one's capacity to love.

because he found them intellectually confused (although he does marshal an argument to this end) but because his attempts to live out these teachings led to moral and spiritual pathology and ultimately to alienation from God and from other people.

The Spiritual Impact of Spiritual Violence against Catholic Women

Although official church teaching has long excluded women from the sacrament of Holy Orders, only in the last 40 years have a growing number of theologians examined the impact of this exclusion on Catholic women's spiritual experience.⁴² In an early (1983) article on the topic, Sandra Schneiders discusses, in particular, women's experience of sacral unworthiness and spiritual inferiority.⁴³ Sacral unworthiness is the sense that simply in virtue of being female one is unworthy to participate or assist in sacramental life. Since women's exclusion from ministry is justified as God's will, God's own design, which Church officials could not alter even if they wanted to,⁴⁴ women's relationship with God easily may be shaped by the belief that their spiritual inferiority and sacral unworthiness is also God's will.

⁴² See for example, Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Beacon Press, 1983); Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Violence against Women*, ed. with M. Shawn Copeland. *Concilium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), *The Non-ordination of Women and the Politics of Power*, ed. with Hermann Häring (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999), and *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle*, ed. with M. Pilar Aquino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000); and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroads Press, 1992).

⁴³ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Effects of Women's Experience on Their Spirituality," *Spirituality Today*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1983, pp. 100-116.

⁴⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sets this out clearly, quoting the decree *Inter insigniores*:

Only a baptized man (*vir*) receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men (*viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ's return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord Himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible. (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P4X.HTM#2O. No. 1578 & 1579.)

The wound of sacral unworthiness is deepened by another characteristic feature of Catholic ritual life, namely, the presentation of God in almost exclusively male terms – what Schneiders calls the “divinization of maleness” – despite the lack of scriptural support for this practice. Scripture provides numerous images of God, many of which are feminine and some of which are female personifications,⁴⁵ but staunch resistance by Church leaders to proposals for more inclusive liturgical language, or even just the bristling of ordinary lay people when one refers to God as “she” indicates how effectively the official Catholic imagination has been shaped by a male God, and the hard work one has to do to liberate oneself from these imaginative limits.⁴⁶ This divinization of maleness coupled with an exclusively male priesthood encourages the spiritual imagination to equate God with male, and conversely to equate male with God, with potentially devastating spiritual consequences for women. As Schneiders explains:

Perhaps the most profoundly destructive is the deep sense of exclusion from the divine that women imbibe ... God, to women, is man “writ large.” Men are God “writ small.” God and man belong to the same order of things and from that order women are excluded ... A second negative effect on women’s spirituality ... is that women (and men as well) have most often experienced God the way they have experienced men. They admire, depend upon, and defer to God. But they can also be dominated, used, undervalued, and basically despised by God. They are ever guilty, a nuisance, and can justify themselves only by unrelenting service, continual performance, and lowly self-effacement.⁴⁷

Women who pursue spiritual formation in such an environment are at risk of “imbibing” a sense of their own divinely ordained inferiority as a central aspect of their spiritual self, which informs how they relate to both God and other people. They are at risk of experiencing God as either authoring or reinforcing broader cultural

⁴⁵ E.g. Is. 66:13; Is. 49:15; Psalm 131:2.

⁴⁶ See Elizabeth A Johnson, *She Who Is*, especially chapter 1.

⁴⁷ “The Effects of Women’s Experience,” p. 101.

messages of female inferiority, and they are in turn at risk of experiencing themselves as undervalued or even despised by God.⁴⁸

It is into this long history of conceptual devaluation of women around which sacramental life has been built that Jaime Manson's editorial charging the Vatican with spiritual violence against women fits. Women's exclusion from Holy Orders along with whatever spiritual injuries that exclusion may inflict is not new. Manson's concern is that this most recent Vatican declaration packs a new spiritual punch and with even more brutal spiritual force. The new message does not merely re-emphasize exclusion; it emphasizes the stronger position that women's bodies are sacramental pollutants and would desecrate the Eucharist. This message strengthens the divinization of maleness and sense of sacral unworthiness that places women at risk of experiencing God as hostile or abusive.

Michelle Casey's⁴⁹ experience reveals the profound spiritual injury to women that can result from spiritual formation within a religious institution that encourages a sense of sacral unworthiness and spiritual inferiority in women. Casey's descriptions of her early spiritual life are descriptions of a dweller. She was a rigidly rule-following cradle Catholic who pitied her non-Catholic associates who she believed were hell bound. Faith was a matter of conforming to Church rules and teachings, which instructed her especially in how to be a "good girl" in God's eyes. Being a good girl had a lot to do with sexual purity. Casey's faith was based on fear of God's punishment should she step out of line, and on the sense that as a girl she was especially prone to sexual sin. Since she could not change the fact that she was a girl, she says she spent the bulk of her life trying to justify herself to God by putting herself down, belittling and judging herself as a way of making restitution with God.

In 2002, when the clergy sexual abuse crisis broke publicly, Casey experienced an enormous sense of betrayal that she likened to a major

⁴⁸ For a good recent summary of this conceptual history see, Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).

⁴⁹ The name Michelle Casey is a pseudonym for the women who shared with me the experiences recounted here and who gave me permission to share these experiences without using her name. All paraphrasing of her experiences and direct quotes attributed to Casey reference unpublished interview transcripts from December 6th, 2013, Milwaukee, WI.

infidelity, as if she discovered that her husband had been unfaithful for the entire 50 years of their marriage. Casey was not a direct victim of sexual abuse, but she had spent her whole life fearfully obeying priests and trying to live out the teachings of the Church and all along Church leaders were violating those teachings in the grossest way while condemning lay Catholics and women in particular as hell bound for the smallest transgressions. Her trust was so completely shattered that she left the Church and began what she described as a quest of spiritual seeking.

A few years into this spiritual quest Casey attended a non-religious women's retreat. On the first evening, facilitators led participants in an introductory exercise in which they asked participants to "kneel down and pray before your god." The idea was to get people pre-reflectively in touch with what "gods" anchor their pursuit of meaning and purpose. The image that came immediately into Casey's mind, and that she could not shake no matter how hard she tried to imagine something else, was an image of the Roman collar. Casey was stunned by the exercise because she realized that the "god" she had worshipped for over sixty years was "the priest." The spiritual violation Casey endured led to a form of idolatry in which she worshiped not God, but priests who had shepherded her into a "faith" based on fear, anxiety, and a deep sense of shame about being a woman. Casey described the exercise as both freeing because it revealed a crucial truth about her life, and devastating as she faced a terrible realization that her spiritual capacities had been recruited over the course of a life-time to support her own degradation and to lead her away from loving relationship with God.

Spiritual Violence, Seeking, and Dwelling

Thus far I have tried to foreground spiritual violence as an overlooked mode of violence perpetrated against women and LGBT persons by the institutional Church. The experiences members of these groups are naming as spiritual violence are not new, but the more public naming of these experiences as a form of Church-based violence is new. I have suggested that experience of spiritual violence is a significant source of mistrust of the Church among members of these groups. But victims' experiences of this mode of violence have not been uniform and the lenses of seeking and dwelling may shed

some light on these divergent responses. In this section, I examine the experience of spiritual violence through the lenses of seeking and dwelling and, conversely, the disjunction between seekers and dwellers through the lens of spiritual violence. Specifically, I explore how one's spiritual orientation as either a dweller or seeker may influence one's experience of and responses to structural spiritual violence, as well as how the experience of spiritual violence may influence one's spiritual orientation and specifically how it may be an important source of the rise in the number of seekers among American Catholics. I use the term 'explore' quite literally here. This section is exploratory and suggestive. I am not intending to tell a causal story about influences or to present empirically verified correlations – this is not an account of how these phenomena in fact influence each other, but an exploration of how they may do so. Nonetheless, these reflections offer important considerations for a Church interested in bridging a perceived disjunction between seekers and dwellers and for discerning how it might relate spiritually to both.

*Impact of One's Spiritual Orientation on One's Experience of
Spiritual Violence*

Dwellers: It may be more difficult for dwellers to perceive structural spiritual violence than it is for seekers to perceive it, because a dweller's threshold for conscious experience of violation is likely much higher than a seeker's threshold. This is in part because a dweller's spiritual identity is so wholly constituted by, and in a fairly rigid and fixed way, the norms, rules, and ritual practices of the institution. To perceive violation built into these norms is a serious threat to the spiritual self who is so deeply constituted by them. There is, as it were, a great incentive of self-protection not to see the flaws in the structure, since it is just a short step then to see the flaws in the self that has been so thoroughly constituted by the structure.

The dweller's orientation, then, may shape her experience of structural spiritual violence in at least one of two ways: internalization or compartmentalization. Dwellers may be more likely than seekers to internalize the harm of spiritual violation because their spiritual orientation does not permit questioning and does not emphasize the search for spiritual authenticity, but instead emphasizes conformity to and habituation into the ritual life of the community. Michelle Casey's

early experiences of formation seem to exemplify this. Dwellers who internalize the harm may deny charges of structural violence and typically come to endorse and defend the violating norms. Moreover, if one internalizes the harm, she may not consciously experience spiritual violation but may nonetheless suffer from some of its effects as these are borne out in her spiritual personality. The young Andrew Sullivan who attempted to live out Church teachings about homosexuality might be an example of this response. Initially he did not overtly experience violation, but he suffered nonetheless from latent spiritual angst, a spiritual self-marked by dishonesty, anxiety, and bitterness and a deep sense of self-loathing, which he later came to realize were the consequences of attempting to live within a spiritually violent structure – one that could not both affirm human dignity while denying his capacity to love. Other dwellers respond to structural spiritual violence by compartmentalizing spiritual experience, attempting to maintain faithful commitment to the Church and its teachings and simply ignoring or shelving those aspects that pose a potential threat to one's spiritual self. The likely makes for a fragmented spiritual self who may experience residual or latent spiritual angst often just below the surface, but nonetheless people in this camp manage to dwell, albeit not entirely at ease by compartmentalizing.

One might object at this point that my analysis forecloses the possibility that someone might escape violation from structural spiritual violence altogether, and through very thoroughgoing conformity to the rules and traditions of the Church cultivate a loving communion with the divine and a healthy spiritual self. Indeed, some dwellers will deny that the structure is violent and resent the charge that their denial is a sign that they have internalized the harm and so are operating with a kind of false consciousness. Individual resilience to structurally inflicted violence varies, and some people for a variety of reasons may escape conscious experience of violation.⁵⁰ In the case

⁵⁰ In a four-part series of organized discussions entitled "More Than a Monologue. Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church" (sponsored by Fordham University, Yale Divinity School, Union Theological Seminary and Fairfield University) an array of perspectives on these issues were shared, including responses from gay and lesbian Catholics who do not experience Church teaching on homosexuality as violating. For access to panel presentations: <http://digital.lib>

of structural violence, however, one cannot look exclusively at individual conscious experience; one has to look at how the structure functions to produce a set of options for the believer, none of which is entirely free from violation. That is, a structure is violent if that structure leaves open no non-violating options for people, even if individuals do not always consciously experience the harm and even if some manage to work around it.⁵¹ An individual's awareness of the violence of a structure she may participate in, and her experience of violation as a result of participation in that structure will depend on a number of other features of her situation. Moreover, one's awareness of these things is rarely "all or nothing," for a structure or institution that is undeniably *partially* constituted by norms that violate persons may not be wholly constituted by such norms.

I also want to acknowledge a possibility that emerges when one considers structural spiritual violence from a strictly theological perspective which maintains that an all-loving and all-powerful divine being is capable of circumventing humanly installed institutions, and that the mystery of God's grace may reach victims despite the violating conditions of their religious home. That is, from this perspective, one's experience of and relationship with God is never entirely up to her, or entirely reducible to her participation within a human institution, and so a person may manage to experience loving communion with God despite an institution that erects barriers to such communion.

Seekers: Seekers may more readily perceive structural spiritual violence because their spiritual identities are less rigidly constituted by the norms of the institution, but their experience of and response to it will vary depending on the kind of seeker one is. "The spirituals," those who have a free-floating spirituality but who may nonetheless find resources within the Church for the journey, may well notice the violent structures of the Church but are likely not to experience violation of the spiritual self because their spiritual identities are not

www.fordham.edu/cdm/search/searchterm/more%20than%20a%20monologue/or%20der/nosort.

⁵¹ Factors including family influences, local parish life and experiences, resources from other parts of the faith tradition, and an individual's own psychological resilience can mitigate the potentially damaging impact of a spiritually violent environment, just as there are sources of resilience which may protect a person from the damaging impact of psychologically abusive parenting.

constituted through the Church. Awareness of the violent structures may cast a suspect pall over the Church as a viable resource for the journey, and may lead this group of seekers to seek elsewhere – to perceive the church as outdated, out of touch, but they are not likely to experience violation of the spiritual self because their spiritual self has not been constituted through these structures. By contrast, those seekers whose spiritual identities are partially constituted through formation in the Church, but whose spiritual selves are more porous, malleable, and fluid than the spiritualities of dwellers, are likely to perceive the violation and to experience anger, and so to dissent from certain aspects of Church teaching and to engage in radical questioning of the faith and negotiation of their relationship to it.

*Impact of Experience of Spiritual Violence on One's
Spiritual Orientation*

Just as a person's initial spiritual orientation may influence her experience of and response to spiritual violence, so too the experience of spiritual violence may influence a shift in one's spiritual orientation in any number of ways. I want to look especially, though not exclusively, at how this experience may be one source of shift from dwelling to seeking. I focus here only on people who gravitate toward dwelling and to those seekers who are anchored to the Church, but nonetheless gravitate toward a seeking spirituality.⁵²

Seekers: Spiritual violence may lead seekers into loss of Catholic faith, but not a loss of religious faith, or loss of religious faith but not a loss of spirituality. Because their spiritual identities are less thoroughly and rigidly constituted through institutional norms and practices, and because the boundaries of their spiritual selves are more porous and fluid, people who have been seekers all along may be better positioned to maintain a sense of religious faith, or at least a sense of connection to the transcendent in the aftermath of spiritual

⁵² I am not discussing the spirituals, since in my view they are likely not to be spiritually violated. A person's ability to be spiritually violated by participation in a religious institution turns on the extent to which his or her spiritual identity is constituted through participation in that institution, and the spirituals, by definition, do not have spiritual identities constituted through a religious institution.

violation. Their connection to the Church is not instrumental, but is integral to their faith and spiritual identity, which is why they experience some level of violation. Yet their seeking orientation may protect them from a total crisis of faith, because it is easier for them to separate God from the places and practices through which we encounter God. Thus seekers who have experienced spiritual violence in the Church, may lose their Catholic faith but retain a sense of religious faith and seek communion with God through participation in another religious homes. Or, they may lose religious faith becoming suspicious of institutionalized religious communities generally speaking, perhaps because of a sense that they are prone to corruption, but nonetheless retain a sense of the spiritual and a desire to connect with God, though be only loosely affiliated with a congregation, if at all (perhaps they become a “spiritual”). The seeking orientation may be more likely to protect a person’s spiritual capacities from thoroughgoing spiritual corruption as a result of structural spiritual violation because it does not identify God so closely with institutionally designated places and doctrines.

Dwellers: I’d like to suggest that dwellers who have conscious experience of spiritual violation are likely to respond in one of two ways: either (1) they experience a spiritual crisis that generates a total break from religious faith, a rejection of their former spiritual self, or (2) they become seekers, having to reconstitute their spiritual identities, negotiating a new one either within the faith tradition of origin or within an alternative religious home. That is, because the spiritual self is so thoroughly and densely constituted through the norms and rituals of the Church, the conscious recognition of structural spiritual violation can bring with it a crisis of the spiritual self: one is likely either to abandon religiosity and faith altogether, or to become a seeker.

Although initially it might be more difficult for dwellers to perceive spiritual violence, if and when the conscious experience of violation comes, it may be all the more severe. Dwellers might be likened to a piece of wood that may bend gradually under the pressures of the violating structure until one day some manifestation of the violation is too much to bear and the wood – the spiritual self – breaks. Because the threshold for their conscious experience of violation is higher, because it takes more to shake them, so to speak, the spiritual consequences once they are shaken may be more severe.

This seems to be what happened to Casey in 2002, when she learned of the child sexual abuse scandal in the Church. Casey has a total crisis of faith that led her initially to leave the Church and to reject God. Because the dweller makes such a tight association between the divine a specific set of institutional norms and practices, dwellers may be at greater risk of conflating the divine with the symbols, places, and practices that mediate experience of the divine, which is precisely what happened to Casey who came to conflate God with the Church and in particular with priests. If dwellers then come to experience these spiritual mediators as abusive or poisoned, they may be at greater risk of experiencing the divine itself as abusive and thus may be at a higher risk than seekers of experiencing a total crisis of faith. They may be more inclined to abandon religious faith altogether rather than to retain a sense of connection with God beyond the norms and rituals of the Church and seek healthy spirituality elsewhere, or navigate a healthier path within the tradition of origin.

For those dwellers who do not have a complete spiritual crisis, their conscious experience of spiritual violation may mean that it is no longer possible for them to dwell safely and securely in the spiritual home of origin and so they have to negotiate their spirituality. And yet the pull of dwelling keeps them tied, even anchored, to the inherited faith they love and experience as a deep part of their identity that they are unable and unwilling fully to relinquish. For people in this camp, the stance of faith generally speaking has not been threatened, but their stance in relation to their particular spiritual home and the faith on offer in that home have been called into question. The source of spiritual seeking in this group seems to spring from the experience of growing up in a spiritually abusive religious home, but a home that nonetheless also delivered some crucial spiritual goods and relationships that are not easily or willingly abandoned. This is not unlike a person who grows up in an abusive family situation, but whose experience was complicated by the fact that the family relationships were not damaging all the way through, and by the fact that even the abusive ones may have delivered important goods and values. In such cases a person develops an uncertain relationship to that home once she reaches spiritual adulthood and is confronted with questions about whether to stay, if she stays how much time to spend there or with which members of the spiritual family to associate, and how to stay and be safe in this

spiritual home. That is, she has to negotiate a new spiritual identity within this home because the inherited path of identity formation results in a damaged spiritual self, and so a spirituality of negotiation – a spirituality of seeking – emerges.

I think this may be where Michelle Casey has landed and it is worth quoting her here because her words illustrate the sense of spiritual homelessness one can experience and the shift from dwelling to seeking one may undergo. Casey describes her relationship to the Church since her 2002 break with it as follows:

I needed to stay away ... in order to feel that those rules no longer hold me. Then I'd come back to [the] Church thinking that I had a whole new outlook and prepared to reengage, but when I do all of the old comes right back flooding me, and I have to go away again, and this time, stay away longer ... the oppression, the rigidity of the mass take me right back to thinking nothing has really changed. But what I also know is that something has to change in me; this is a two-way thing – there is something in me that has to change before church will be different for me. What do I need to do to embrace this Church differently?⁵³

Having been a dweller, it took a long time and a major betrayal to generate her crisis of faith, which initially led Casey to leave the church and even temporarily to suspend her commitment to religiosity, though she never seems to have lost a sense of the transcendent. She went seeking for the transcendent in other traditions and in her own explorations of self-discovery. She has now in some sense returned to the Church, but arguably as a seeker.

Even those women and gay Catholics who are dwellers and who claim not to have conscious experience of spiritual violence and who remain steadfastly dwellers are nonetheless more likely to be propelled to some extent into a spirituality of negotiation – and thus to experience elements of spiritual seeking – in a way that men and heterosexual persons are not so propelled, precisely because their very existence in the Church as women and as gays invite the question of how to reconcile or *negotiate* those identities with one's spiritual

⁵³ Unpublished interview transcripts, December 6, 2013, Milwaukee, WI.

identity. The Church's teachings on homosexuality forces the question "How can I be both gay and Catholic?" which is a question not raised for heterosexuals – there is no disjunction between heterosexual identity and Catholic identity. Similarly, the Church's views about and treatment of women raises the question, "How can I affirm my own dignity as a woman and be Catholic?" which is a question not raised for men because the dignity of men is clearly valued and endorsed.

Two Sub-Categories of Spiritual Orientation

This discussion generates two sub-categories of spiritual orientation for victims of spiritual violence:

Dweller/seekers may, like Andrew Sullivan, still encounter God in the sacred places and holy rituals designated by the official Church. This may be easier for gay men to do because as men there is nothing in Catholic liturgical experience that overtly violates their personhood in the way that several liturgical and ritual norms may violate the spiritual personhood of women. Dweller/seekers reorient themselves toward religious authorities and toward the institution, no longer viewing either as a repository for revealed truth but rather as fallible resources for the journey. But they do not necessarily aim to create radically new institutional structures or rituals. They may continue to emphasize encountering God within traditional ritual practice and familiar, clearly delineated sacred space, but can no longer relate to religious authorities as epistemically privileged repositories of divinely revealed truth, for example, and so treat them instead as resources. That is, these dweller/seekers still dwell in the sacred spaces and rituals designated by the tradition, but engage in individual, personal negotiation of an authentic spiritual self that can be integrated with those aspects of the self that the faith tradition denigrates. Their spiritual identity is still, in some sense, traditionally Catholic or marked by participation within the bounds the institutional Church – they change the self but not the structure. Sullivan, for example, appears to remain very clearly anchored in many ways to a traditional understanding of Catholic faith, still regularly attending mass and reciting the same communion litany before receiving the Holy Eucharist that he recited as a 15 year-old. His seeking appears to take place at an individual level as he

negotiates how fully to integrate spiritual and sexual aspects of the self while still participating to greater or lesser extent in much of the ritual life of the official Church.

Seeker/dwellers by contrast may, like Jaime Manson and many of the members of Dignity USA and the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), no longer be able to encounter God in officially designated Church spaces, or through officially designated sacraments because spiritually violating attitudes toward women are built into the central meanings of these. For these people, participation in the ritual life of the community may be experienced as participation in one's own spiritual abuse. Their spiritual identities are still partially and deeply constituted by the faith in some sense and they experience other aspects of the tradition as beautiful and affirming – the church is not spiritually violent all the way down, so to speak. People in this group are no longer able to encounter God in officially designated spaces or to build relationship with God through the officially sanctioned rituals, yet the pull of dwelling may nonetheless keep a person tied, even in some sense anchored to the inherited faith and might yield a sense of responsibility to that faith. They often feel as if they cannot and will not leave and abandon the gift of the faith to a human institution that threatens to corrupt that faith. I'd like to suggest that in addition to whatever individual spiritual negotiation they may undertake, seeker/dwellers are also more likely than dweller/seekers to seek radical institutional change by creating new spiritual communities and new rituals, or by giving new spiritually non-violating meanings to old familiar rituals.⁵⁴ That is, whereas dweller/seekers are more likely to emphasize individual spiritual change, seeker/dwellers are more likely to create new structures or to be open to the creation of new structures, but ones that are still in some sense expressive of a distinctively Catholic spirituality. Members of Dignity USA clearly

⁵⁴ For example, Catholic ritual is always part of Dignity USA's national conferences, including opportunities for participants to attend Holy Mass, These "masses" are in many respects radically revised and reimagined versions of liturgy so as to be maximally inclusive, for example, and so are denounced by the official Church as sacrilegious. But the fact that these ritual opportunities are viewed as an important part of this community's gatherings suggests the pull of dwelling that many members of this organization feel. For more on this perspective see, Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith and Power* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), see especially chapter five, "Gay and Lesbian Catholics: 'Owning the Identity Differently,'" pp. 115-163.

understand themselves to be part of the Church, and yet also seek new institutional norms and structures. Members of the WOC, and especially Roman Catholic Women Priests, also understand themselves to be part of the Roman tradition and yet seek radical (at the roots) structural change, which includes full inclusion of women into the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Conclusion: The Leadership of Pope Francis and Prospects for Healing and Hope

I'd like to conclude with some brief remarks about prospects for hope and healing from structural spiritual violence under the new leadership of Pope Francis. Specifically, I'd like to suggest that the two sub-categories just described of dweller/seeker and seeker/dweller reflect the spirit of Pope Francis's leadership, which might be characterized as a call to cultivate a faith that both dwells and seeks, and especially that is capable of holding a healthy tension between dwelling and seeking.⁵⁵ To the extent survivors of spiritual violence also come to cultivate this kind of hybrid spiritual life, they may serve as important resources for a Church interested in bridging the disjunction between seekers and dwellers.

The disjunction between a dweller-friendly Church and an increasingly seeker-oriented population within the West is not due to a mere emphasis on dwelling over seeking within the Church, but rather a distorted kind of dwelling emphasized by a Church that has, by and large, cut itself off from seeking. There is a connection between the kind of spiritual violence described in this paper and a degenerate spirituality of dwelling that can result when dwelling is cut off from seeking. Structural spiritual violence manifests not only in the Church teachings about women and LGBT persons referenced in this paper, but also in the attitudes among Church leadership toward victims

⁵⁵ In an oft-cited remark from 2013, that Pope Francis made about gay priests during an interview on a papal airplane. He said, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" Although Francis did not stray from official church teaching about homosexuality, he struck "a more compassionate tone than that of his predecessors" including his immediate predecessor Pope Benedict who in 2005, wrote that men with "'deep-seated homosexual tendencies' should not become priests" (*New York Times*, July 29, 2013).

which encourage silencing and hasty censure rather than dialogue and attempts to heal and reconcile. In my view, these attitudes are, at least partially, the result not just of a lopsided but also a depraved form of dwelling characterized by a hostility toward seeking that can emerge when dwelling is severed from seeking. Although no religious institution is entirely immune from becoming spiritually violent, an institution that emphasizes and values seeking is less likely to become so because seeking can function as an important check on those aspects of dwelling that may yield an ossified faith bolstered by arrogant certitude. If this is right, then prospects for healing from structural spiritual violence require a correction in the spiritual orientation of the institution of the Church. I think Pope Francis clearly recognizes this and is pursuing such a corrective.

In his 2014 Christmas address to the Curia, Pope Francis lists fifteen sicknesses or ailments infecting the Curia that need to be healed if the Church is to restore its credibility and relevance.⁵⁶ The list includes:

- The disease of rivalry and vainglory which impedes humility (#7)
 - “Spiritual Alzheimer’s disease... in those who have lost the memory of their encounter with the Lord” and “who build walls and routines around themselves, and thus become more and more the slaves of idols carved by their own hands” (#6)
 - “The disease of excessive planning and of functionalism” which “attempts to contain and direct the freedom of the Holy Spirit ... We contract this disease because ‘it is always more easy and comfortable to settle in our own sedentary and unchanging ways’” (#4)
 - The disease “of mental and spiritual ‘petrification’” found “in those who have a heart of stone ... who lose ‘the sentiments of Jesus’ (cf. Phil 2:5-11), because as time goes on their hearts grow hard and become incapable of loving unconditionally the Father and our neighbour (cf. Mt 22:34-35)” (#3)
 - The disease of thinking “we are ‘immortal’, ‘immune’ or downright ‘indispensable,’” and so of failing to be self-critical (#1).

⁵⁶ “Presentation of the Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia” address of his Holiness Pope Francis. Clementine Hall, December 22, 2014. Online at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141222_curia-romana.html.

The arrogance, certitude, stone-heartedness, self-referential attitude, and rote functionalism described in this list are arguably ailments that result from a prolonged spirituality of dwelling that has been disconnected from the gifts of seeking. To dwell without seeking is to risk cutting oneself off from the mystery of God, from the surprising places where and people through whom God can be revealed, and from a sense of that the kingdom of God is both “already and not-yet.”⁵⁷ It is also to risk a rigid, haughty assuredness that becomes an obstacle to intimate human encounter and unconditional love, which Jesus clearly modeled as God’s love.

To seek without dwelling is also risky, though, and may generate a different kind of spiritual “sickness.” Seeking cut off from dwelling risks collapsing into an exaggerated individualism, which may yield an isolated spiritual self that easily becomes apathetic or disillusioned. It is to risk abandoning the rituals and relationships through which we encounter the divine and that sustain our faith. It also risks deserting our responsibility to a community to whom we are accountable both for our own spiritual failures and when we believe others, including Church leaders, have strayed from the Gospel message. This may be part of the reason why seeker/dwellers like members of WOC and Dignity USA do not understand themselves as having left the Church, but instead as in some sense anchored to the Church. They seek radical change of its most fundamental structures and have created new communities of faith to spearhead and support this journey, rather than going it alone.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ John C. Haughey, S.J., “The Mission from Below” in *Where is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), pp. 1-14.

⁵⁸ This is speculative, but it may be the case that healthy spiritual development and sustenance requires participation in a community with some shared sense of the transcendent and some shared sense of how to relate to the transcendent. I think this is evident even among people who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious but who nonetheless seek other people with common spiritual sentiments with whom to share the journey. If one has no spiritual community, or if one’s relationship with a spiritual community is purely instrumental one may fall into a kind of spiritual isolation that leads to a loss of a sense of the sacred and of being connected to a transcendent being or reality – a kind of apathy or spiritual numbness. Even secular accounts of virtues such as reverence or piety, typically associated with spiritual or religious ways of being, emphasize these traits as

Arguably, Pope Francis is challenging the Church as a whole – lay faithful and Church leadership – to cultivate and nurture a spirituality that both seeks and dwells and that is capable of encountering God in the healthy tension between these orientations. In his recent address to the US Congress, for example, he lifts up the lives of two American Catholics as spiritual exemplars: Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. Day might be characterized as a dweller/seeker. She became extremely devout, went to daily mass, and promoted religious orthodoxy and yet retained a humility that fostered the kind of human encounter and intimacy that enables us to perceive peoples' realities and experiences, which can change us and help us see anew the face of God. Merton might be characterized as a seeker/dweller. As a priest and deeply prayerful man, he was clearly anchored to the Church, and yet he is also one of the clearest examples of a seeker who looked for and experienced God in other spiritual traditions, especially Buddhism, and in experiences in nature.

Pope Francis has not called for reconsideration of the substantive content of Church doctrine about homosexuality or women's ordination, and he may have some blind spots especially in regard to the role of women in Church leadership.⁵⁹ Early in his papacy he was asked about the possibility of ordaining women to which he replied, "'The church has spoken and says no ... That door is closed,'" and then he referenced Pope John Paul's II 1994 document, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which declares that "the church has no authority to ordain women, and this view must be held by all as a definitive belief."⁶⁰ Members of WOC continue to ask the Pope to engage in dialogue about this issue, arguing that his failure even to discuss it risks undermining the credibility of his powerful message against elitism in all its forms.⁶¹

important *social* virtues. See for example, Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁹ See for example, Paul Valley, "A weakness for women," chapter 16 in *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* second edition (Bloomsbury: London, 2013).

⁶⁰ Robert McClory, "Pope Francis and women's ordination" in *The National Catholic Reporter*, The Francis Chronicles, September 16, 2013, p. 1.

⁶¹ For a summary of the most recent address see Thomas C. Fox, "Theresa Kane's message to Pope Francis: eradicate scandal of gender inequality" in *National Catholic Reporter*, September 19, 2015. Theresa Kane first made a public plea for gender equality within the Church in a 1979 address to Pope John Paul II. See,

Still, Pope Francis has, generally speaking, assumed a radically new spiritual and moral posture and tone, which has galvanized many Catholics, especially younger generations who have felt alienated from the Church, to a renewed commitment to the faith. And as John Allen suggests, at “a certain point tone becomes substance if it is seen as revitalizing the prospects of the Church.”⁶² A change in tone that revitalizes a culture of seeking within the institution of the Church, and that aims to bridge the disjunction between seekers and dwellers by making dialogue a habit and humility a paramount institutional virtue, may indeed be a substantive change the full implications of which we have yet to discover. Survivors of spiritual violence who value both seeking and dwelling and who have learned to hold a healthy tension between these orientations may be especially well positioned to lead the way.

“Listen ... to Hear the Call of Women” online: *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1979, see <http://www.washington-post.com/archive/politics/1979/10/08/listen-to-hear-the-call-of-women/a6a4b00b-f44b-48c7-8771-33e91f248798/>. Moreover, in an editorial after the Pope’s visit, Maureen Dowd suggested that rationale for Church teaching on women’s ordination sends a message that women are divinely ordained as in some sense lesser beings, which lends credibility to those who would justify poor physical, psychological, economic, and political treatment of women on grounds that women are lesser beings. She references Paul Valley’s biography of the pope, *Pope Francis: Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism*, which calls women the Pope’s greatest area of weakness, an area that Francis is well aware of but appears baffled about how to resolve “within the orthodox framework of Catholicism.” See Maureen Dowd, “Francis the Perfect 19th Century Pope” in *The New York Times*. September 26, 2015.

⁶² John Allen, quoted in Rachel Donadio, “On Gay Priests, Pope Francis Asks: ‘Who am I to Judge?’” in *The New York Times*. July 29, 2013.