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REMAKING IRISH CATHOLICISM: MORAL AUTHORITY, REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS, AND THE STATE

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Part I

Chapter 1 Introduction

On May 25, 2018, the Irish government held a referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment, the state's constitutional prohibition on abortion. Although campaigners and observers had expected the margin of victory to be tight, nearly two-thirds of Irish voters marked "yes" on their ballots, repealing the amendment and making it possible for politicians to expand legal access to abortion. This display of strong support for legalized abortion in a historically "Catholic country" made headlines around the world.[1] *The Washington Post* declared, "The Irish have swept aside one of the most restrictive abortion bans in the developed world in a landslide" (Booth & Stanley-Becker, 2018). *The Guardian* described the result as "an extraordinary victory for women's rights that seals the country's transformation from bastion of religious conservatism to one of Europe's most tolerant democracies" (McDonald, Graham-Harrison, & Baker, 2018).

The referendum result spoke to an internationally recognized shift in Irish attitudes toward the teachings of the Catholic hierarchy that had taken place as the nation-state had undertaken a program of modernization. When the country was more politically and economically insular, the Catholic hierarchy wielded considerable power, and Irish Catholics demonstrated pious devotion to the Church and to Catholic orthodoxy. As late as 1971, over 90% of Catholics in Ireland fulfilled their religious obligation to attend Mass each Sunday (Girvin, 2018a). However, when Ireland started to forge stronger economic and political ties with its European neighbors,[2] exposing the Irish people to new ideas, perspectives, and practices, the population's commitment to the Church began to wane (Girvin, 2018b).

This shift was accelerated by the revelations of abuse and mistreatment overseen or

[1] This characterization is attributed to Pope Paul VI (1897-1978).
[2] Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973.

committed by the Irish Catholic Church. Since the late 1990s, the Irish Catholic Church has been beset by numerous scandals centering on the treatment of children and women in Church-run institutions, including parish churches, national schools, residential industrial schools, Magdalene laundries, and Mother and Baby Homes. Journalistic investigations and government inquiries have documented widespread physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect perpetrated by clergy and lay workers, as well as systemic practices of family separation, forced adoption, and concealment of abuse. Revelations of these harms have greatly undermined the moral authority of the Catholic hierarchy, further diminishing the influence of the Church in Irish society. By the 2010s, the number of Catholics in Ireland who attended Mass weekly had fallen dramatically, to approximately 35% (Girvin, 2018b). In popular discourse**,** these abuses have often been attributed to clericalism, on the part of the state and the population in general.

State actors have increasingly sought to distance Ireland from this legacy and to recast the nation as modern, liberal, and secular (Keogh, 2011). In 2011, Taoiseach Enda Kenny—himself a practicing Catholic—made international headlines when, in a speech rebuking the Holy See for thwarting state efforts to investigate child sexual abuse, he distanced the nation from the clericalism of its past. "This is not Rome," he said, "nor is it industrial-school or Magdalene Ireland, where the swish of a soutane smothered conscience and humanity, and the swing of a thurible ruled the Irish-Catholic world."[3] This was a republic, he declared, and its laws superseded those of the Church, which had "neither legitimacy nor place in the affairs of this country" (Kenny, 2011).

Demonstrating Kenny's point, in recent years the state and Irish citizens have enacted a number of laws challenging the teachings of the Catholic Church, particularly those concerning

[3] A soutane is a type of cassock worn by Catholic priests and a thurible is a type of incense holder suspended from chains.

sex, marriage, and reproduction. In May of 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage by popular referendum (McDonald, 2015). Just three months later, it became the fourth country in the world to allow trans people to have their gender legally recognized on government documents through a process of self-certification, with no medical intervention or certification required (de Londras, 2020; Republic of Ireland, 2015). In 2017, the state amended its laws to allow same-sex couples, whether married, in a civil partnership, or unmarried to apply to adopt (Republic of Ireland, 2017a). That same year the government prepared a regulatory framework for assisted human reproduction, including provisions for a variety of new reproductive technologies (Republic of Ireland, 2017b). Then, in January of 2018, the government announced it would hold a referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment in order to legalize abortion.

The new and proposed laws have distanced the state and its citizens from their historic deference to the moral authority of the Catholic hierarchy. At the same time, these laws represent a growing rift between the political aims of the state and those of the Vatican, the colloquial term for the government of the Roman Catholic Church that is headed by the Pope. Ireland's new laws are manifestations of what the Vatican deems the "gender agenda," a set of ideologies, legal reforms, and rights claims that, from the perspective of the Vatican, emerge from a commitment to obscuring the natural "difference or duality of the sexes" (Ratzinger, 2004). This denial of biologically determined difference, the Vatican suggests, connects what it sees as the components of the gender agenda: the "dismantling of sex roles, the acceptance of homosexuality, the recognition of a diversity of family forms and of sexual and gender expression, and access to the new reproductive technologies, condoms, other contraceptives, and abortion" (Case, 2016, p. 166). The idea of a "gender agenda" first took shape in the 1990s, as

the Vatican developed a strategy to counter the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights at the 1994 United Nations (UN) Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing (Buss, 1998; Case, 2011, 2016). Ever since, the Vatican (acting in its own name and through a "multitude of individual and organizational actors") has been influential in generating popular concern about "gender" and mobilizing opposition to laws and policies associated with the "gender agenda," such as the large-scale protests against the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption in France and against progressive sex education in Poland (Case, 2011, p. 808; Graff & Korolczuk, 2017; Fassin, 2016; Robcis, 2015). The debates surrounding Ireland's legal reforms have presented opportunities to incite similar concerns and protests. However, as McAuliffe and Kennedy (2017) have argued, discourses about "gender" and the "gender agenda" have gained little traction in Ireland, reinforcing both the separation between the Vatican and the state and the nation's new, socially progressive reputation.

With the steady decline in the Catholic hierarchy's political influence, widespread outrage over the recent revelations of abuse, and popular indifference to the concerns of the Vatican, it is easy to see why one might view the vote to repeal the Eighth Amendment as a rejection of Catholicism. Indeed, one international news source described the vote as a "rebuke" of the Catholic Church; another called it a "hammer blow" (De Freytas-Tamura, 2018; Ní Aodha, 2018). However, based on over a year of research, I suggest that what is actually occurring is not a rejection of the Catholic Church; rather, Irish people are remaining Catholic, but they are living their religion in new ways. In this dissertation, I argue that Catholic laypeople are actively remaking Irish Catholicism by challenging the moral authority of the hierarchy and by reconfiguring their relationships with the hierarchy, the Irish state, and the global Catholic

Church. Because Church authority in Ireland was historically secured and maintained through the control of social and biological reproduction, it is in the domain of reproduction that we see Catholicism remade.

Christian personhood, Catholic moral authority, and making "good Catholics"

In examining transformations in Irish Catholicism, I build on anthropological scholarship on religion, Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular. All three bodies of literature have been profoundly shaped by discussions surrounding the connections between Christianity and anthropological thought that emerged during the "reflexive turn" of the 1970s and 1980s. Talal Asad's critique of the category of religion has proven especially influential. In *Genealogies of Religion* (1993)**,** Asad argues that anthropological conceptions of religion have been constrained by scholars' reliance on post-Enlightenment Christianity as a model. Compared to earlier forms of Christianity, he shows us, post-Enlightenment Christianity has a limited presence in the public sphere and lacks access to powers that could enforce disciplinary modes of subject formation that historically characterized the religion. No longer defined by formal exterior practices, Christianity came to be concerned with the "internal, private assent to particular propositions understood as 'belief'" (Bialecki, Haynes, & Robbins, 2008, p. 1142). That anthropological understandings of religion were shaped by "the privatized forms of religion so characteristic of modern (Christian) society" was, for Asad, exemplified by Clifford Geertz's famous definition of religion as a "cultural system" characterized by adherence to internalized representations (Asad, 1983, p. 237; Geertz, 1973/2008). Scholars of religion—and particularly scholars of Islam and Christianity—have built on Asad's claims to argue that defining religion primarily in terms of belief can lead anthropologists to misrepresent the lives and experiences of those who practice religions without following such a model (Agrama, 2012; Fernando, 2014; Mahmood, 2005/2012; Hirschkind, 2006).

This critique of the category of religion has influenced the anthropology of Christianity, a strand of research that emerged in response to the rapid growth of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity globally in the 1980s and 1990s. Accordingly, much of its early scholarship was on social change and religious experience in "convert cultures" that had recently adopted these forms of Christianity. Drawing on Asad's insights, anthropologists have observed that a narrow definition of religion premised on belief does not adequately represent the lives of those who practice Protestant and evangelical Christianities but who are not fully immersed "in other facets of Western modern culture" (Bialecki et al., 2008; see also Kirsch, 2004; Keller, 2005; Robbins, 2007). Both anthropologists and the Christians they study understand conversion as a transformation from "a pre-Christian past and a new orientation to a brighter future in which they will participate in a modern and global religious order"—a social change that is thematized with Christian tropes of "rupture" and discontinuity (Bialecki et al., 2008, p. 1144). Yet, as scholars have observed, this transformation is always only partial; converts are constantly navigating tensions between non-Christian moral traditions and Christian conceptions of meaning, personhood, and temporality (Bialecki et al., 2008; Cole, 2010; Engelke, 2007; Keane, 2007; Meyer, 1999; Robbins, 2004, 2014; Schieffelin, 2002).

A well-developed aspect of the research on conversion investigates Christian self-formation: in other words, how people become Christian. Scholars have argued that Christianity as a cultural form promotes individualism as a key part of Christian personhood and moral thinking (Keane, 2007; Robbins, 2004). This emphasis, Joel Robbins (2012) argues, is grounded in the Christian idea that "it is in the human person that the transcendent most fully reveals itself in the mundane world" (p. 19). While this is shared by most, if not all, forms of Christianity, including Roman Catholicism, the ethnographic support for Christianity as an "individuating

force" that shapes Christian lives comes predominantly from scholarship on Protestantism. Scholars have generated a wealth of literature on individualism in Protestant language ideologies, which tend to stress the importance of sincerity and truth-telling (Keane, 2002, 2007; Harding, 2001; Robbins, 2001, 2004; Schiefflin, 2002). In his influential work *Christian Moderns* (2007), Webb Keane argues that underlying this ethic of speech is a conviction that what matters for meaning depends primarily on the speaker's intentions and not how speech is received by interlocutors (as opposed to models of speech that center politeness or formality). In Calvinism—and in Protestantism more generally, he contends—there is a moral demand for each person to strive to convey their immaterial, spiritual thoughts and feelings without relying on the social conventions of language; in doing so, speakers are understood to cultivate independent, autonomous Christian selves that transcend the "mundane" material and social worlds that surround them to connect more directly with God.

Keane's work deftly shows that the semiotic ideologies that produce the Protestant individual also have converged with Enlightenment thought about morality, autonomy, and freedom to produce a "moral narrative of modernity," Keane's term for an understanding of modernity as a story of moral progress. In the analysis of Keane (2007), the modern individual, like the Protestant individual, detaches themself from the material; however, they are not doing so to connect more directly to God, but to liberate themselves from social conventions (like religious rules and traditions) and fetishes (such as sacred texts) that limit the individual's freedom. That does not mean Christian individualism is always viewed as "modern"; after all, Christianity is often invoked to oppose social changes perceived to be associated with modernity (Bialecki et al., 2008, p. 1151). Robbins (2007) posits that Christian forms are more likely to be viewed as antimodern in places where Christianity has been present for a long period of time,

like Europe.

The claim that individualism is fundamental to Christian personhood and moral thinking has met with criticism. Some scholars, like Mark Mosko (2010), have rejected it entirely; he argues that what has been understood as individualism is in fact dividualism – the treatment of the person as multiple and indissociable from their relationships (Strathern, 1988). Many others recognize individualism to be a salient feature of Christianity, but contend that the discipline's focus on individualism can be "misleading or perhaps insufficient" for understanding Christian lives (Bialecki & Daswani, 2015; see also Bialecki, 2011; Cannell, 2017; Chua, 2012; Elisha, 2011; Daswani, 2011; Handman, 2015; McIvor, 2019; Vilaça, 2011). In recent years, this critique has generated some insightful explorations of how relationalism and intersubjectivity figure into Christian moral thinking among Mormons (Cannell, 2017) and evangelical Protestants (Elisha, 2011; McIvor, 2019).

While this scholarship has been very productive for my thinking about Christian personhood, I am concerned that the anthropology of Christianity's focus on individualism and relationalism has emerged primarily from ethnographic work on Protestantism and Pentecostalism. That is not to say that questions of individualism and relationalism are irrelevant to understanding the personhood of Roman Catholics—far from it. However, a study of how people become and remain Catholic should not presume that individualism and/or relationalism are the most salient features of Catholic personhood. In fact, among my interlocutors, questions of individualism and relationalism are far less significant for their understanding of bbeing. Catholic than questions of moral authority.

Scholars in the nascent anthropology of Catholicism argue that the distinctive features of Catholicism, such as its approach to moral authority, can open up new areas of inquiry and

debate for studies of Christianity and religion more broadly (Mayblin, Norget, & Napolitano, 2017, p. 2). The anthropology of Catholicism is a body of scholarship that orients itself toward the broader comparative anthropology of religion, distinct from but in conversation with the anthropology of (Protestant) Christianity. Scholars within the movement recognize that Catholicism and Protestantism "share a broader Christian language" (Mayblin et al., 2017, p. 2); both invoke an "underlying grammar of established center versus popular periphery, of significant differentiation of the sacred in time and space, of conflicts and yet ineluctable relationships between clergy and laypeople" (Coleman, 2017, p. 277). Yet they diverge in significant ways, and their distinctive features raise different kinds of questions (Mayblin et al., 2017, p. 4). I suggest that Catholicism's approach to moral authority, distinctive among Christianities, opens up new terrain for conversations about Christian personhood.

The issue of moral authority within the Catholic Church is "fraught with ambiguity even in theological circles" (D'Antonio, Dillion, & Gautier, 2013, p. 70). On the one hand, the authority to interpret the Word of God, whether in written form or in the form of traditions, lies with the Pope and the bishops. This authority is referred to as the Magisterium, and according to the theological concept of apostolic succession, it has been transmitted from Christ's Apostles to successive popes and bishops in an uninterrupted line. The exercise of the Magisterium can propose a teaching as "infallible," obliging Catholics to accept it as dogma; the vast majority of teachings, however, are declared noninfallible but authoritative. Authoritative teachings—and even public statements made by the Pope or bishops that are not explicitly authoritative—are meant to be "acknowledged with reverence" and "not dismissed" (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 25).

On the other hand, this top-down understanding of moral authority is complicated by

Catholicism's assertions that the Church is a dialogical, collegial, and communal institution, guided by both the hierarchy and laity. These aspects of the Church were strongly reinforced at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), often referred to as Vatican II, which was called by Pope John XXIII as a means of *aggiornamento*, a "bringing up to date" of Church traditions to meet the challenges of modernity. The Council emphasized the importance of the individual conscience in moral decision-making. The participants defined conscience as "man's most secret core" in which "he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths," enabling him to "perceive and acknowledge the imperatives of the divine law" (Vatican Council II, 1965, Gaudium et spes, section 16; Vatican Council II, 1965, Dignitatis Humanae, section 3). While stressing that Catholics should "pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church" in forming their consciences, the Council stated that "[man] is bound to follow [his] conscience faithfully in all activities" and that no one should be prevented from acting in accordance with their conscience or forced to act against it (Vatican Council II, 1965, Dignitatis Humanae, sections 3, 14). Additionally, the Council stated that lay people, collectively and individually, are "competent" in questions of living in the temporal world, and they have the right and responsibility to use that competence to offer advice on matters that concern the good of the Church—so long as they do so in respectful dialogue with the hierarchy, who are similarly obligated to "willingly make use of [the laity's] prudent advice" (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 37).

The ambiguities Catholic teachings on moral authority and the resultant tensions are an example of Catholicism's capacity to contain seemingly "incompatible cultural materials into one formation," or *complexio oppositorum*, "a complex of opposites" (Mosse, 2017, p. 105). Carl Schmitt (1923/1996), who used this notion in developing a theory of hegemony in imperialism,

suggested that Catholicism resists resolving opposition not through theological abstraction above (in a detached, distant God) or Protestant interiorization within (the erasure of that distance between God and the individual soul), but instead by allowing oppositions to clash, producing political engagement and giving the religion a "political energy."

As I will show in the dissertation, this political energy emerges through Irish Catholic efforts to transform popular understandings of Catholic morality and ethical action—purportedly derived from a legacy of clericalism—that emphasize unquestioning adherence to the hierarchy's moral teachings. In this dissertation, I show how lay Catholics mobilize and sometimes creatively rework Catholic sources to make the questioning of the hierarchy's moral teachings, including those on moral authority itself, a legitimate part of being a "good Catholic." While Catholics may differ on what sources they consider to be authoritative, they share a conviction that engaging with and questioning the hierarchy's teachings is necessary for living their faith.

Reconfiguring the role of the laity in the Church, state, and the Irish politics of reproduction

Examining transformations in Catholicism also requires consideration of the historic relationship between the governing structures of the Catholic Church and those of the state. In Europe, anthropologists of Catholicism have argued that the religion's historical connections with deeply entrenched European systems of power gives it the capacity to be rendered "invisible," or indistinct from the aspects of social, cultural, and political forms with which it has long been entangled. After all, from the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth, the Catholic Church claimed dominion over "all secular powers and forms of government" in most of Europe, structuring social life and "communities at all levels" (Mayblin et al., 2017, p. 4). This politico-historical legacy has resulted in Catholicism exhibiting a "high degree of congruence" with national identities across Europe, even those national identities that are ostensibly secular (Hann

& Goltz, 2010, p. 5). In France, for example, where *laïcité* demands that signs of religion must be absent from the public sphere, Elayne Oliphant (2021) shows us that Catholic forms have a significant presence in public life, but are made "banal" through efforts to normalize Catholicism as part of French cultural heritage; as a result, the presence of Catholic forms in the public sphere, unlike the presence of Muslim forms, rarely provokes political concern or state intervention.

Catholicism is similarly understood as part of Irish cultural heritage and national identity. However, in contemporary Ireland, the presence of Catholic forms in public life is increasingly a source of controversy and demands for state intervention. In particular, people are concerned about the presence of Catholic moral teachings in law and other institutions of the state historically controlled by the Church. For example, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference's publication of a relationships and sexuality curriculum for primary schools has recently revived debate about the Church's role in the national education system (McGarry, 2021); currently, 89% of primary schools are state funded but under Church management and so are committed to a "Catholic ethos" grounded in Catholic moral teachings (Republic of Ireland, 2021. The bishops' curriculum states that the Church's teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman "must not be omitted," which has prompted outrage from parents and calls for the state to take direct control of primary schools (McGarry, 2021; O'Brien, 2021; O'Toole, 2021).

Yet many lay Catholics are concerned less with how public institutions are shaped by Catholic values and more with how entanglements of Church and state shape Irish Catholicism. Specifically, they see the presence of Catholic teachings in state institutions as a product of a clericalism on the part of the state, the Catholic hierarchy, and Irish society in general for most of the twentieth century. I show that, to distance contemporary Catholicism from its association

with clericalism, these lay Catholics are reconfiguring their roles in relation to the hierarchy and to the state.

Though I have discussed the relationship between the hierarchy and laity in terms of moral authority, it's worth outlining their respective roles within the Catholic Church. Catholicism teaches that all "the faithful" are divinely called to particular states of life, with associated work and responsibilities that will help them love and serve God in accordance with God's plan for mankind's salvation. In the simplest terms, these states of life can be divided into two general categories: the hierarchy and the laity. Here, when I use the term hierarchy, I am not referring to the complete divine ordering of the visible church, but to those who are ordained: the pope, bishops, priests, and deacons.[4] In Catholicism, the sacrament of ordination is "not merely a symbolic rite of passage from one status to another; it effects a deep ontological change in a man's nature," making him part of the ecclesial ministry (Mayblin, 2017, p. 507). The hierarchy serves the church by proclaiming the word of God, presiding over (or assisting with) the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and "shepherd[ing] the People of God toward their salvation" (CCC 874). With the exception of already married men who become deacons, the ordained are obliged to observe celibacy so they "can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind" (CCC 277).

The laity are baptized Catholics who are not called to be ordained, instead serving the mission of the Church by living in the world and endeavoring to bring it in line with God's plan. In other words, Catholicism teaches that by fulfilling their religious obligations while living an ordinary life with "secular professions and occupations," the laity make the message of salvation

[4] The use of "hierarchy" and "laity" in this paragraph is consistent with the Catechism on the Faithful (CCC 871–945).

known to the world (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 31). This understanding of the laity and its significance to the mission of the Church was promoted by the Second Vatican Council. The Council also identified the laity's involvement in religious matters as an avenue for renewal that the hierarchy should encourage and support. In one decree, the Council wrote that the hierarchy should "grant the [laity] the freedom of action and an area to exercise it, and even encourage them to undertake tasks on their own initiative . . . [and] consider, with fatherly attention and affection in Christ, the projects, demands, and desires put forward by laypeople" (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 5).

In this dissertation, I show that lay Catholics see the historic involvement of the Irish hierarchy in public institutions as an encroachment on the spiritual work that the laity are divinely called to perform. From their perspective, the state should not have encouraged the hierarchy to take responsibility for education, welfare, and health care, nor should it have allowed the hierarchy to influence state law; these are institutions that are of the temporal world, they reason, and thus the domain of the laity. Moreover, these lay Catholics contend, if the hierarchy has maintained control of these institutions in order to guide the population morally, it has done so poorly: it has emphasized its own moral authority, refused to allow discussion or questions about its moral teachings, and been punitive in response to violations of those teachings—all of which, lay Catholics say, has facilitated clericalism.

Concepts from the sociology of work, occupations, and professions are useful for thinking about the Irish laity's critique of the hierarchy. According to the highly influential systems model of professions put forth by sociologist Andrew Abbott (1988), all professions are engaged in an ongoing struggle to claim and maintain control over arenas of work. Abbott uses the term "jurisdiction" to refer to work connected to a profession. To gain jurisdiction**,** a

profession must identify a specific problem and conceptualize that problem as a potential object of its professional action. It must also develop professional interpretations of the problem and related techniques for remedying it. However, such jurisdictional claims are always insecure, for other professions may offer competing interpretations of the very same problem and competing techniques for solving it.

I suggest that lay Catholics see themselves in a "jurisdictional dispute" with the Irish hierarchy over the work of forming the moral consciences of the Irish public. To claim this jurisdiction for the laity, they not only criticize the hierarchy's approach to moral formation but also assert—and demonstrate through their actions—that they as laypeople are especially well suited to this work. These actions center on an embrace of the complexity of understanding and interpreting Catholic teachings in their own lived experiences as a rebuke of clericalism. To this end, they teach about the moral authority of the laity, encourage debate and questioning about moral issues, and demonstrate compassion and understanding as people struggle with navigating the tensions between Catholic teachings, their consciences, and living in the world. Through this, they promote the idea that entanglements of Church and state are not necessary for—and in fact may be harmful to—the social reproduction of the Catholic Church.

Social reproduction generally refers to the different "activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally" (Laslett and Brenner, 1989, p. 382). Feminist scholars understand social reproduction to include "various kinds of work – mental, manual, and emotional – aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation" (Laslett and Brenner, 1989, p. 383). This work can entail "how food, clothing, and shelter are made for immediate

consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality" (Laslett and Brenner, 1989, pp. 382-383). The social reproduction of the Catholic Church involves the maintenance of particular kinds of people – priests and laity – which requires both processes of socialization (such as education, moral formation, and techniques of vocational discernment) as well as processes of procreation. In other words, the social reproduction of the Church requires human reproduction to produce a generation of people who can be socialized into the Church.

Gail Kligman (1998) notes that because reproduction "provides the means by which individuals and collectivities ensure their continuity" (p. 5) it is strongly politicized in every society. Scholars interested in the politics of reproduction explore how "seemingly distant power relations shape local reproductive experiences" and how efforts to govern reproduction are experienced in everyday life (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991, p. 313). While liberal theory places reproduction in the "private sphere" of domesticity, family, and personal life, in contrast to the "public sphere" of political representation, civil society, and state formation, scholars interested in the politics of social and biological reproduction have repeatedly shown that reproduction is a concern not only for individuals and families but also for states. Social reproduction and biological reproduction secure the continuity of the nation, that "'imagined community' that the state serves and protects, and over which it exercises authority" (Kligman, 1998, p. 5). This, as Kligman (1998) observes, makes reproduction an "ideal locus through which to illuminate the complexity of relationships between states and their citizens, or noncitizens, as the case may be" (p. 3). States, scholars have shown, intervene in the domain of reproduction for a variety of purposes: to promote or restrict population growth, to enhance population "quality" through selective population growth and/or reduction, and to shape the body politic in ways that align

with their political and/or economic interests (Kligman, 1998; Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005; Greenhalgh, 2003, 2008; Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995; Hartmann, 1995; Kanaaneh, 2002; Gameltoft, 2014).

As I show in Part I of this dissertation, the Irish state in the early and mid-twentieth century intervened in social and biological reproduction to produce a particularly pious and religiously disciplined population that would demonstrate both the Irish capacity for self-governance and its commitment to traditional norms in the face of European modernization. In pursuit of this goal, the state incorporated Church teachings on marriage and family into its laws and regulations and relied on the governing structures, organizations, and manpower of the Church to enforce discipline (Inglis, 1987/1998; Ferriter, 2009). This partnership also contributed to the continuity and political power of the Church. Irish citizenship—regardless of one's religion, it should be noted—demanded submission to the hierarchy's moral authority over matters of social and biological reproduction, as exercised through state law and by the myriad Catholic institutions and organizations that structured Irish social life (Inglis, 1997/1998; Fuller, 2004). For Catholic laypeople in particular, who have always made up the vast majority of the population of Ireland, reproductive experiences were thus governed by both the Irish state and the Catholic Church.

State laws and regulations, however, are not determinative, even when supported by the disciplinary power of the Catholic Church. As scholars of the politics of reproduction have shown, individuals, couples, and families either resist laws and policies in toto or accept the portions of them that align with their own interests in making reproductive decisions (Greenhalgh, 1994; Braff, 2013). Because the governance of social and biological reproduction was a project of both Church and state, Irish laypeople's efforts to realize their own reproductive

interests have long entailed resisting (or selectively accepting) the governing techniques of both institutions. However, this dissertation shows that lay Catholics increasingly view the presence of Church teachings in state public institutions as an impediment to not only their personal reproductive interests, but to their interests in shifting the social reproduction of the Church away from a model grounded in clericalism. As a result, I argue, in their capacity as citizens and as Catholics, Irish laypeople are acting to reconfigure the state's governance of reproduction as a means of remaking both the state and the Church.

Field sites

This dissertation explores the remaking of Irish Catholicism through an ethnographic examination of sites where lay Catholics are actively discussing, debating, and reworking Catholic norms of social and biological reproduction. In the context of Hungary's post-socialist transition, Susan Gal (1994) writes that "the insistent debates about abortion and the nature of motherhood reveal the ways in which politics is being reconstituted, contested, and newly legitimated" (p. 258). In a similar way, I suggest Church politics are being "reconstituted, contested, and newly legitimated" through lay Catholic debates about social and biological reproduction. Conversations among laypeople about the role of women in the mission of the Church and the permissibility of abortion help us to understand the processes through which lay Catholics are reconfiguring moral authority and their roles relative to the Church and state, as well as the broader stakes of reforming Irish Catholicism. I examine such conversations at three key sites where I conducted ethnographic research: a faith formation group, a set of abortion rights workshops, and the campaign to repeal Ireland's constitutional prohibition on abortion. Over the following pages, I offer an overview of each of these sites.

Discerning Hearts

Discerning Hearts is a lay-led Catholic faith group, which met weekly in the recreation room of a parish church in a leafy neighborhood of Dublin.[5] Most participants did not live in the parish; they traveled from all across Dublin for the 2–3-hour meeting. On a given evening, there were usually 8 to 10 people who settled at the conference table in the middle of the room out of approximately 12 "regulars." Though the group advertised itself as "for Catholic young adults," the age range was wide: 27 to 50, with most participants in their late 30s and early 40s. With a few exceptions (including myself), they were Irish and baptized Catholic, though their expression of their faith varied: some attended Mass daily and filled their nights and weekends with faith-related events, while others identified as Catholic, but felt ambivalent toward the faith and rarely attended Mass at all. The purpose of the group was to support one another in "faith formation," the developing and deepening of their faith through communal study, discussion, and prayer.

Discerning Hearts was one of many lay-led groups, events, and activities for Catholic "young adults" in their 20s, 30s, and 40s in and around Dublin in 2017–2018. Some were affiliated with transnational movements, like Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which draws on Protestant Pentecostal theology to emphasize the spontaneous, active union of participants with the Holy Spirit (Feller, 1996, p. 54) ; Youth 2000, a Catholic spiritual movement centered on "draw[ing] young people to a deep and lasting union with Christ" through peer-ministered prayer groups, retreats, and festivals (Youth 2000, 2020); and Nightfever, an initiative where Catholic teenagers and young adults invite passersby "who might have strayed from the Church" into urban churches on weekend evenings (Nightfever, 2020). The Dublin Diocese's newly appointed Youth Evangelization Team had also started to run a series of activities for young adults, consisting of a spiritual book club, a hiking group, and a popular monthly event called the

[5] "Discerning Hearts" is a pseudonym.

Encounter, which featured live music, guided meditative prayer, and personal testimonies of "faith journeys." Additionally, there were numerous small, independent groups aimed at Catholic young adults, some of which had spun off from the transnational movements, which tended to focus on scripture interpretation and faith formation.

These groups are best understood as a response to the call for a "New Evangelization," Pope John Paul II's term for a new program for proclaiming the Gospel. Concerned that "social and religious realities which were once clear and well-defined [had become] increasingly complex," Pope John Paul II outlined three general domains of Catholic missionary activity: (1) the "peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known"; (2) Christian communities "with adequate and solid ecclesial structures" fully committed to living faithfully and proclaiming the Gospel; and (3) contexts "where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (John Paul II, 1990, sections 32–33). It was this last domain that was most in need of a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization" (John Paul II, 1990, section 33).

Pope John Paul II was particularly concerned about the loss of Christianity in "countries with ancient Christian roots," namely Europe (John Paul II, 1990, section 33). In his exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003), he talked about "the urgency of not squandering this precious patrimony and helping Europe to build itself by revitalizing its original Christian roots," "index[ing] a reality and an anxiety that Europe might lose its Christian and Catholic roots." His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, shared these concerns. In 2004, as prefect for the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, he (then Cardinal Ratzinger) pressured the convention for the European Constitution to have the preamble reflect the continent's Christian history; he and

the Vatican eventually settled for the compromise phrase "the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe" (Spencer, 2010). As pope in 2010 he established a Pontifical Council to Promote the New Evangelization, whose principal task was to "promote a renewed evangelization" in regions that were historically Christian but where "in recent centuries . . . the secularization process has produced a serious crisis of the meaning of the Christian faith and of belonging to the Church" (Benedict XVI, 2010, sections 4–5). Commentators at the time presumed the focus of the new Pontifical Council would be Europe.

Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI saw hope for reevangelizing Europe in the missionary work of the laity (Jenkins, 2013). "Lay missionary associations, international Christian volunteer organizations, ecclesial movements, groups, and solidarities of different kinds," John Paul II wrote, could be used to give "fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life" and therefore should be "held in esteem" (John Paul II, 1990, section 72).

Discerning Hearts and organizations like it are useful spaces for thinking about moral authority and vocational jurisdiction. Because it is outside the direct control of the Church's centralized hierarchy, Discerning Hearts can draw on and creatively rework a variety of Catholic cultural materials in ways that are engaging to people who feel dissatisfied with or indifferent to the more-traditional aspects of Irish Catholic life. The discussions that take place at Discerning Hearts enable us to see how Catholics navigate questions of morality, ethics, and authority as they strive to be disciples of Christ while living in modern Ireland.

Abortion Rights Workshops

The workshops I explore in this dissertation were adapted by Irish abortion rights activists from a model developed by the organization Catholics for Choice (CFC), a U.S.-based lobby group that sees itself as a counterpoint to the Roman Catholic hierarchy's efforts to

influence policy on gender, sexuality, and reproductive health (Catholics for Choice, 2020). Working both in the United States and around the world, CFC offers resources that emphasize faith-based arguments for individual autonomy in reproductive decision-making. In the years leading up to the 2018 referendum on abortion, CFC provided training to Irish abortion rights activists on facilitating "Values Clarification Workshops," which were designed to give participants a nonjudgmental space for thinking about the moral issues surrounding pregnancy, reproductive decision-making, and public policy. Some of the trained activists, with the support of their volunteer groups and/or organizations, adapted CFC's workshop format for the Irish context and facilitated these new versions both for abortion rights activists and for the Irish public in 2017–2018.

These workshops should be understood as one small piece of the broader, decades-long movement to expand legal access to abortion in Ireland. With roots in second-wave feminist activism around women's rights and sexual health, the Irish abortion rights movement first gained momentum in the lead-up to the 1983 referendum campaign on a proposed amendment to enshrine a fetal right to life in the Irish Constitution**,** which had been brought about by conservative lay Catholics and was strongly supported by the Catholic hierarchy. Abortion was already illegal in Ireland under the 1861 Offences against the Person Act, but proponents of the amendment maintained, incorrectly, that constitutional protection for the unborn would prevent abortion from occurring in Ireland. The referendum passed, with 66.9% of the public voting in its favor. The new Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution, more popularly known as "the Eighth Amendment," stated that the state acknowledged "the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantee[d] in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right" (Republic of Ireland, 1937/2020).

With the new amendment in place, abortion rights activists turned their attention to related causes: advocating for the right to information about abortion services abroad and the right to travel for those services, defending judicial decisions that expanded access to abortion in very limited circumstances, and maintaining an underground network for distributing information and facilitating access to abortion for those who could travel.

The workshops were part of a more recent reinvigoration of abortion rights activism that began in the 2000s but "intensified significantly" after the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012 (Calkin, de Londras, & Heathcote, 2020, p. 2**)**. Halappanavar had asked for—and was denied—a termination to hasten the miscarriage of what had been a wanted pregnancy on the grounds that doctors could not intervene while the fetus maintained a heartbeat; while waiting for the natural completion of the miscarriage, Halappanavar contracted sepsis, which resulted in her death. This event sparked widespread outrage, and the following year, the Oireachtas, Ireland's legislative body, passed the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (PLDPA) to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future. This law outlined the procedures by which one could access abortion in the limited circumstances permitted by the Eighth Amendment and established a criminal penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment for those who obtained or facilitated abortions unlawfully. The PLDPA "exposed the limits of both political will and legislative possibility as long as the 8th remained in the Constitution," and consequently, abortion rights activists began to call for the repeal of the amendment (Calkin et al., 2020, p. 3). Over the next five years, as support for this cause grew, abortion rights activism became more visible and vocal. The forms of this activism varied, including public protest, street art and performance art, lobbying Irish politicians, making submissions to European and international human rights agencies, and innumerable conversations about abortion with family, friends, and strangers.

When Catholicism and the Catholic Church figured in activist discourses and imagery, it was usually in a negative light, since after all, it was the Catholic hierarchy and conservative laypeople who had led the charge for a constitutional "right to life" amendment. Many activists framed the Eighth Amendment as part of a historical narrative of women's oppression at the hands of the Catholic Church and the Irish state. Catholic moral discipline, the controlling of women's reproduction, shame, and secrecy were themes that threaded the Eighth Amendment together with Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries. In posters, chants, and street art, activists—including Catholic activists—made it clear they held the Catholic Church responsible for decades of harm.

Yet activists were also aware that to repeal the Eighth Amendment in a referendum vote, they would need to convince Catholics to support expanding legal access to abortion, and these workshops represent a small piece of that effort. The workshops I discuss intended to persuade people that expanding legal access to abortion is permissible, and even morally good, within a Catholic moral framework. The site illuminates techniques and sources used to transform understandings of moral authority in the Church and to help people cultivate a sense of an interior moral conscience.

Together for Yes: the Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment

The official civil-society campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment began in January 2018, after the Irish government announced it would be holding a constitutional referendum on abortion later that spring. In that referendum, the Irish public would be asked to vote "yes" or "no" on a proposed amendment to the constitution, the Thirty-Sixth Amendment, though it was rarely referred to as such; more often, it was called the "referendum on repeal" or the

"referendum on repealing the Eighth." Technically, the proposed amendment would *not* repeal Article 40.3.3, but it would replace the text of the article with the line: "Provision may be made by law for the regulation of termination of pregnancies."

If passed, the new text of Article 40.3.3 would make it possible for the Oireachtas to introduce legal abortion in a wider variety of cases, as well as to place limitations on abortion access.[6] Two months before the vote, the government published the legislation that it intended to introduce to the Oireachtas, should the referendum pass (Republic of Ireland, 2018, General Scheme of a Bill to Regulate Terminations of Pregnancy 2018, hereafter "General Scheme").[7] It was generally expected that if the referendum passed, something similar to the "General Scheme" would be made law, and so the proposed provisions were a critical part of campaign messaging and the public debate.[8] The government's proposal to make abortion available "on request" up to 12 weeks after the pregnant person's last menstrual period was especially controversial.

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[6] The Oireachtas, Ireland's legislative body, already had the power to regulate abortion, but that power was limited by Article 40.3.3. It could pass laws concerning the termination of pregnancy, but "only where there was a real and substantial risk to the life of the mother" (Republic of Ireland, 1937/2020*,* Art. 15; Referendum Commission, 2018). If there were a majority "no" vote, the referendum would fail to pass, and the limitations on the power of Oireachtas relating to abortion would remain in place.

[7] In Ireland, publishing a general scheme to accompany a referendum vote is "not entirely unusual," according to legal scholar Fiona de Londras (2020): "It is often considered an important step in assuring the electorate about what might follow constitutional change," she writes, "although, of course there is no legal (as opposed to political) obligation to propose law that tracks the general scheme" (p. 129). At the polls, voters were *not* asked to vote on the government's proposed legislation; they were voting solely on the proposed amendment to Article 40.3.3.

[8] I briefly outline the main provisions of the "General Scheme" (Republic of Ireland, 2018) below:

Abortion would be available "on request" up to 12 weeks after the pregnant person's last menstrual period, which is usually about 9–10 weeks post conception, and there would be a 3-day waiting period between the request and the abortion treatment (either medical or surgical). After 12 weeks, abortion would be available only where there was a risk to the life of the pregnant woman, a risk of serious harm to her health, or a "fatal fetal anomaly." In the cases of risks to life and of serious harm to health, lawful abortion would only be available until "viability," which the proposed legislation defined as "the point in a pregnancy at which, in the reasonable opinion of a medical practitioner, the fetus is capable of sustained survival outside the uterus." Abortion would be available after viability only when the fetus had been diagnosed with a condition "that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus either before birth or shortly after birth"; many such conditions are diagnosed at or after a 20-week scan (which is approximately 4 weeks before a fetus typically becomes viable).

Doctors would also be permitted to carry out abortions in an emergency situation if they determined there was an immediate risk to the woman's life or of serious harm to her health and it was necessary to bring the pregnancy to an immediate end to address that risk. Providing an abortion outside the law would be a criminal act, but it would never be a crime for a woman to access an abortion, even if its provision was not lawful.

Three organizations came together to lead the campaign for a "yes" vote:[9] the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), a grassroots all-volunteer and nonhierarchical group; the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment (often shortened to "the Coalition"), an umbrella network of nearly 100 organizations in favor of repeal, including political parties, trade unions, and other civil society groups; and the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), a feminist organization established in 1973 made up of both member organizations and individual members. They called the campaign "Together for Yes" (hereafter TFY), and it was supported by a "campaign platform"[10] of dozens of member organizations, as well as most of Ireland's political parties.[11]

While most Irish voters committed to either "yes" or "no" soon after the government announced the referendum, there remained a sizable group of people who remained undecided, approximately 17–24% of eligible voters, throughout the eight weeks of campaigning. Although the "yes" side maintained a consistent lead in the polls, both sides desperately wanted to secure

[9] In forming a united campaign, the founding organizations had to negotiate differences in their organizational structures as well as in their different political aims. Both ARC and the Coalition endeavored to secure abortion law reform, but ARC's long-term aim was the establishment of free, safe, and legal abortion access in Ireland, while the Coalition focused on repealing the Eighth Amendment. The NWCI's mission of "achieving equality for women" was broader than the missions of ARC and the Coalition, and the organization was, comparatively, a "slight latecomer to advocacy for repeal" (De Londras, 2020, p. 132). Nevertheless, all three agreed that the campaign would be led by a team of three equal codirectors, one from each organization.

[10] Some member organizations involved in the campaign platform were cultural and professional organizations that had formed specifically to campaign for a "yes" vote, such as Doctors Together for Yes, Farmers Together for Yes, and Parents Together for Yes. Most organizations on the platform, however, were established abortion advocacy groups (e.g., Terminations for Medical Reasons [TFMR], Lawyers for Choice, Strike 4 Repeal, ROSA, etc.), trade unions, and NGOs. The platform also included organizations that advocate for the general and reproductive rights of migrant and ethnic minority people in Ireland (e.g., Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice [MERJ], Akina Dada wa Africa [AkiDwA], the National Traveller Women's Forum, and the Anti-Racism Network), trans people (such as Transgender Equality Network Ireland, LGBT+ for Choice, National LGBT Federation [NXF]), and persons with disabilities (such as Deaf Community Together for Yes, Disabled People for Choice, Disabled Women Ireland, and Inclusion Ireland). While the campaign platform was the most representative part of the campaign infrastructure, it did not have decision-making power; strategic decisions were made primarily by the executive (De Londras, 2020, p. 132).

[11] The majority of Ireland's political parties supported Together for Yes, including Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, Labour, the Greens, Solidarity, and People Before Profit, by participating in campaign events, serving as spokespeople and debaters, and mobilizing their supporters to volunteer and to vote "yes" (Fields, 2018; Bardon & Carswell, 2018). The parties also ran their own individual campaigns in favor of repeal: across the Irish landscape, party leaders and local politicians appeared on party-specific posters, urging their constituents to vote "yes" in the referendum.

the majority of undecided votes, the "no" side to eke out a win,[12] and the "yes" side to avoid a narrow victory that might later be challenged.

According to campaign research and polling data from the major news publications, most undecided voters had the same perspective on expanding legal access to abortion. They wanted to make abortion lawful in more cases, specifically what Irish media referred to as the "hard cases": pregnancies resulting from rape or incest or those where the fetus was diagnosed with a severely life-limiting condition. However, they were hesitant to support the government's proposal to make abortion available without restriction for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. In many contexts, these undecided voters would be considered pro-life centrists,[13] but in Ireland, where the pro-life movement was strictly absolutist on abortion, they were not aligned with either the "yes" or "no" sides. Accordingly, they were called "middle ground" voters.

To persuade the middle ground to vote yes and to support the government's proposed legislation,[14] TFY employed a variety of messaging strategies. The core messaging centered on what codirector Ailbhe Smyth referred to as the "three C's": care, compassion, and change. Passing the constitutional referendum, TFY suggested, would both require and instantiate all

[12] There were two main campaigns leading the movement to preserve the Eighth Amendment: "Save the 8th" and "LoveBoth."

[13] The leadership of both "no" campaigns, and the Irish pro-life base more generally, were "absolutists" on abortion, meaning that they believed every abortion constitutes the murder of an innocent person and so should be illegal in all circumstances (Flowers, 2020). Pro-life movements in many other countries include both absolutists and centrists, who view abortion as immoral but tolerate exceptions, such as in cases where the pregnancy threatens the life of the pregnant woman, where the pregnancy threatens the health of the pregnant woman, when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, or when there has been a fetal anomaly diagnosis (Flowers, 2020). The leaders of the "no" side campaigns had unsuccessfully fought against the legalization of abortion to save the life of the pregnant woman and were determined not to cede any further ground in protecting the fetus's right to life.

[14] As Fiona de Londras (2020) has written, many members of the TFY executive team and campaign platform did not want to promote the government's proposed legislation, because they felt it was too restrictive. However, they felt compelled to do so for two reasons: first, to coordinate with the government's campaign, and second, to refute the claims of the "no" side, which made the proposed provisions a significant part of its messaging.

As a result, TFY ran a campaign that implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—endorsed the legislation. It even released a policy paper that described the provisions as "workable and reasonable proposals to allow women and girls to access the abortion services which they need, in a safe and regulated environment within the Irish health system" (TFY, 2018a). The paper did not acknowledge the shortcomings of the legislation; as de Londras writes, "to do so would have been to present the 'no' campaign with ammunition to ground claims detrimental to the 'yes' campaign" (de Londras, 2020, p. 133)

three, transforming Ireland. Its narrative of national transformation described the past as "harsh" and "punitive," and it often framed the Eighth Amendment as part of a long history of "letting down women and girls."[15] To elicit that compassion from more-reluctant voters, TFY foregrounded the "hard" or "exceptional" cases in its messaging. In particular, it highlighted the stories of women with wanted pregnancies who had accessed abortion abroad after being diagnosed with a severely life-limiting fetal anomaly; these stories framed abortion "as good motherhood, rather than a rejection of the maternal role" (Taylor, Spillane, & Arulkumaran, 2020, p. 40).

Another key messaging strategy was normalizing abortion as necessary medical care. To do so, TFY assigned numerous obstetricians to be spokespeople. At debates and in advertisements, these doctors stressed the ways in which the Eighth Amendment interfered with their ability to provide care. Because they had to balance the right to life of the fetus with the right to life of the pregnant woman, they asserted, many were hesitant to perform surgeries or provide treatment that would benefit a pregnant woman if there was a chance it could harm the fetus. There was not a clear line between a risk to health and a risk to life, they said, and they were often uncertain when it was appropriate to intervene in a pregnancy under the law.

In this dissertation, I examine a less prominent aspect of the campaign's messaging: discourses directed at Catholic undecided voters. Through years of activism, especially through the aforementioned workshops, some of the TFY campaigners had learned that many Catholic voters worried about the social and spiritual repercussions of challenging Church teachings on abortion. The varied discourses and texts the campaign used to persuade undecided Catholic voters enable us to see how popular understandings of Catholic moral authority and ethics are reworked in the context of state politics.

[15] TFY ad, 2018.

Methods and fieldwork

This dissertation is based on a total of 16 months of fieldwork in the Republic of Ireland. In the summers of 2013, 2015, and 2016, I undertook three short research trips: this preliminary research enabled me to establish contacts, refine my topic, and conceptualize the problem of my research. The main part of my fieldwork was conducted between September 2017 and September 2018, primarily in Dublin, with some short visits to towns and cities across the republic.

My research took place within three general domains: (1) Catholic evangelization groups, organizations, and activities, (2) abortion rights activism, and (3) sites of public discussion and debate surrounding the 2018 referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment. Below, I provide a broad overview of my interlocutors, the research activities I conducted within each of these domains, and the methodological challenges of carrying out the project.

Catholic evangelization groups, organizations, and activities

To understand how Catholics practice and explore their faith in contemporary Irish society, I conducted participant observation at a wide range of events and activities for Catholic adults in (or near) Dublin, including faith-sharing groups, scripture discussions, Charismatic Catholicism seminars, and social gatherings.

The fact that I am not Catholic did not present a significant obstacle to my participation in these activities for a few related reasons. First, at larger events open to the public, I was never asked about my religious background. Because I exhibit stereotypically "Irish" physical traits—white, freckles, red hair—and grew up in Boston, a city that has long been a destination for Irish migrants, most people presumed I had Irish heritage and that I was likely raised Catholic. Second, many Catholic adults in their 20–40s have found that most people in their age cohorts are nonpracticing or "lapsed," and so they are eager to meet anyone who shows an interest in the

Church. If asked about my religious background, I was honest that I was not Catholic, but that I was interested in Catholicism for academic and personal reasons. Third, some either hoped or quite firmly believed that by participating in Catholic religious and social life, I would eventually convert to Catholicism.

The final reason for the relative ease with which I entered these spaces was that I was often accompanied by people who had an established presence at Catholic faith-based events in Dublin. Early in my fieldwork, I established connections with a faith-sharing group, Discerning Hearts, which met weekly and whose members were keen to participate in Catholic social life. After a few months of regularly attending Discerning Hearts, group members permitted me to record the discussions, during which participants often discussed the challenges of adhering to Catholic teachings in the modern world, the place of the Church in Irish society, and the changes they would like to see in Irish Catholicism and in the Church more generally. They also regularly discussed—and debated—the referendum on abortion.

Many people who participated in Catholic faith-based activities supported or volunteered for the "no" side. Though I did not participate alongside them, I did sometimes accompany my interlocutors to public religious events related to the referendum, including conferences, pilgrimages, and a public praying of the rosary.

I also conducted semistructured interviews with most of the members of Discerning Hearts, as well as with a few other people whom I met in other religious spaces and who had actively campaigned against repealing the Eighth Amendment. These interviews focused on the participant's subjective experiences of being Catholic in contemporary Ireland; their perspectives on Church teachings related to sex, marriage, reproduction, and the family; their involvement with the politics of abortion; the place of the Church in Irish social and political life; and their

hopes for the future of the Church in Ireland.

Abortion rights activism

When I arrived in Dublin in the fall of 2017, it was not yet certain that there would be a referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment within the year, but it certainly seemed possible. As a result, abortion rights groups in Ireland were inundated with requests from professional and student researchers for information, interviews, meetings, and—disturbingly often—the contact information of anyone who had accessed abortion abroad. These requests were met with polite but firm responses from activists: the request would be forwarded, but there was no guarantee anyone would have the capacity to provide assistance. Abortion rights activists were volunteers who devoted whatever time they could to the cause of expanding access to abortion in Ireland and there was always more work to do.

After receiving a polite response to my request for a conversation, I decided to start showing up at events open to the public, information sessions, and meetings run by Dublin-area abortion rights groups to learn about their organizations and activities. It was through a chance conversation in a pub following one of these events that I was offered access to the proceedings of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment, which I discuss below. I also learned through attending these events that, for many activists, trust was earned by contributing to the movement. Researchers were turned away not only because activists had limited capacity to support them, but also because those activists were wary of people's making requests without first showing that they were dedicated to expanding access to abortion in Ireland.

I decided to volunteer for one abortion rights group in a personal capacity. From my first meeting, I made clear that I was in Ireland to conduct research on Catholicism and the politics of abortion, but that I would not use my participation in the group as data for my research and I

have been careful not to do so in this dissertation. Through the group, I did meet a number of activists who later agreed to be interviewed. Months later, I negotiated a similar arrangement with the TFY campaign. I volunteered for the organization, primarily doing office work, but I agreed not to use my role or anything I learned while volunteering as data for my research. I was, however, permitted to accompany the campaign's National Tour in a research capacity, enabling me to observe campaign activities at sites around the country and speak with local activists. I was also permitted to ask people I met through volunteering whether they would like to be interviewed, and many agreed, so long as I interviewed them *after* the campaign had concluded.

I conducted semistructured interviews primarily with activists (1) who identified themselves to me as Catholic and/or (2) whose volunteer work involved delivering pro-repeal arguments grounded in Catholic teachings. The interviews shed light on how abortion rights activists navigate and support others in navigating the tensions between being Catholic and challenging the Church's teachings on abortion. These interviews also provided a context for broader conversations about the place of Catholicism in Irish social and political life, activists' concerns and hopes for the new abortion regulatory regime, and the cultural and legal changes that would be necessary to make the nation a more just place.

Additionally, from the time I arrived in Dublin, I closely tracked public abortion rights discourses and materials that indexed religion, faith, and spirituality. These included (but were not limited to) flyers, posters, chants, speeches, public art, blog and social media posts, campaign advertisements, and debates on radio and television. The vast majority of these discourses and materials indexed the Catholic Church and aspects of Catholicism.[16] In 2018, once the date of the referendum was announced, the sheer volume of relevant data became overwhelming, and I

[16] There were some discourses and materials that indexed Celtic paganism, neo-paganism, and New Age spiritualities.

therefore decided to narrow the scope of the data I actively collected to discourses and materials produced and circulated by TFY (and organizations within the campaign umbrella). However, I continued to document any relevant data I encountered while going about day-to-day life in Dublin.

Sites of Public Discussion and Debate

As noted above, I was given the opportunity to attend most of the sessions of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth (JOC) as a member of the public gallery. This parliamentary committee was tasked with considering expert testimony and ultimately making recommendations to the larger parliamentary body, the Oireachtas, first and foremost on whether there should be a public referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment, and if so, what the text of the referendum should say. The JOC also discussed and made recommendations regarding future legislation on abortion and related matters, such as reforms to sex education. In addition to providing me with a much more nuanced understanding of the Irish legislative system, attending these sessions enabled me to track how the testimony presented to the JOC was taken up, contested, and/or reproduced by politicians, the Irish media, and later by the pro- and anti-repeal campaigns.

Over the course of my year in Ireland, I also attended and observed many rallies, marches, conferences, debates, and information sessions related to the regulation of abortion organized by a wide range of actors, including abortion rights groups, pro-life groups, professional organizations, political parties, student groups, churches, and lay Catholic organizations and businesses. In these settings, I observed the interactions of my interlocutors and prominent public figures, made new contacts, and collected materials relevant to themes of the dissertation.

Outline of chapters

The chapters that follow are divided into two parts. In Part I, I present a history of the Catholic Church's role in Irish governance that provides the background necessary to understand the ethnographic material I present in the second part of the dissertation. While my interlocutors are not likely to be familiar with all the details of this account, they would certainly recognize the general narrative and many of the events. The Church's acquisition and subsequent loss of political power and moral authority is a story that shapes how lay Catholics conceptualize what Irish Catholicism has been and what they want it to become. To tell it, I rely primarily on the work of Irish historians, whose books, articles, and public commentary have shaped popular understandings of Irish Catholicism over the last four centuries.

Chapter 2 discusses the making of a Catholic nation-state, from the oppression of Irish Catholics under British colonial rule in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the construction of a dominant Irish Catholic Church and the emergence of Irish-Catholic nationalism in the nineteenth century and the struggle for independence and the establishment of a Catholic democratic Republic in the early twentieth century. In this narrative, we see that adhering to the Church's teachings on sex and reproduction became a means for Irish people to improve their socioeconomic conditions in the wake of a devastating famine, to assert their capacity for self-governance, and to represent the new Irish state as morally superior on the world stage.

Chapter 3 then traces the gradual dismantling of the Irish Catholic Church's "moral monopoly" from the 1960s through the 2010s, fueled by the reforms and divisions that followed the Second Vatican Council, the Irish state's entry into the European Economic Community, the economic boom of the 1990s, and the Church's abuse scandals. It is the domain of reproduction—where the conservative Irish hierarchy had established its authority—that we see

the hierarchy's influence wane, as Irish citizens voted to liberalize state laws grounded in Church teachings on marriage, sex, and family.

In Part II, I explore the varied ways lay Catholics are endeavoring to "remake" Irish Catholicism, and the social, political, and religious stakes of their efforts.

Chapter 4 takes us to Discerning Hearts, the faith formation group described earlier in the introduction, where we meet Catherine, the main organizer, and several other Dubliners trying to learn more about and deepen their faith while grappling with their doubts, questions, and anxieties about being Catholic in modern Ireland. I use the case of Discerning Hearts in general and Catherine's role in forming and leading the group in particular to show how lay people, and especially single lay women, are claiming jurisdiction over the moral formation of Catholic adults with the hope of creating a more vibrant, engaged Catholic culture detached from the clericalism of the past.

Chapter 5 then turns to the abortion rights workshops adapted from a model provided by CFC. After introducing the guiding theological principles and political aims of CFC, as well as the organization's work in Ireland, the chapter provides an overview of the structure and content of the workshops adapted to the Irish context. Drawing on workshop materials and interviews with facilitators, I show that these workshops provide a range of Catholic sources to persuade participants that Catholic morality is capacious enough to allow for a diversity of opinions on abortion and that the Church values the cultivating of and acting on one's own moral conscience, even in the face of opposition from the hierarchy.

Chapter 6 explores a small piece of the larger TFY campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment, the techniques employed by pro-repeal activists to assuage the religious concerns of undecided voters. I show that campaigners drew on and creatively reworked the campaign's

main narrative of repeal as an opportunity for national transformation to frame voting "yes" in the referendum as an opportunity for Catholics to transform the Irish Church to be more "caring and compassionate" and more committed to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. As a result, I argue, campaigners presented the argument that voting to expand legal access to abortion could be understood as an act of piety.

In Chapter 7 I conclude the dissertation by drawing out the global connections that are integral to how Irish Catholics are remaking the Church. This allows me to situate their work within broader debates over morality, authority, and jurisdiction within the Catholic Church, debates that are shaping the politics of social, cultural, and biological reproduction around the world.

Chapter 2 Making a Catholic Nation

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical account of how the Irish nation-state, a strict moral regime of sex and reproduction, and Ireland's Catholic national identity came to be mutually constituted. I begin by discussing the British colonization of Ireland and the dispossession and oppression of native Irish Catholics during the Protestant Ascendancy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I then show how, after many failed attempts to convert and thereby subdue the native Irish, the British state tasked the Roman Catholic Church with the project of civilizing the population. The Church enforced a strict moral and in particular sexual disciplinary regime in Ireland that proved materially advantageous to both the native Irish and the Irish Church; though the Church's aims were to suppress rebellion and institute religious discipline and strict adherence to the Church's teachings on sex and reproduction, the regime came to be entangled with Irish nationalism and resistance to British rule. In the latter half of the chapter, I turn my focus from the whole of the island of Ireland to the southern counties that secured political independence from Britain, becoming first the Irish Free State and later the Republic of Ireland. I explore how, as anxieties about changing norms around gender roles, sexual behavior, and morality circulated within the newly independent Free State and across post-War Europe, Irish-Catholic nationalism and Irish national identity became bound up with state and Church efforts to regulate reproduction. This I suggest lay the groundwork for the regulation of reproduction to become a key context through which the boundaries of religion and politics in Ireland would later be negotiated.

The Protestant Ascendancy and the Penal Laws

To fully explain how Catholicism became enmeshed with Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century, I must first address the impact of the Protestant Ascendancy on Irish

Catholics in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after the British had successfully completed their colonization of Ireland. The process of colonization had begun with the Anglo-Norman invasion of the island in the twelfth century, but it was Oliver Cromwell's brutal conquest in the mid-seventeenth century that brought the entirety of Ireland under British control. Through the Cromwellian conquest, native Irish Catholics were dispossessed of their land, which was then reallocated to English and Anglo-Irish settlers considered loyal to the British Crown and to the Established Church of England (which would later also be known as the Established Church of England and Ireland, or Anglicanism). These settlers and their descendants sought to maintain their socioeconomic advantage by "making the Catholics a servile caste," limiting their capacity for upward mobility and participation in civil society (Inglis 1987/1998, p. 103). This form of domination by Protestant colonizers and their descendants came to be known as the Protestant Ascendancy, though in truth it benefited only those wealthy Protestants who belonged to the Established Church; Presbyterians, Methodists, and even poor Anglicans were thwarted from joining this elite class. However, it was Catholics, referred to by the colonizers as "Papists" for their allegiance to the Pope, who made up the majority of the island's population and were the primary object of colonial repression.

The Protestant Ascendancy maintained its dominant position by implementing and enforcing a series of restrictions known as the Penal Laws. The Penal Laws limited Catholics economically by forbidding them to buy, inherit, or receive land as a gift. Instead, they could lease and work land that had been confiscated by Anglo-Irish colonizers, but these leases could not last more than 31 years. There was also a legal limit to the amount tenant farmers could profit from their labor. If a farmer's profits exceeded one-third of his rent, he would have to report this to his landlord and have the rent increased. If he did not report this, "his farms passed

to the first Protestant who made the discovery" of his illegal profits (Lecky, 1916, p.146, 151 as cited in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 103).

The Penal Laws also sought to restrict Catholic religious life. Bishops and priests belonging to Catholic religious orders were banished. Diocesan priests were allowed to remain if they registered with the state and took an Oath of Abjuration, acknowledging that Catholics had no right to ascend the British throne, and restricted their religious functions to saying Mass and administering the sacraments. Many priests in fact refused to take the Oath of Abjuration and so remained outlaws, delivering Mass not in churches but in open-air, out-of-sight locations, such as in the back alleys of urban centers and at designated "mass rocks" in the rural countryside. This carried a significant risk: if priests other than registered diocesan clergy were found after 1698, they were to be imprisoned and deported, and if they returned, they could be legally "hung, drawn, and quartered" (Inglis, 1987/1998, pp. 103–104). The Penal Laws did not institute a process for registering additional priests or replacing existing priests, because "the notion was that they would quietly die out within a generation" (Inglis, [1987/1998, p. 104).

Further, the Penal Laws strictly limited Catholics from educating and being educated. Catholics could not keep a school, serve as a private tutor, or act as the guardian of a child. Catholic parents could not send their children to be educated abroad and Catholics were entirely forbidden from attending the one university in Dublin. Tom Inglis (1987/1998) argues that this restriction on education and the limitations on the number and functions of priests (who were themselves educated) were intended to keep Catholics "ignorant" and "undisciplined" so they would be less capable of political resistance: "as an uneducated, uncivil, disorganized alliance, Catholics might occasionally burst out in open rebellion," he writes, adopting the perspective of the Protestant elite, "but at least they would not be able to engage in any organized political

revolution" (p. 103). Catholics strongly resisted the education restrictions. In parishes across the country, "hedge schools" were formed, where instructors, often supported by the local diocesan priest, would instruct (for pay) the children of elite Catholic families in Latin and Greek classics. Despite a 10-pound reward for "the discovery of a Popish schoolmaster," hedge schools persisted (Lecky, 1916, p. 148 as cited in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 105).

To counter the hedge schools, the Anglo-Irish Protestant elite lobbied the British state to establish subsidized schools to Protestantize and Anglicize the Irish. The strategy of these "Charter Schools," as they were known, was to separate Catholic children from their parents so that they could be taught English, the principles of the Established Church, and loyalty to the Crown (Inglis, 1987/1998, pp. 105–106). The children were also given training in "labor and industry" in an effort to "cure [their] habitual laziness and idleness" (Wall, 1976, p. 9 as cited in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 107). As they grew older, they would be apprenticed to Protestant families and forbidden to communicate with their families of origin. Catholic families, however, were not especially keen to hand over their children to a school system intended to "rescue the souls of poor children from the dangers of Popish superstition and idolatry"; enrollment was very poor, and ultimately the Charter Schools failed (Inglis 1987/1998, p. 106).

Despite this failure, the Protestant Ascendancy continued to insist that the British state take measures to moralize, subdue, and ideally convert Irish Catholics. One Anglo-Irish organization, the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion, wrote,

> It is a melancholy truth that the Irish vulgar are in too many instances bloody and ferocious, retaining the habits and feelings of Savages, devoid of lasting gratitude, and ready at the impulse of any groundless resentment to exercise the most unrelenting cruelty. . . . Should not every expedient that either honest Policy or Pure Religion can furnish, be instantly reported to, in order if possible to introduce among them the habits and principles of rational beings, and of Christians? The change from Savageness to

> Civilization has been too often realized to be anywhere despaired of. But it must begin somewhere.
> (Corcoran, 1928, p. 114 as cited in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 107).

The British state's investment in controlling the Irish population increased in the early nineteenth century. Ireland had always been an unusual colony; apart from some good farming land, it lacked the kind of natural resources that typically inspired imperial conquest. However, its geographical situation, being separated from Britain only by a small sea, made Britain militarily vulnerable. It had maintained a colonial presence in Ireland largely to prevent France and Spain from using the island to their military advantage (Inglis, 1987/1998, pp. 107–108). Yet it was gradually recognizing that the Protestant Ascendancy's efforts to control the Catholic population had not worked well. Irish Catholics had not been compelled to convert to the Established Church, they refused to give their children over to the Charter Schools, and most importantly, they continued to rebel violently. The turn of the nineteenth century had been marked by Irish rebellions against British sovereignty, both in Ireland and in other British colonies with a significant Irish presence (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 107). And the population of Ireland was growing. In 1821, after the first detailed census, it was revealed that Ireland's population had grown to 6.8 million, which was half the population of England and one-third the population of the British Isles altogether (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 107). Concerned about the proximity of so many rebellious Irish "savages," the British state tried a number of tactics for controlling the population: a rigorous form of policing, a state-subsidized emigration program, and experimental educational initiatives organized by Protestant evangelical societies (Inglis, 1987/1998, pp. 107–113). None were effective; the Protestant elite felt they did not have enough control over the new policing regime, the emigration program was unpopular, and Catholics fiercely resisted the education initiatives for their religious orientation.

By the 1830s, the British state was reconsidering its approach to Catholicism. The Penal Laws had already begun to be dismantled in the late eighteenth century, and in 1829, a Catholic Relief Act was passed in British Parliament to remove most of the remaining restrictions (Inglis, 1987/1998, pp. 110–113). Though the Anglo-Irish Protestant elite protested this vehemently, the state felt that its priority should be pacifying the Irish to avoid revolution and abolishing Catholicism no longer seemed an effective mode of doing so (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 110–113). Instead, many British politicians now argued that the state should form an alliance with the Catholic Church: "As long as the Irish could be dissuaded from bloody rebellion and became civil and disciplined," they reasoned, "it did not matter so much who produced the results" (Inglis 1987/1998, p. 113). Catholic bishops and clergy in Ireland had long demonstrated their commitment to law and order, using their sermons to exhort their parishioners to avoid violence, and this reassured British politicians that the hierarchy and clergy were not trying to foment rebellion (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 114).

The tentative alliance between the British state and the Catholic Church was realized in the establishment of the Irish National School system. While the British state recognized that its educational initiatives had failed because they were operated by Protestant societies, it was unwilling to establish a standardized school system that was denominationally Catholic (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 124). The state proposed a nondenominational school system in which religious instruction would be offered only one or two days a week, either before or after ordinary school hours (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 124). The Irish Catholic hierarchy accepted that the school system would be nondenominational, but insisted that (1) in schools where the majority of students were Catholic, the schoolmaster must also be Catholic; (2) any instructor who taught Catholic children must be educated and supervised by Catholics; and (3) the Catholic bishops must select and

approve the books that would be used (Akenson, 1970, pp. 384–385 as quoted in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 124). Within 25 years, most of these demands would be granted and most schools would be Catholic. This was perceived as a "win" by both the British state and the Catholic hierarchy (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 125). For the British state, the National Schools ensured that all Irish children would receive moral guidance and discipline, minimizing the chances of violent rebellion. For the Catholic hierarchy, gaining control over education allowed it to more effectively and completely provide the moral discipline that would lead Irish people to salvation.

The entanglement of Catholicism with Irish nationalism

The disciplining of Irish Catholicism, Irish Catholics, and Irish gender and sexuality

In the nineteenth century, Irish Catholicism underwent two significant transformations that were related. First, as alluded to above, the Irish Catholic Church instituted a regime of strict moral discipline, instructing, surveilling, and evaluating their parishioners in church (and especially in confession), in schools, and in their homes. In general, the Church sought to instill in the faithful greater personal control of their bodily instincts and passions; public order could be maintained and salvation eventually attained if people drank less, behaved less aggressively, and restricted their sexual activity to the only permissible context, marriage. They were particularly concerned with reducing violence caused by local feuds and by secret nationalist societies, such as the Ribbonmen.[1] Their interest in controlling sexual passions was not prompted by high levels of adultery and illegitimacy, but by a belief that instilling shame about the material body would lead to a greater awareness of the soul and greater internal control over one's bodily impulses (Inglis 1987/1998, p. 138).

[1] Inglis (1987/1998) describes the Ribbonmen as the "violent tip of an iceberg of class, nationalist, and sectarian sentiment which was floating in an ocean of Irish discontent" (p. 139). He explains that they struggled against the Catholic hierarchy to "[obtain] control of the form and content of political activity"; bishops objected to the Ribbonmen's violent tactics but also because they were not sectarian enough" (pp. 139–140).

This regime of strict moral discipline was extended and supported by a second major transformation in Irish Catholicism, the centralization of the organization of the Irish Church and the standardization of its practices. For the first half of the nineteenth century, the Irish hierarchy had been divided, fighting bitterly over issues such as charitable bequests and university education. Frustrated with these conflicts, the Holy See decided that the Irish Catholic Church needed its own process for settling domestic disputes. The man chosen to initiate this process was Paul Cullen, an Irishman who had spent decades in Rome serving as the rector of the Irish College (for priests) and the official representative of the Irish hierarchy at the Holy See. Cullen was appointed Archbishop of Armagh and sent back to Ireland to convene the first national synod of the Irish Catholic Church. Following precedents set by synods in Philadelphia and Baltimore, the 1850 Synod of Thurles (a town in County Tipperary) standardized "every aspect of the administrative life of the church, from the placement of baptismal fonts to the powers, responsibilities, and financial arrangements of the parish clergy" (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 72). Later, after being assigned to the much larger archdiocese of Dublin, Cullen used his "mastery of Roman politics"—and his tendency to remove or replace bishops he did not support —"to extend his reach beyond his own ecclesiastical province, which was one of four, and into nearly all of Ireland's twenty-eight dioceses" (p. 72). In this way, he could monitor parishes throughout the country to ensure they were complying with the changes he wanted to make.

One such change was the expansion of the parish priest's role and responsibilities. Under the Penal Laws, diocesan priests had been limited to saying Mass and performing the sacraments. In the nineteenth century, however, they became "rigorous disciplinarian[s]," monitoring all aspects of Irish social life (Inglis 1987/1998, p. 140). Through Cullen's standardization of the organization and practices of the Irish Church, it became mandatory for the laity to attend church

once a week and confess their sins to the priest at least once a year" (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 72). Priests were also tasked with overseeing the religious instruction children received and with regularly visiting the homes of their parishioners to ensure they were complying with Church rules and to offer support—or threats—if they were not (Inglis 1987/1998, pp. 141–142). An increase in the number of priests greatly facilitated their capacity to closely observe and discipline the population; in the first 20 years after the Synod of Thurles, the ratio of priests to people increased by a third (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 74).[2]

The priests' control stemmed from their religious power to deny parishioners the sacraments or to excommunicate them from the Church altogether. If enacted, these actions would have disastrous social and economic consequences, making parishioners outcasts in their families and communities, and the spiritual consequences were even direr. The priest was accepted as the mediator between God and the individual, so that his decision to deny a person the sacraments or excommunicate them from the Church practically ensured their eternal damnation (Inglis 1987/1998, p. 140). The priest had always been able to threaten these actions to encourage compliance with his moral directions, but as his disciplinary role expanded to new domains, he could control more aspects of Irish social life. Parishioners responded by adhering closely, albeit legalistically, to the rules and regulations communicated by the priest; by complying with his directions, they could avoid his censure.

Confession became an essential part of Irish Catholic life, facilitated by the standardization of Irish Catholic practices and a boom in church construction in the mid-nineteenth century. The open-air masses that had become the norm under the Penal Laws afforded little opportunity for private interactions between priests and parishioner. Cullen,

[2] Specifically, the ratio of priests to people increased from 1 priest for every 3,300 people in 1850 to 1 priest for every 1,100 people in 1870 (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 74).

however, in order to replicate Roman Catholic rituals and architecture, insisted that any new parishes include designated space for private confession (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017). The confessional provided space for "a regular and thorough scrutiny by the parish clergy of the behavior of the individual members of their congregations and for an important personal confrontation between priest and parishioners, with the former in a position of unquestioned authority, able to interrogate, exhort, or reprimand the penitent as he saw fit" (Connolly, 1982, p. 121). The assessment had to be thorough, because concealing an immoral thought or action from the priest would invalidate both the act of penitence and the forgiveness the priest could offer. Without that forgiveness, a parishioner could not "receive the other sacraments without committing sacrilege and risked damnation in the case of sudden death" (Connolly, 1982, p. 121).

Confession, Inglis (1987/1998) has argued, played a crucial role in sexualizing the body. It was where the body's activities —and thoughts pertaining to the body—were examined, supervised, and punished (p. 145). In the dark confessional, the body was hidden from the community, the priest, and the parishioner themself, which would ideally inspire self-consciousness and shame in the penitent person. The examination of the conscience that took place in confession involved a thorough investigation into the parishioner's sexual actions and thoughts. A textbook for priests commonly used in the nineteenth century shows that in the confession they were understood to be not only a moral judge but also a "physician" who could provide "remedies" for the "diseases" of sin that afflicted both body and soul (p. 145). Sexual thoughts and actions could not be cured, but they could be monitored by the priest, who would provide guidance and impose penance (p. 145). Priests, Inglis argues, suggested that only they had the moral fortitude to possess complete knowledge of sexual sin and its remedies; for regular

laypeople, “any detailed knowledge of the condition [of sexual sin] would destroy an innocence which held the disease at bay” (pp. 145–146). The confession thus allowed priests simultaneously to project themselves as the authorities on sexual morality and to monitor and discipline sexual behavior in their communities.

The priest’s supervisory role was extended to the local schools, which, as discussed earlier, were in theory nondenominational but usually administratively controlled by Catholic clergy (and later nuns). Though the teaching of specifically Catholic practices and doctrine was restricted to designated religion classes, the aim of the National Schools was to provide moral instruction, which was focused on children’s behavior. A description of textbooks procured by the Commissioners of National Education gives some indication of what kind of behaviors the priests hoped to instill in their students:

> They teach them that they must control their angry passions, be kind to the defenseless, attentive to the aged, respectful to females, obliging to one another, and merciful to animals. They teach them that it is the will of God, that they should be temperate in eating and drinking, should avoid indecent language, and be modest in all their deportment. They teach them to be industrious in order to maintain themselves and aid their parents; to be frugal, in order that they may give to those who want, and that they may not want themselves.
> (Commissioners of National Education, 1853, p. 15 as cited in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 154)

The education provided by the clergy and Catholic orders was highly gendered, with boys and girls being segregated and guided by separate curricula designed to communicate the distinct roles, responsibilities, and skills they were expected to have as adults. One text, *The Agricultural Class Book* (1850), was used for both male and female students: the story teaches boys “how a peasant transforms his land through drainage, does mixed farming, rotates crops, keeps fowl, keeps his accounts, and so on,” while it teaches girls how the peasant’s wife “[prepares] a varied diet of bread, meat, and soup, [keeps] her house clean, and [repairs] clothes” (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 190). Girls were particularly encouraged to develop “modesty, virtue, and the practice of being

industrious," for idleness invited opportunities for sinful thoughts and actions; accordingly, if a woman was not "cooking, tending her garden, cleaning the house, or mending clothes, she should be praying" (p. 191).

Students were subject to constant supervision and discipline at school,[3] and parents were expected to reinforce that discipline in the home. Mothers in particular were held responsible for the cleanliness and behavior of their children at school. Before students could receive instruction, they were evaluated for their bodily cleanliness: if they did not arrive at school with their faces and hands washed and their hair combed, wearing clean clothes, they were sent home, and their mothers would soon be visited by a priest. In this way, Inglis (1987/1998) writes, "The child became the link between the moralizing forces of the Church and the isolated homes of Ireland" (p. 191). These disciplinary interventions were not unwelcome. Priests (and later nuns) were the only people with power who visited women in their homes and took an interest in their domestic activities and women found that these visits could enable them to access a bit of that power (pp. 192–193). By closely adhering to her priest's instructions to supervise and morally discipline her husband and children, a woman would not only receive the priest's blessing and approval, but she could call on him as an ally when her family disobeyed her directions (p. 191). As a result of the relationships that developed between priests and women during home visits, Catholic mothers garnered moral authority, at least within the home, and became key figures in the regime of strict moral discipline the Irish Catholic Church sought to institute (p. 193). Though women's disciplinary power was limited to the family, the disciplining of children was essential for the restructuring of Irish inheritance practices in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, which would

[3] The playground was considered "the best place for discovering the dispositions, developing the character, and forming the habits of children." Children were never to be left to themselves; teachers and other monitors should "without controlling or embarrassing [the children] by their presence keep a strict over their words, actions, and general demeanor" (*An Outline of the General Regulations and Methods of Teaching in the Male National Model Schools*, 1840, pp. 5–6, as cited in Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 153)

materially benefit farming families and the Catholic Church, and which would strengthen support for Irish independence from Britain.

The Economic Benefits of Strict Sexual Discipline

Adhering to strict regulations around sexuality was a matter of salvation, but it also had material advantages for the many Irish Catholics who, dispossessed of land and wealth under the Penal Laws, had since become tenant farmers with meager holdings. Their economic hardship had been exacerbated in the eighteenth century, first by a substantial increase in the size of the population, and second by Britain's Industrial Revolution, as the production of inexpensive cloth and other materials undercut the domestic industries that supported Irish farms (Inglis, 1987/1998, pp. 160–164). For many tenant farmers, the only crop that would enable them to pay their Protestant landlords and feed their families was the potato (pp. 162–163). Then, in the 1840s, disaster struck: a blight infected the potato crop, resulting in a period of mass starvation and disease known as the Great Famine. In just three years, 1.5 million people died or left Ireland (p. 163). The potato could no longer be relied upon, and even after the Famine, Irish people, especially the rural poor, continued to leave the country in droves to find other opportunities for work.[4]

The tenant farmers who remained in Ireland were reluctant to subdivide their holdings among their children;[5] land that could barely feed a family, provide money for rent, and generate a small amount of capital would certainly not support multiple families. Farmers began to adopt a new system of inheritance: one son would inherit the farm after the death of his father, and

[4] Over a million Irish people emigrated in the five years after the Famine (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 165).

[5] The tenant farmers who remained in Ireland had commercially viable farms; they comprised up to one-seventh of the total agricultural labor force before the Famine and likely a greater proportion afterwards. These farmers employed laborers and sometimes servants and could afford to educate their sons and daughters for religious life. After the potato blight, they primarily used their farms to raise sheep and cattle (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 183).

when a sufficient number of his siblings had left to live elsewhere, he could marry and start his own family (Arensberg & Kimball, 1940/1968). His siblings had few options. One or two sisters might marry if the family could afford their dowries (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 164). Otherwise, the siblings would need to emigrate, enter into a religious order, or support the inheriting brother by continuing to work on the farm. Siblings who chose the latter two options would have to remain celibate, either because religious life required chastity or living conditions would deteriorate if the inheriting son's siblings brought partners and/or children to live on the farm. The stem-family practices underlying this system of inheritance—postponed marriage, emigration, and celibacy—had been practiced elsewhere in Europe since the sixteenth century, but "mainly due to the Penal Laws, the interest and means to embody them had been absent in Ireland" (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 160). In the nineteenth century, however, the Catholic Church's promotion of strict sexual discipline, reinforced through a "system of surveillance which extended beyond the school, into the family, and finally, into the wider community," strongly encouraged the unmarried children of tenant farmers to remain chaste (p. 169).

The same strict adherence to Catholic teachings on sexuality that made this new system of inheritance work also necessitated its continued use over generations. Most married women did not adopt strategies and practices that might reduce their fertility, because Catholic doctrine stressed that married couples should always remain open to producing more children (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 174). Accordingly, Catholic families remained large, and to maintain the family's land and improve its standards of living, most adult children were encouraged to postpone marriage, remain celibate, and/or emigrate (p. 177).

The wealth accumulated through this system of inheritance not only increased the standards of living for tenant farming families, but also was used to benefit the Irish Catholic

Church. Increasingly, farming families could afford to educate their sons and daughters for entry into religious life. This facilitated an expansion of the religious orders in Ireland in the late nineteenth century (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 183). Priestly orders who already had established presences in Ireland, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans, saw their numbers grow, and were joined by newer orders, including the Vincentians and the Redemptorists, who undertook nationwide campaigns to generate public enthusiasm for the sacraments (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 74). Convents also proliferated across the island, "led by the Sisters of Mercy but including many other groups of women, some contemplative, some not, committed to education at every level and of every class, to nursing, and to orphanages or asylums" (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 73). Further, as farming families accumulated wealth, they used their capital to support a new wave of building projects initiated by the Irish Catholic bishops, headed by Cullen: "Cathedrals, churches, chapels, convents, monasteries, seminaries, parochial houses, episcopal palaces, schools, colleges, orphanages, hospitals and asylums all mushroomed in every part of Ireland" (Larkin, 1984/1997, p. 27). Through this material expansion and with the increase in manpower, the Catholic Church could "reach into every corner of the island," providing a local parish church and a priest (or priests) to head it. In this way the local parish soon became center of Irish Catholic life (Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017, p. 74).

Contributing to the Church's material expansion allowed Catholic farmers to demonstrate publicly their commitment to Catholicism as well as their economic progress. They were, as Inglis (1987/1998) writes, showing that they could attain the same social prestige and economic class as the Protestant gentry who had dominated their lives (p. 183). And as they became the dominant economic class in Ireland, they also gained political power.

The Emergence of Catholic Nationalism

It was conflict over land that gradually compelled Catholic tenant farmers to enter into a political alliance with the Irish Catholic Church. In the 1870s and 1880s, after a series of disastrous harvests that left many unable to pay rent on their land, they began to mobilize into an agrarian-political movement headed by MP Charles Stewart Parnell. In the short term, they advocated for a reduction in rents, but their long-term aim was much greater: the ability to own the land they worked. After the conflict escalated into a violent Land War (1879–1882), which would periodically reignite in the ensuing decades, Parnell redirected his efforts toward acquiring Irish Home Rule through the British parliamentary process. He came to lead the recently formed Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and secured the support of the Irish Catholic hierarchy, who agreed to support the party's positions on Home Rule and tenant land acquisition so long as the IPP advocated for the Church's interests. Specifically, the Catholic hierarchy wanted to reform the college and university system in Ireland, historically dominated by the Established Church (of England and Ireland), so that Catholics would have greater access to higher education, and they wanted the right to approve IPP representatives in their local dioceses. This arrangement developed into a clerical-nationalist alliance that was extremely effective politically. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the pattern of Catholic landholding had changed from primarily tenancy to ownership, and the Church governed several new institutions of higher education that were financed by the British state. However, even after repeated attempts to pass an Irish Home Rule bill, the issue of self-governance remained unresolved.

At the turn of the century, the clerical-nationalist alliance remained in place, though the IPP had largely fractured and lost momentum, replaced by a number of nationalist parties and

groups who felt that political self-determination had to be accompanied by a revival in cultural heritage and pride in being Irish. These groups saw Catholicism as an important marker of Irish identity that, though nearly lost, had been successfully revived over the nineteenth century. Other markers of Irish identity, however, had been lost through colonial efforts to Anglicize the Irish: first and foremost, the Irish language, but also folklore, games, rituals, and traditions. Groups who attempted to revive and popularize these markers of Irish identity included the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Irish Literary Revival Movement, the Gaelic League, and Sinn Féin (the last being the most overtly political). These organizations helped shape a new generation of nationalist political leaders who would participate in the revolutionary activity of the late 1910s and subsequently shape new postcolonial political order (Fuller, 2004).

As many scholars have noted, in the early twentieth century the Catholic hierarchy and clergy, despite some misgivings, increasingly followed the political momentum of the Irish nationalist movement (Fuller, 2004; Inglis, 1987/1998; Barr & Ó Corráin, 2017). Though Catholic theology held that it was morally wrong to contravene the law of the existing government—still the British state—the Irish hierarchy strongly resisted the conscription of the Irish population to fight in the First World War, a stance it justified based on its long history of condemning violent political action. Yet when it came to violence in pursuit of Irish independence, the hierarchy began to moderate its position. In the nineteenth century, the Irish Church had been deeply suspicious of Fenianism, but it openly supported the political aims of the early twentieth-century revolutionaries, many of whom belonged to Sinn Féin. Louise Fuller (2004) argues that this shift in attitude toward political revolutionaries was partially due to an increase in public support for Irish independence, but it also helped that the political movement generally and the revolutionaries in particular were more overtly Catholic than the Fenians had

been.[6] Also, unlike activists on the continent who were seeking to radically transform the social order in the wake of the First World War (as I shall discuss in more detail), the Irish revolutionaries had no intention of making changes that would "undermine the rights of the Church and Christian values" (Fuller, 2004, p. xxxvii). In fact, as I shall show in the next section, after securing independence, these activists used the strict moral discipline that the Church had promoted over the course of the nineteenth century as the basis for unifying the population and building the new nation-state.

The Catholic family: Unifying a divided nation

The process through which the nation achieved full independence from Britain was slow, violent, and politically divisive. In the 1910s, nationalist leaders, known as republicans, tried repeatedly to secure political independence from the United Kingdom for the whole island. Their first attempt at revolution, known as the Easter Rising of 1916, was crushed within a week; however, the revolutionaries who survived the Rising united under the political party Sinn Féin and sought to claim Irish independence through the British legislative process. In the United Kingdom's 1918 General Election, Sinn Féin won the majority of seats in the Irish House of Commons and used their success as a mandate to form an independent legislature, the Dáil Éireann.

The Dáil declared independence from the United Kingdom in 1919 and claimed that their new state, the Irish Republic, had jurisdiction over the entirety of Ireland. Practically, however, republicans only controlled 21 of the island's 32 counties; British authorities retained a strong presence in the northeast and in urban areas, such as Dublin and Cork. Nonetheless, the Dáil

[6] After Sinn Féin won a majority of seats in the Irish election of 1918, the head of the Irish College in Rome asked bishops in Ireland to speak to the "soundness of the new party, and those who replied all bore testimony to what exemplary Catholics its members were." One Bishop Foley wrote that Sinn Féin leaders of the anticonscription campaign had "displayed the most marvelous fervor in prayer, reception of the sacraments, assisting at Mass etc, that had ever occurred in the country. . . . No mission that was ever held so profoundly affected the lives of the whole Catholic people, and the Sinn Féiners were second to no others" (cited in Fuller, 2004, p. xxxvii)

established a new government, court system, police force, and volunteer army, later known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which fought against British forces and Irish Unionist forces in the Irish War of Independence (1919–1920). During this time, the British parliament decided to partition the island into two new territories: Northern Ireland, the 6 counties that had a Protestant majority committed to remaining part of the United Kingdom; and Southern Ireland, the remaining 26 counties, which were majority Catholic and largely controlled by the new republican government. Both territories would be given the option to be self-governing while remaining within the United Kingdom. While the northern counties accepted this, republicans in the south did not, and they continued to fight for independence for the whole island. Ultimately, the War of Independence ended with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1922), which allowed the 26 southern counties to establish themselves as the Irish Free State while remaining part of the British Empire. The northern counties were allowed to opt out of the Irish Free State and remain part of the United Kingdom if they chose and they did so. Among republicans, the signing of the treaty was extremely divisive; it was only narrowly ratified by the Dáil, and ultimately the political divisions led to an 11-month civil war, which was won by those in favor of the treaty.

At this time of heightened division, concerns about declining sexual morality circulated both in and outside Ireland. Following the First World War, there was considerable anxiety in Europe and the United States about the "libidinal elements of violence" as well as specifically sexual violence that had been perpetrated during the conflict (Herzog, 2011, p. 47). Further, the mobilization of men into conflict, it was feared, had "weakened family structures" and disturbed conventional gender roles by making women responsible not only for domestic responsibilities, but also for the responsibilities and labor previously assigned to men (Ferriter, 2009, p. 101).

These fears mingled with anxieties about a postwar "climate of openness to experimentation," which on the continent had led to a "rich burgeoning of bohemian and other ventures in non-traditional sexual arrangements," as well as organized activism in support of "sex reform," a rethinking of the "entire complex of issues related to marriage, reproduction, gender relations, and the very idea of what sex was and could be" (Herzog, 2011, pp. 47–53). In some places, these collective anxieties motivated popular support for conservative movements keen to "restore a masculinity" that had been undermined by trauma, economic instability, and the "growing sexual, emotional, and economic independence of women" (p. 53).

Although the Irish had not participated in the First World War, these anxieties nonetheless resonated, as the population had recently been involved in two violent conflicts, the War of Independence with Britain and the subsequent civil war over the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Discourses about a decline in sexual morality circulated broadly, centered on the need for the new state to partner with the Catholic Church and voluntary lay Catholic groups to recover an "historic (or mythical) Irish chasteness" (Ferriter, 2009, p. 100) for the sake of the nation's moral well-being as well as its reputation. An *Irish Times* column from the late 1920s wistfully recalled that Ireland had, for centuries, been famous "for her men's chivalry and for her women's modesty," lamenting that "the nation's proudest and most precious heritage [was] slipping away from its grasp" (p. 101). There was also considerable public preaching on this perceived decline in sexual morality. In 1926, the Archbishop of Tuam, in a homily criticizing recent trends in women's dress he considered "immodest," argued that "the future of the country is bound up with the dignity and purity of the women of Ireland" (p. 101).

Sonja Rose (1999) argues that these kind of upsurges in public moral discourse surrounding sexuality often occur when "questions about community or national solidarity

become highly charged," especially in the context of war (p. 231). War, she says, threatens physical bodies and the social body on a variety of fronts. It also transforms everyday life, "as women and men take up new opportunities with unforeseen consequences," potentially threatening the "very unity that the nation is imagined to represent" (p. 231). Significantly, it focuses public attention on questions "of who 'we' are and what it is that 'we' stand for" (p. 231).

I suggest that to provide an answer to those questions—and thus a unified national identity—the newly independent Irish state promoted a Catholic moral order centered on social doctrine on the family. In what follows, I look at two key ways the state promoted these teachings: first, by enshrining Catholic teachings on family, sex, and gender in the Constitution; and second, by partnering with the Catholic hierarchy to regulate sex outside of marriage. These projects, I argue, show that particular ideas about marriage, sex, gender, and reproduction embedded in Catholic teaching on the family shaped how the Irish nation-state and citizenship were imagined and constituted.

A Constitution for a Catholic Nation

Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937), the document that contains the Eighth Amendment, was not the first constitution drafted for the independent Ireland. The first had in fact been drafted 15 years earlier, following the Irish War of Independence and a subsequent civil war over the nation's future relationship with the United Kingdom and with the six counties that would come to be known as "Northern Ireland." In 1922, the government of the new Irish Free State found it politically necessary to draft a constitution that would be "conciliatory toward the Protestant minority" on the island (Hug, 1999, p. 13). However, as it became clear that Northern Ireland, at

least for the time being, would remain part of the United Kingdom, political leaders in the Irish Free State began to prioritize establishing a unified national identity, distinct from and morally superior to that of their colonizer. The writing and ratification of a second constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, not only facilitated the full separation of the Irish state from the United Kingdom, but established that the state would be founded on - and would remain committed to - Catholic social values, particularly those related to the family.

While the republican leaders on the committee that drafted the first constitution for the Irish Free State were all Catholic and strongly influenced by the Catholic hierarchy, the complicated circumstances through which the state had acquired political independence from the British government meant that the committee was hesitant to "give its full weight to…an explicit enshrinement of the Catholic teaching in its laws" (Hug, 1999, p. 15). In the wake of two almost overlapping conflicts (the War of Independence and the Civil War), the leaders of the Irish Free State needed to draft a constitution that would be acceptable both to the British, who still held some authority, and to the anti-Treaty republicans, who still hoped for full political independence and the reunification of the island. Though the constitution's preamble affirmed that "all lawful authority comes from God to the people" (Constitution of the Irish Free State, 1922, Preamble), the constitutional committee agreed that the document would avoid "religious clauses," meaning clauses that favored one religion over another, and in fact prohibited the passing of laws that would discriminate between religions in Article 8 of the final draft. By committing to religious neutrality, the committee would make it clear that the Constitution would be "secular enough to accommodate Catholics and Protestants alike"; this would assuage British concerns about discrimination against Protestants who remained in the southern counties and at the same time would appeal to anti-Treaty republicans who still hoped the northern counties could be

convinced to join the Free State (Hug, 1999, p. 13). Early in the drafting process, political leaders had suggested constitutional measures that would commit the state to legislating with a Catholic ethos, such as a "theological senate"[7] that would decide if laws passed by the Dáil were "contrary to [the majority population's] faith and morals or not," but these were never incorporated into the constitution (Hug, 1999, p. 15).

However, though the constitution professed the state's commitment to religious neutrality, the new government of the Irish Free State soon began to promote a comprehensive moral order based on Catholic principles, which they hoped would assist them in imposing political order and reinforcing democratic governance in the wake of the civil war. As I shall discuss in more detail in the next section, the government was especially concerned about the threat modernity posed to Irish identity, values, and morality. They passed laws prohibiting divorce and contraception, censored literature deemed immoral (including literature on contraception), and sought to limit prostitution and other "sexual crimes" by imposing harsh restrictions on cinemas, dance halls, and public houses (Girvin, 2018a, pp. 4–5).

The government justified this campaign on majoritarian grounds. Promoting Catholic social principles would foster social cohesion in a society that had recently been politically divided to the point of civil war, but that was religiously homogenous, particularly after partition. Moreover, as historians Diarmaid Ferriter and Brian Girvin have shown, the primary aim of promoting this moral order was to demonstrate moral superiority over the British, who were often represented as "godless" by Irish conservatives (Ferriter, 2009, pp. 205–214; Girvin, 2018a, pp. 4–5).

The government's interest in promoting a Catholic moral order must also be considered

[7] This particular proposal was made by the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, William T. Cosgrave.

in the context of widespread concern across Europe and the United States about the "erosion of moral codes" following the First World War (and, in Ireland's case, the War of Independence and civil war) and anxieties about the activities of the "modern girl" (Ferriter, 2009, p. 106). In Italy, for example, over the course of the 1920s, there was "panic" at the blurring of traditional gender roles and frustration as a younger generation took up new courtship practices that did not involve parental controls. As Senia Paseta has shown (2003), the government of the Free State looked closely at foreign legislation before drafting their own measures against divorce, contraception, and "immoral" films and literature. Still, Paseta (2003) argues, it is striking that the Free State banned contraception on moral grounds and not in relation to any "demographic and eugenic concerns and debates that underpinned similar legislation in continental Europe" (p. 100). I will discuss the Irish regulation of contraception in more depth later in this chapter, but for now, I want to reiterate that the newly independent Irish Free State's campaign to promote a moral order based in Catholic principles, particularly with regard to sexual behavior, can be understood both in the context of its particular history of resistance to British rule and in the context of broader anxieties about changing norms around gender roles, sexual behavior, and morality that circulated during the interwar period.

It was through the drafting of a second constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, in the 1930s, that the government of the Irish Free State sought to secure its full political independence from the British Empire and simultaneously to demonstrate its commitment to the institution and teachings of the Catholic Church. This project had been initiated by Eamon de Valera, an anti-Treaty republican whose party, Fianna Fáil, took power in 1932. As head of the executive, de Valera immediately began to dismantle aspects of the treaty that had allowed Britain to continue to exercise its authority in Ireland: he removed the Office of Governor General (Britain's

representative in Ireland), he abolished the Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown, and he abolished the Senate, a legislative body separate from the Dáil Eireann that was dominated by politicians who had supported the treaty. In 1935, he began to draft a new constitution, this time without a committee. The new constitution established a new head of state, the President, and avoided any mention of allegiance to the British monarch. It also included a jurisdictional claim over the territory of Northern Ireland, though, as Chrystel Hug (1999) writes, "the spirit of compromise that had characterized the 1922 constitution was no longer a priority" (p. 15), for even ardent republican nationalists like de Valera and his followers had come to view the reunification of the island as a somewhat distant goal. Feeling no pressing need to appeal to the Protestant population in Northern Ireland and keen to establish a unified sense of Irish identity, de Valera drafted a constitution that "raise[d] Catholic ideology to the status of government principle" (p. 15).

De Valera himself clearly understood Catholicism was inextricable from the Irish nation. In a famous St. Patrick's Day speech, he proclaimed that for fifteen hundred years, since St. Patrick had arrived on the island, "Ireland has been a Christian and a Catholic nation." Referencing the centuries of British efforts to forcibly convert the population, he went on: "All the ruthless attempts to force her from this allegiance have not shaken her faith. She remains a Catholic nation." (Hug, 1999, p. 15). This stance is reflected in the Preamble to Bunreacht na hÉireann, which reads, "In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and states must be referred, we, the people of Éire, humbly acknowledge[e] all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, who sustained our fathers through centuries" (Republic of Ireland, 1937/2020, Preamble)

The new constitution's discussion of religion, Article 44, explicitly recognized "the

special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the majority of the Citizens" (Republic of Ireland, 1937/2020, Article 44) (this recognition was repealed in 1972). Although the article clearly privileged the religion of the majority, Dermot Keogh, in his detailed account of the constitutional drafting process (1986), has argued that de Valera resisted suggestions from the hierarchy to establish a closer political relationship with the Holy See by signing a concordat, as the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese states had done. De Valera was committed to make the constitution inclusive, guaranteeing civil liberties for those belonging to other churches, even as he staunchly defended promotion of his own church on majoritarian grounds. "There are 93 percent of the people in this part of Ireland and 75 percent of the people in Ireland as a whole who belong to the Catholic Church," he once said, "who believe in its teachings, and whose philosophy of life is the philosophy that comes from its teaching" (Hug, 1999, p. 17). Irish politicians, often divided along party lines, were united in their support for de Valera's Catholic nationalist perspective on the relationship between Church and state; Keogh (1986, p. 164) reports that there was no conflict during Dáil debates on the drafts of the constitution on the topic of religion or on religious principles.

Bunreacht na hÉireann demonstrated the state's commitment to the Catholic Church not only through its recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the majority, but also by establishing a moral order centered on the superiority of divine law—or natural law—over positive law. It was not for the state to define laws that had been given by God; instead, it was the state's duty to affirm and protect those divine laws. Accordingly, Bunreacht na hÉireann followed Catholic teachings in prioritizing the "common good" over individual rights.

And the "common good" of the nation and society more broadly, the Constitution proclaimed, could only be attained by promoting and protecting the traditional family as defined

by Catholic teachings. Through Article 41 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, the state, in keeping with Catholic teaching, "recognizes the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law"; it goes on to guarantee "to protect the Family in constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State." This required the state to "guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack. No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage."[8] Through these measures, de Valera made plain that Ireland's moral order depended on the state's protection of the institution of marriage and thus the family against the "selfish whims" of individuals, such as Protestants, whose religion allowed for divorce.

Moreover, de Valera's new constitution suggested the "common good" depended on the facilitation of women's labor—particularly as "mothers"—in the domestic sphere. In Article 41.2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, the state recognized that "by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and therefore will endeavor "to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home." This measure reflects an idea that was gaining traction among the Catholic hierarchy at the time, the theology of sexual complementarity, which defines men and women as equal in their humanity but having gender-specific roles to fulfill based on their natural, God-given inclinations. Though the article recognized the work most early twentieth-century women did in the home as labor that was essential and beneficial to the state and society, in the context of a document that placed divine law above positive law, it suggested that "life within the home" and motherhood were a woman's natural roles and should

[8] This particular article was repealed by popular referendum in 1995, thereby legalizing divorce.

be protected against individual interests. During the drafting process, Irish feminists expressed concern that the text would confine women to the home and justify their unpaid labor there, but legislators ignored their concerns, and the article remained intact (and to date has not been repealed). In ratifying Bunreacht na hÉireann in 1937, the state cast off its lingering ties to the British Empire while proclaiming its commitment to the Catholic Church. This constitutional endorsement of Catholic teachings, on the one hand, could be seen as the ultimate expression of Irish independence and moral superiority over their former colonizers; on the other, it compelled the state to prioritize Catholic teachings on the family above the rights of individual citizens—a policy that would eventually become politically divisive.

The Church-State Project of Regulating Reproduction

As I discussed in the last section, the Irish state's campaign to promote a strict moral order based in Catholic principles served multiple purposes. It allowed the newly independent state to demonstrate moral superiority over its former colonizers, unified a politically divided population in the wake of civil war, and addressed widespread concerns about the supposed erosion of moral codes in modern Europe. When De Valera drafted a new constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, in 1937, which eliminated Ireland's remaining political ties to the British Empire, he formally tasked the state with recognizing and promoting the family as fundamental to the social order and to the "common good" of the nation according to divine law. It became the special duty of the state to protect the institution of marriage "on which the family is founded" from attack. The constitution included its own measures to protect the institutions of family and marriage: a prohibition on divorce and a state commitment to supporting women's

domestic labor.[9]

In this section, I will take a broader look at the state's commitment to protecting the institutions of family and marriage. Because Catholic teachings hold that the family, comprised of a married man and woman intending to produce children, is the fundamental social unit of the church, nation, and wider society, both the Irish state and the Irish Catholic hierarchy sought to strictly regulate sex outside of marriage. Women's capacity for pregnancy meant that they more than men became the objects of this new regime of moral surveillance and discipline. For a nation keen to demonstrate its moral superiority, it was essential that Irish women follow Catholic teachings by engaging in sexual activity only within marriage and only for the purpose of procreation. From the perspective of the state, the existence of "illegitimate children," "unmarried mothers," and contraception posed significant threats to the institution of marriage, the "common good," and Irish moral superiority. As other states in Western Europe adopted more progressive policies in these areas, particularly in relation to contraception, Ireland's strict regulations made it stand out as uniquely conservative and "traditional" in the modern world, and its opposition to liberal sexual and reproductive policies became a part of its national identity.

Ironically, compared to other Western European countries, there was "very little sexual activity" occurring in Ireland in this period, at least "according to official statistics" (Ferriter, 2009, p. 103). In 1926, approximately three-quarters of men and just over half of women between the ages of 25 and 43 were unmarried (Daly, 2006, p. 76). From the 1920s until the 1950s, approximately a quarter of Irish men and women remained "permanently celibate," making Ireland the state with the "highest rates of postponed marriage and permanent celibacy of any western country that kept such records" (Daly, 2006, p. 76). Those who did marry had large families: in 1926, a farming couple married for 20 years or more had an average of 6 children,

[9] No financial support has ever been allocated to women on the basis of the "woman in the home" article.

but this in fact forced many of their offspring to remain unmarried, for as discussed earlier, only 1 child would be assigned ownership of the farm and thus be "marriageable" (Daly, 2006, p. 26). Moreover, this land inheritance system discouraged men from marrying until their noninheriting siblings emigrated, a system that was exacerbated by the collapse of emigration during the Great Depression. There were also concerns about standards of living; the majority of farmhouses had only 3 or 4 rooms, which particularly on larger landholdings were not sufficient to accommodate the number of "assisting relatives," sons and brothers of farmers, needed for farm labor, as well as wives and children (Ferriter, 2009, pp. 103–104). For a sense of comparison, in England a son 24 to 34 years old supporting his father on the family farm was four times more likely to be married than his Irish counterpart (Daly, 2006, p. 76).

Though delayed marriage and celibacy were concerning to the Irish government, much more concerning was the increasing number of children being born outside of marriage, which undermined the state's effort to demonstrate moral superiority through its promotion of Catholic social values. According to the Carrigan Committee report, "The official statistics are sufficient to show that illegitimacy is an evil which, contrary to past experience of history, has begun to grow and spread latterly in the country" (Carrigan Committee Report, 1931, as quoted in Hogan, 2020, p. 87). The newly independent state acted on proposals it received that it create and support an infrastructure of "mother and baby homes" to be run by Catholic religious orders. These homes were designated specifically for unmarried women on their first pregnancy. These women would be removed from their families and communities so that their failure to remain chaste could remain unknown, both so that the women could avoid public shaming, condemnation, and social ostracization, and so that visible evidence of sinful sexual behavior—in the form of pregnant unmarried women and "illegitimate" children—was not available to Irish

society. The plan was that women would stay in the home for the first year of their child's life, though in practice the amount of time women stayed in the home depended on how quickly foster parents could be found; well into the 1970s and 1980s, single motherhood was not considered an option beneficial to either mother or child (Hogan, 2020, p. 95). The government gave "almost complete discretion" to the religious orders in handling the cases of unmarried women pregnant for the first time, with it being assumed that the nuns who ran Mother and Baby Homes and similar institutions would provide the "appropriate training and example" through which an unmarried woman's "self-respect [could be] restored" (Ferriter, 2009, p. 127). Women who became pregnant outside of marriage more than once, however, were considered "unreformable" or "hardened" sinners and were relegated to workhouses, called "country homes," or institutionalized in the notorious Magdalene laundries operated by Catholic religious orders (Hogan, 2020, pp. 87–88). Their repeated sexual sins had made them "sources of evil, danger, and expense" to both their communities and the "first time offenders" housed in Mother and Baby Homes (Ferriter, 2009, p. 127; Hogan, 2020, pp. 87–88).

To avoid institutionalization or being separated from their children, many pregnant women migrated to England, where they often received support from English charity workers. Historian Lindsey Earner-Byrne (2004) has shown that this form of emigration was "perceived as a national embarrassment, reflecting not just the harshness of the moral code in Ireland, but its abject failure to control sexual behavior." However, when English and Irish charity workers pressured the Irish Catholic hierarchy to support a repatriation scheme for this set of emigrants, they sanctioned it only "half-heartedly"; the emigration of unmarried expectant mothers was seen as "convenient by state and society alike, as it saved money and preserved the illusion at home of chastity" (Ferriter, 2009, pp. 128–129), a pattern that would later be repeated with abortion

emigration.

Contraceptives also posed a threat to the state's commitment to preventing and disciplining sex outside of marriage. The unpublished report from the Carrigan Committee on public morality had indicated that in the late 1920s there was widespread use of contraceptives, even in rural areas (Girvin, 2018a, p. 5). Ireland's proximity to Britain facilitated the circulation of newspapers and periodicals that contained advertisements for information on contraception and at the time contraceptives could be received from Britain by mail order. The sexual reform movement was bringing about significant changes in British attitudes toward sex: birth control clinics had opened up in England, Scotland, and Wales during the 1920s, and by 1930 even the British Ministry for Health had decided to permit married women to receive birth control advice on health grounds. There were no birth control clinics in the Irish Free State and government censorship had prevented the distribution of books like Marie Stopes's *Married Love*, which openly advocated the use of contraceptives in certain situations, but it was clear from the Carrigan report that many Irish people were ignoring Catholic teaching on the issue. For the sake of public morality, the committee recommended that the state ban contraceptives except in exceptional circumstances (Girvin, 2018a, p. 6).

In 1930, contraception became more than just a moral issue, it became a source of sectarian division. Previously, both the Anglican Church (which included both the Church of England and the Church of Ireland) and the Catholic Church had condemned the use of contraceptives on the grounds that the purpose of marriage was procreation. At the Lambeth Conference in 1930, however, the Anglican Church ended its opposition to contraception, instead adopting a "more tolerant and supportive position for married couples who wished to regulate family size" (Girvin, 2018a, pp. 5–6). This move was condemned by the Catholic

Church. At the end of the year, Pope Pius XI published an encyclical titled *Casti Connubii* (Of Chaste Wedlock), which served as a direct rejoinder to the Anglican position. Although the encyclical promoted marriage as a "companionate and joyfully sensual project," part of a new approach to marital theology that framed Catholic teaching as the best guarantor of marital and sexual happiness, *Casti Connubii* emphasized that the primary purpose of sex within marriage was for the "begetting of children." Those who used contraception, the pope argued, "frustrate [the conjugal act's] natural power and purpose, sin against nature, and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious" (Fuller, 2004, p. 196).

Between the publication of *Casti Connubii* and the recommendation of the Carrigan Committee, there was strong incentive for the government to demonstrate its commitment to Catholic teaching on marriage by banning contraceptives altogether (Girvin, 2018a). The committee that drafted the proposed legislation initially decided to include a conscience clause, permitting those who felt that the use of contraceptives was not morally wrong, such as Protestants, to order and use them (Girvin, 2018a, p. 6). However, the vice president of the state's executive council at the time, Seán T. O'Kelly, insisted that the ban be universal. "No Catholic could permit what was intrinsically wrong," he argued, "no matter how much a person might say that they in their conscience saw no wrong in it" (Girvin, 2018a, p. 6). Ignoring the minority of Protestants, both in the Dáil Éireann and in the larger population, he asserted that the "the practice of contraception is contrary to Catholic doctrine and is abhorrent to the people of Saorstat Eireann [the state of Ireland]," thus equating Catholic and Irish values (Girvin, 2018a, p. 6). The legislation received broad support, and the ban on contraception was passed on majoritarian grounds (Girvin, 2018a, p. 6).

The state "vigorously" enforced the law within its boundaries and encouraged the

international community to oppose contraception as well. At the League of Nations, the Irish state followed the lead of the Holy See in opposing any pro-contraception resolutions proposed there (Girvin, 2018a, p. 7). In 1951, two decades after the law had been passed in Ireland, the state threatened to withdraw from the World Health Organization when it adopted a pro-contraception policy (Girvin, 2018a, p. 7). The extent to which Ireland's position on contraception stood out among other Western European countries, however, has been a matter of scholarly debate. Diarmaid Ferriter (2009), for example, has argued that pro-natalist discourse was widespread across Europe in the 1920s to 1940s and that the "interrelation of religion and politics" on matters of sex and reproduction can also be seen in the Netherlands, where both Catholic and Orthodox groups maintained significant political power (pp. 191–192). Girvin, on the other hand, has argued (2018a) that even in states where there was religious and/or political opposition to contraception, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Britain, at least some access to contraception was permitted, often in relation to health considerations (p. 7). Moreover, in contexts where birth control and contraceptive reform movements emerged and encountered moral disapproval and opposition, there was always debate. Girvin points out that as these reform movements gained traction across most of Europe through the mid-century, liberalizing the regulation of birth control and contraceptives across the continent, public discussion of these topics in Ireland remained taboo and the state maintained its absolute prohibition well into the 1960s (pp. 7–8).

The state's support for Catholic teachings on contraception was largely shared by the public. It is likely, of course, that some couples sought birth control advice and contraceptives from clinics in Belfast and London and customs authorities apparently reported to one researcher that they were not "unduly intrusive in respect of mail from Britain that may contain

contraceptives or information" (Girvin, 2018a, p. 8). Still, many Irish people endeavored to keep their sexual and reproductive practices in line with Church teachings. Sociologist (and Jesuit priest) Alexander J. Humphreys (1966), researched family planning among Irish married couples in the late 1940s and early 1950s and found that while many spaced births by abstaining from sex, in keeping with Catholic teachings, none of his informants considered birth control involving contraception (p. 211). Later in the 1950s Ireland experienced an economic and social crisis that led to a major change in economic policy and the state's decision to apply for membership in the European Economic Community, but despite this upheaval, through the early 1960s people remained committed to Catholic social teaching (Girvin, 2018a, p. 9). One survey (Biever, 1976) in Dublin found that significant majorities of Dubliners "endorsed church teaching on moral issues", including contraception; a full 57% reported their belief that childbearing was the only reason to engage in sexual activity (Girvin, 2018a, p. 9).[10] This survey also found that the vast majority of respondents "expressed strong support for intolerant and theocratic attitudes" (Girvin, 2018a, p. 9), which suggests that many were likely to support the state's enforcement of Catholic teachings on reproduction.

Religion, politics, and the regulation of reproduction

Through this chapter, I have shown that the processes through which Catholicism was localized in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland made strict adherence to Catholic morality on family, marriage, and reproduction a fundamental part of Irish nation building and the establishment of an independent Irish state capable of self-governance. By enshrining Catholic moral teachings on marriage and the family in law and by working with Catholic organizations to regulate reproduction in ways that promoted adherence to those teachings, the

[10] By the time of this survey, Pope Pius XII had in fact endorsed the "safe period" method for continuing to have sex without contraception while limiting the number of pregnancies. According to a survey conducted in 1973, the majority of women interviewed employed this method (Girvin, 2018a, p. 8).

political leaders of the Irish Free State quite consciously endeavored to demonstrate—to the Irish population, to their former colonizers, and to the world at large—that the Irish people were both unusually disciplined and united in their commitment to Catholic social values.

I do not mean to suggest that the state's promotion of marriage and family should be understood solely in terms of how Catholicism was localized in Ireland. After all, "the family," even when detached from its particular theological significance in Catholicism, is a very useful and common political trope. As Anne McClintock (1993) has argued, the trope of the family offers a "natural" figure for sanctioning social hierarchy within a "putative unity of interests" (p. 65); it characterizes the subordination of woman to man and child to adult as natural, allowing other forms of social hierarchy depicted in familial terms to be understood as natural, too. Nations are symbolically figured as families in ways that reinforce, perpetuate, and naturalize ideologies of male-female difference, such as the gendered division of social life into the "public" and "domestic" spheres. In this figuration, men take on the roles of the public sphere as national citizens, political actors, and motivators of social change. Women are excluded from this kind of action and instead are "subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit" (McClintock, 1993, p. 62). They are seen as the "bearers" and "mothers" of the nation and its citizens: by giving birth, they reproduce the boundaries of the nation, and by socializing the next generation, they maintain national traditions (McClintock, 1993, pp. 62–66; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 7). There are clearly parallels between this account of women's roles within the national family and Catholic teachings; earlier this chapter, I argued that Article 41.2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, which recognizes women's reproductive labor and motherhood as essential to the common good, drew on the Catholic theology of sexual complementarity. However, the notion that, for the good of society, "a woman's place is in the

home" is not at all exclusive to Catholic teachings or to the Irish context.

In a similar vein, I want to acknowledge that states are likely to have a vested interest in regulating reproduction regardless of their relationship with Catholicism or any other religion, because, as noted above, women's reproductive practices are often understood to be central to the reproduction of the nation, the state, and its citizens. As scholars of the politics of reproduction have long argued, when states intervene in the domain of reproduction, the policies they enact and the ideologies they promote not only impact local reproductive experiences, but also shape how national boundaries, political processes, and the state itself are "imagined, constituted, and legitimated" (Gal & Kligman, 2000, p. 5; Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991, 1995; see also Scott, 1998/2018).

However, from the 1920s through the 1960s, the state policies and ideologies that regulated reproduction in Ireland could not be easily extricated from the moral teachings of the Irish Catholic Church. To make sense of this entanglement of the state and the Irish Catholic Church in the regulation of reproduction, I draw on the concept of "reproductive governance" developed by Lynn Morgan and Elizabeth Roberts (2012). They use reproductive governance to refer to the mechanisms through which different historical configurations of actors produce, monitor, and control the activities of the sexual and reproductive body (p. 241). These mechanisms can include "legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements" (p. 241). Reproductive governance allows us to see that the regulation of reproduction is not just a project of the state; many actors have a vested interest in shaping reproductive behaviors, including NGOs, international governing bodies, social movements, and religious institutions. Sometimes actors are fully aligned in how they want to shape reproductive behaviors and sometimes they may be working toward diametrically opposed

ends. And as Morgan and Roberts stress, the configurations of actors involved in reproductive governance, the techniques they use, and the sexual and reproductive activities they want to promote or discourage may change over time (p. 242).

This chapter illustrates that for several decades the Irish state and the Irish Catholic Church were both invested in adherence to Catholic teachings on the family and marriage and together sought to prevent extramarital sex and especially extramarital childbirth to represent the nation and its citizens as committed to Catholic moral discipline and therefore an example for other nations in the midst of widespread concerns about modernity and moral decline. Though each actor employed different techniques for regulating reproduction, they both worked to establish and maintain a hegemonic "moral regime of reproduction," Morgan's and Roberts's term for the privileged standards of morality that shape ideas about sexual and reproductive behaviors, a regime grounded in the strict sexual discipline that had characterized Irish Catholic morality since the nineteenth century.

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, scholars have observed that when Catholicism has been deeply entangled with forms of social, cultural, and political life, as is the case in much of Europe, its presence can be difficult to detect (Mayblin, Norget, & Napolitano, 2017, p. 4). However, in Ireland, the entanglement of Catholicism with the regulation of reproduction did not render Catholicism invisible or subsume Catholic values within those of the state. On the contrary, for the political leaders of the Irish Free State the legitimacy and authority of the independent nation-state depended on its values being recognizably Catholic. In order to demonstrate that the Irish were capable of governing themselves and were in fact morally superior to their Protestant colonizers, they made the nation's commitment to Catholic morality more visible by incorporating Catholic doctrine on marriage, the family, and reproduction into

state law and policy and by working with the Irish Catholic Church and Catholic organizations to morally discipline the population. Through Bunreacht na hEireann's articles on the family, marriage, and the role of women, the funding of Church-operated Mother and Baby Homes, and the prohibition of contraception in the wake of *Casti Connubii*, the new state demonstrated to the Irish public and to the outside world that Irish morality was synonymous with Catholic morality.

I argue that these intentional, recognizable entanglements of the Irish state and the Irish Catholic Church in the regulation of reproduction would eventually become key sites for people to question and negotiate the boundaries of religion and politics—what Hussein Agrama (2012) calls "secular problem-spaces." Secularism, he says, "should not be seen solely as a separation between religion and politics, or simply as a process of imposing regulatory norms within social life" (Agrama, 2012, p. 40). Instead, building on the work of David Scott (2004), Agrama argues the concept of "problem-spaces" allows us to think about secularism as a context around which recurring questions about the boundaries between religion and politics form. In his work, Agrama explores how Egyptian courts take up, reproduce, and transform Islamic concepts and practices, blurring the line between religion and politics, two categories that are often presupposed to be distinct. He shows that when the courts incorporate an Islamic concept into state law, it generates questions about the boundaries between these categories: Is the phenomenon the secularization of a religious concept or the Islamization of secular legal precepts? More broadly, is Egypt a religious or secular state? Questions like these, Agrama (2012) says, are imbued with stakes—in particular, "the rights, freedoms, and virtues that have become historically identified with liberalism" (p. 28), including legal equality, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, and tolerance. Rather than answering these questions—and potentially reproducing normative ideas about secularism, religion, and politics—adopting

Agrama's approach allows us to focus on our own: What prompts questions about the boundaries between religion and politics? What are the stakes associated with these questions? What "concepts, practices, and processes" are used to respond to these questions? And what are the social consequences of asking them at all (Agrama, 2012, pp. 28–29)?

In the next chapter, I explore how the regulation of reproduction became a secular problem-space and a key domain through which the relationship between religion and politics in Ireland has been negotiated. I suggest that this can be traced to a historic moment of heightened dissent among Catholics, both in Ireland and around the world, centered on moral authority and the morality of contraception. The way this dissent was governed by the Holy See and by the Irish bishops, I argue, gave rise to a new, more liberal form of Catholicism in Ireland. For these new liberal Catholics, Irish state laws and policies on marriage, family, and reproduction both promoted a conservative Catholicism that they felt was not aligned with contemporary Catholic values and prevented them from making reproductive decisions they felt were morally licit within Catholicism. I argue that the questions they raised about the boundaries between religion and politics and the responses their questions provoked radically reconfigured Catholic religiosity in Ireland.

Chapter 3 Regulating Reproduction, Dividing Catholics

Introduction

This chapter explores the context through which concepts of "liberal Catholicism" and "conservative Catholicism" emerged and gained traction in Ireland. Significantly, people who subscribed to "liberal Catholicism" and those who subscribed to "conservative Catholicism" were divided not only about moral authority within the Catholic Church but also about the relationship between the state and Catholicism. Liberal Catholics felt the state's laws and policies prevented them - and non-Catholics - from acting in line with their religious values; they questioned whether a state could be liberal, democratic, and promote and enforce Church teachings. Conservative Catholics, on the other hand, saw the liberalization of social policies on the European continent and in the US as evidence of a decline in morality; for them, the Irish state had been founded on Catholic moral values to protect Irish society from the threats posed by modernity. Through this chapter, I will show that their debates between these factions about the boundaries of religion and politics centered on the regulation of reproduction, rending it, as I suggested in the last chapter, a key problem-space of secularism. I argue that contentious arguments over laws and policies related to reproduction - concerning marriage, the makeup of the family unit, contraception, and abortion - profoundly reshaped Irish reproductive governance, disrupting the once-close relationship between the state and Irish Catholic Church and widening the gap between the moral values of the state and those of orthodox Catholicism.

Vatican II, Humanae Vitae, and the morality of contraception

The Second Vatican Council

The popular and political consensus on the threat contraception posed to Irish sexual morality began to splinter, however, with the spirit of renewal and reform brought about by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), also known as Vatican II. Convened by Pope John XXIII,

the council signaled a transformation in the Church from "cultural confinement" to continued engagement with a modern, rapidly-changing world (McBrien, 1994, p. 609). Prior to Vatican II, twentieth-century Catholic ecclesiology[1] had been divided between two approaches (p. 657). The more conservative approach, which dominated Irish thinking on the subject, stressed the "institutional , juridical, and hierarchical aspects of the Church", while the more progressive conceptualized the Church as the "whole People of God, always in need of renewal and reform" (p. 686). With his council, however, Pope John XXIII encouraged openness to the latter. He insisted that in contrast to prior councils, which had usually been convened to establish orthodox theology and identify heresy, the Second Vatican Council was not for condemnations but for updating the Church "for the sake of its own spiritual vitality, Christian unity, and world peace" (p. 686). With this approach, and with the convenience of modern modes of transportation, the Council became the "largest and most representative" in the Church's history, with bishops arriving from most continents and many cultures; additionally, to fulfill its aims of inclusivity and engagement with the broader world, the Council, for the first time in Church history invited both Catholic laypeople and leaders from Christian churches and religious traditions to participate in discussions (pp. 655–656).

Although the Council produced many significant documents intended to shape the future direction of the Catholic Church, two of its authoritative constitutions had a particularly significant impact on Irish thinking about contraception specifically and about Catholic morality more broadly. The first was *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations), the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which emphasized, in keeping with the progressive approach to ecclesiology, the full participation of the laity in the body and mission of the Church. The constitution proclaimed that the hierarchy's authority ought to be used to serve the People of God, and as "spiritual

[1] Ecclesiology is the theology of the nature and structure of the Church.

shepherds", the pope, bishops, and priests must "recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity"; this involved guiding and teaching their "flock", but it also required giving laypeople "freedom and room for action" (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 37). Laypeople, it advised, with that freedom, should "learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society" and should strive to reconcile the two, remembering that even in approaching the "temporal affairs" of the world, they should allow their "Christian conscience" to guide their moral decisions (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 36). This guidance assigned the individual person the task of determining how to reconcile Catholic morality with the demands of the modern world and suggested that, because their conscience had been formed by Catholic teachings, they could rely on their own sense of right and wrong to do so.

The second document was *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope), the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. This constitution argued that the Church does not exist alongside or separate from the world but is, and always has been, part of the world and must show its solidarity, respect, and love for "the entire human family" by using its teachings and resources to recognize and engage with the questions and problems that are troubling the world (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 3). Speaking to the broader anxieties about marriage, family, and sex discussed earlier in the chapter, the Council recognized that "marriage and the family" presented a problem of "special urgency" in the modern world (Vatican Council II, 1965b, sections 46–47). The excellence of the institution, it wrote, had been obscured by polygamy, divorce, "so-called free love and other disfigurements" (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 47). Where marital love did exist, it could easily be profaned by "excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure, and illicit practices against human generation" (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 47).

Yet even for those endeavoring to follow Catholic teachings on marriage and the family, the Council recognized, the modern world presented obstacles: economic hardship, the demands of civil society, and in some contexts (including Ireland), concerns about population growth and the availability of resources to support large families.

According to historian Louise Fuller (2004), while *Gaudium et Spes* did not shift the Church's position on contraception, it promoted an approach to Catholic thinking on the purpose of marital sex that diverged the approach the Irish bishops had endorsed (p. 195). Their approach, she writes, was reflected in Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930). In that document, Pius XI had distinguished between primary and secondary "ends" of the "conjugal act": the primary end of marital sex was for generating and educating children in the faith, but secondary ends could include mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence - lust - "which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end" (Pius XI, 1930, sections 17, 59). However, Fuller (2004) writes, in the intervening years, as part of a continuing effort to make Catholic teaching on sexuality more appealing, the theology of marriage had shifted from emphasizing procreation to emphasizing the significance of the relationship between spouses (p. 196). This new emphasis seemed to win approval in *Gaudium et Spes*, which made no mention of the comparative ends of marriage (Fuller, 2004, p. 196). Instead, the Council asserted that God had established the institution as an "intimate partnership of married life and love" and that, through ongoing marital sex, described as a "a human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other", a relationship would arise "which by divine will and in the eyes of society" would be enduring (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 48). Marriage was not solely for procreation, the document emphasized, and would "maintain its value and indissolubility" even when spouses did not

produce children (Vatican Council II, 1965b, sections 49–50). It also recognized that in the modern era, married people could find themselves in "circumstances where at least temporarily the size of their families should not be increased", as well as the challenge of abstaining from "the faithful exercise of love' in those times (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 51).

This constitution also elaborated on *Lumen Gentium*'s discussion of the layperson's moral conscience. A person's conscience, the council wrote, was their "most secret core and sanctuary", where they are "alone with God, Whose voice echoes in [their] depths" (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 16). Because God had given humans free will, the dignity of a person lay in their capacity to "act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within" by their conscience and "not under blind internal impulse or by mere external pressure" (Vatican Council II, 1965b, section 17).

Vatican II's new emphasis on the lay person's moral conscience and endorsement of a relationship-centered theology of marriage led Catholics around the world to anticipate a change in Church teaching on family planning. Even if the Church did not change its perspective on contraception, Fuller (2004) writes that Vatican II had given laypeople permission to become "more confident and self-reliant in their moral decision making" and even to "lay aside the dictates of the Church, if they seemed not in harmony with the dictates of their own conscience" (Fuller, 2004, pp. 197–198).

The individual conscience, contraception, and Humanae Vitae

Following the Second Vatican Council, debates about the ethics of contraception, which had been taking place in the United Kingdom and on the continent for decades, finally emerged in Ireland, disrupting the long-held consensus on the matter. Suddenly, the issue of birth control

had become an “open question” on which many books were published, and in the Irish theological journal The Furrow, theologians, priests, and lay men and women engaged in an extended debate, “involving many shades of opinion” (Fuller, 2004, p. 197). The issue was also extensively debated in popular Irish media. Before the mid-1960s, explicit discussion of contraception had been taboo, but now on television women could be seen “openly and frankly” discussing their perspectives as they awaited a formal judgment on the matter from the Pope (p. 197).

Even without a pronouncement from the Pope, people in Ireland were more actively and openly supporting the use of contraceptives. In 1965 a large supply of oral contraceptives had been impounded by the Revenue Commissioners, who regulated customs, but the company involved argued that doctors had prescribed them for “female functional disorders” (Girvin, 2018a, p. 9). Ultimately, it was agreed that contraceptives could be permitted if they were prescribed by a doctor for medical reasons, though the Revenue Commissioners pointed out that this made it very difficult to regulate their importation (p. 9). After Vatican II, however, there was less of a need to claim a menstrual disorder in order to obtain contraceptives. In 1967, the National Maternity Hospital - a Catholic institution - began to prescribe the pill to women whose conscience permitted it (p. 10). That same year, a survey revealed that thousands of Irish women were regularly using oral contraceptives. There was also increasing public support for a reassessment of the Church’s approach to family planning and for the state’s legalization of contraceptives. A grassroots women’s movement had recently emerged in Ireland, which made family planning one of its major issues; these activists successfully facilitated the opening of Ireland’s first family planning clinic in 1969 (p.10). Although the importation and sale of contraceptives remained illegal through the 1960s, a government review in early 1970 revealed

that the pill was "widely available on prescription despite the law" (pp. 9–10).

In 1968, Pope Paul VI published the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life): On the Regulation of Birth in which he re-affirmed the Catholic Church's opposition to artificial contraceptives. Many Catholics, both in and outside Ireland, were surprised and disappointed by the pronouncement (Girvin, 2018a, p. 11). A change in Catholic thinking on contraception had seemed not only possible but likely, Fr Denis O'Callaghan, a professor of Moral Theology and chair of the Irish Theological Association commented at the time (Fuller, 2004, p. 199). Comprehensive and forceful theological arguments had been developed in favor of a shift in position; the majority of participants in a Pontifical Commission on Birth Control had determined that artificial contraceptives were not intrinsically evil and proposed that married couples should decide for themselves about the appropriateness of available methods; and the "long delay" in issuing a judgment following the Commission's majority report had suggested that change was forthcoming (Fuller, 2004, pp. 199–200). However, the Pope had disagreed with the majority of his commission and had published his encyclical as an explanation of his disagreement.

The authoritative force of the encyclical was unclear. It was well-known that the Pope had disagreed with the report from his Commission on Birth Control, which had been supported by 64 of the 69 members and included theologians, doctors, lay women, bishops, and cardinals, and particularly after Vatican II, it was difficult for many to accept that he had set aside the theological insights of this inclusive commission (Fuller, 2004, pp. 198–199). Moreover, in *Humanae Vitae*, the Pope was not speaking ex cathedra, meaning that his pronouncement did not have the status of infallibly proclaimed doctrine; this seemed to leave open the possibility of doctrinal change in the future (Fuller, 2004, pp. 199–200).

The text divided Catholics around the world. Many interpreted *Humanae Vitae* as a signal that the Pope was "applying the brakes" to changes that had been taking place since the Second Vatican Council and welcomed a return the "old comfortable certainty and security of an era when what was right and wrong was very rigidly laid down" (Fuller, 2004, pp. 198–199). Others felt that the encyclical was not so much slowing reform but ending it altogether. They feared that the hierarchy would no longer endorse the emphasis on free conscience and "the optimistic outlook on life and human nature" that had been promoted by the Second Vatican Council (p. 199). Though the reaction in Ireland was less negative than it was in some other contexts, such as the US and the Netherlands[2], the impact of the pronouncement on the Irish Church was still felt.

The Irish hierarchy lauded the publication of *Humanae Vitae* and in a public statement reiterated their confidence that "[their] people" would accept the Pope's teaching, giving it that "whole-hearted assent which the Second Vatican Council require[d]" for Catholic teachings to have force (Fuller, 2004, p. 200). Aware that much of the debate surrounding contraception had centered on the role of conscience, the hierarchy reminded Irish Catholics that *Gaudium et Spes* had decreed that spouses could not "act arbitrarily" but had to be "governed by a conscience which must be confirmed to divine law, submissive to the teaching authority of the Church which authentically interprets that law in light of the gospel". In other words, people could act according to their conscience - so long as their conscience was in line with Church teachings.

The Irish hierarchy's response to *Humanae Vitae* centered on communicating and reinforcing orthodox Church teaching, but Fuller (2004) writes that not all hierarchies saw themselves "merely as a vehicle for the transmission of rules" (p. 201). In France, she explains,

[2] In the early 1960s, a series of Dutch television broadcasts on human sexuality led by a Catholic psychiatrist provoked a "critical rethinking" among Dutch Catholics about the morality of married couples using contraception. A few years later, when *Humanae Vitae* was published, it was "sharply criticized" by Dutch bishops, theologians, and laypeople. According to a 1969 survey (Hutjes, 1975), 93 percent of Dutch Catholics stated that their sexual practices would remain unaffected by the encyclical's directives.

bishops presented the content of *Humanae Vitae* as a set of objective moral norms that should guide the Catholic conscience but recognized that people might experience a conflict of conscience as they made determinations about family planning (Fuller, 2004, p. 201). The French hierarchy instructed the faithful that they had been given free will and the guidance of the church; now they had to take responsibility for their own moral decisions (Fuller, 2004, p. 201). The Irish hierarchy only obliquely acknowledged the possibility that the laity might be conflicted about the Church's teaching. "We ask our people to believe that we are deeply and painfully aware of the delicate personal problems and intellectual difficulties to which this teaching may give rise for some," they wrote in their public statement, framing adherence to the teaching as challenging but not optional (Fuller, 2004, p. 200). Where rejecting the Church's teaching on contraception could be understood by the French hierarchy as an individual's (im)moral decision, for the Irish hierarchy, it would constitute a failure to be moral.

Fuller noted, too, that in their effort to promote *Humanae Vitae* as a reaffirmation of the "Church's traditional condemnation of contraception", the Irish hierarchy invoked outdated teachings on the primary and secondary ends of marriage (Fuller, 2004, p. 200). She argues that in *Humanae Vitae* Pope Paul VI had not cast the procreative purpose as primary and the unitive purpose as secondary; instead, he had stated that every conjugal act "must remain open for the transmission of life" (Fuller, 2004, pp. 200-201). The Irish bishops, however, ignored the fact that the unitive purpose of marital sex had been incorporated into official church teaching, insisting that the "by their very nature the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation of children" (Fuller, 2004, pp. 200-201).

Though the bishops and other conservative Catholics welcomed *Humanae Vitae* as a return to traditional teaching, they recognized that the Second Vatican Council had provided

legitimacy for liberalism among Irish Catholics (Girvin, 2018a, p. 11). Many would no longer accept the authority of the pope or of the hierarchy uncritically. In Ireland and abroad, there were respected priests and theologians debating each other on issues related to sexual morality (Fuller, 2004, pp. 202–204). With a diversity of opinions and interpretations within reach, Catholics in Ireland no longer needed to rely solely on the hierarchy's moral leadership; they could seek out moral guidance that was more in line with their personal and intellectual convictions.

Legislating contraception: Divided Catholics, divided state

A first attempt at legislative reform

One such liberal Catholic, Senator Mary Robinson (née Bourke) became the "public face of contraception" when she, along with her colleagues John Horgan and Trevor West, introduced a bill to amend the legislation prohibiting contraception (Girvin, 2018a, p. 11). Robinson, who would later become President of the Republic, had been the first Catholic person elected to the Irish Senate by the graduates of Trinity College Dublin, historically an Anglican university. Robinson was known for her strongly-held feminist and liberal views, and while Catholic herself, argued the "law should never be used to uphold or enforce beliefs of any particular Church in a democratic society" (p. 11). In her view, the state's prohibition of contraception forced Catholic values on the population, undermining its claim to being a democratic republic.

Robinson's bill, writes historian Brian Girvin (2018a), "exposed the difficulties that a government in a predominantly Catholic state faced when demands for change were made in respect of moral questions" (p. 12). Though Ireland was not a theocracy, the Irish hierarchy's moral authority had, since the early days of Irish independence, allowed it to influence the Irish government and the political parties, and in response to Robinson's proposal, it took both direct and indirect approaches to swaying politicians. One statement from the Irish bishops specifically

addressed legislators, reminding them of their responsibility to protect society and urging them to continue their majoritarian approach to governance. Questions concerning civil law on divorce, contraception, and abortion, the statement read, "involve issues of grave import for society as a whole, which go far beyond purely private morality or private religious belief"; moreover, the bishops added, "civil law on these matters would respect the wishes of the people who elected the legislators and the bishops confidently hope that the legislators themselves will respect this important principle" (Girvin, 2018a, p. 12). The hierarchy also made their views on the legislation known to their congregations. In March 1971, priests across Dublin read out a Lenten pastoral written by Archbishop McQuaid stating that contraception was "evil" and that if legislation was passed which offended the objective moral law, it would be a "curse upon our country" (Fuller, 2004, p. 2017). While some protested this message by walking out of the mass, other parishioners mobilized to protest the legislation, writing angry letters to then-Taoiseach Jack Lynch expressing their anger and dismay at the prospect of change (Fuller, 2004, p. 207; Girvin, 2018a, p. 12).

Both politicians and the public appeared divided on the issue. On the one hand, the women's movement appeared to be making significant progress in its efforts to sway Irish people toward more progressive policies. They strongly lobbied legislators to change their party platforms to relax the prohibition on contraception; by 1971, the government's main opposition party, Fine Gael, had expressed its support for "moderate reform", while many members of the Labour Party campaigned for more substantial change (Girvin, 2018, p. 12). That same year, to challenge the ban on the importation and sale of contraceptives, members of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) orchestrated a "spectacular" publicity stunt, defying the law by bringing contraceptives into the state on the train from Belfast (Fuller, 2004, p. 207). When they

disembarked the "contraceptive train" in Dublin, the women were allowed to walk through the customs barrier with their purchases, despite customs officials' knowledge of the event. The IWLM then issued a statement that 26,000 women in Ireland used the pill and that by failing to enforce the ban, the Irish government had "by default . . . upheld the constitutional rights of men and women to exercise freedom of conscience and the right to control one's life" (Hug, 1999, pp. 89–90).

On the other hand, the majority of the population remained committed to orthodox Catholic teachings. In contrast to other Western European countries in the 1970s, Ireland had stayed both religious and conservative. In 1971, over 98% of the population said they were religious, and over 90% attended mass at least once a week (Girvin, 2018a, pp. 12–13). A survey on the legalization of contraception in 1971 showed that a clear majority opposed changing the law, and half of those surveyed believed that if contraceptives were sold in Ireland, the condition of family life would deteriorate (pp. 12–13). The only significant support for legalization came from people living in Dublin and from middle class men throughout the country (pp. 12–13).

Robinson's proposal had prompted the party in power, Fianna Fáil, to develop an official position on the legalization of contraception. The task fell to Desmond O'Malley, the Minister for Justice; as noted earlier, as opposed to countries where contraception was considered a health issue, Ireland considered contraception a legal and moral matter. Girvin (2018a), drawing on files from the Ministry of Justice, has shown O'Malley's thinking was strongly influenced by the Irish hierarchy. Even though the government claimed at the time (and Girvin accepts) that no direct representations were ever made to Department of Justice by individual bishops or the Catholic hierarchy, Girvin argues that O'Malley and his colleagues explicitly drew on Catholic natural law in evaluating policy options. They also extensively engaged with and drew upon the

bishops' public statement on Robinson's bill (Girvin, 2018a, pp. 13–14).

O'Malley's main concern was preventing contraceptives from becoming available to young, unmarried people; he feared that even limited access to contraception would eventually lead to widespread availability and the development of a permissive attitude toward sexuality in Irish society (Girvin, 2018a, p. 13). The "real issue", he maintained, was whether access to contraceptives would lead to a "significant increase in immorality, i.e. immorality which would not occur if contraceptives were not available" (p. 14). Ireland was already becoming too immoral, he feared, and legalizing contraception posed a "grave danger of either a moral breakdown or serious damage to mental health" (p. 14). He acknowledged that a case could be made for married couples to have access to contraceptives, but the potential consequences for the young and unmarried seemed too great to permit anyone access at all (p. 15).

The government cabinet supported O'Malley's proposal that the government not legalize contraception, and so they opposed Robinson's bill in the Seanad, successfully defeating it. However, the bill was not Robinson's only strategy for overturning the ban. As part of her legal practice (outside of her role in the Seanad), Robinson had agreed to represent a woman whose spermicidal jelly had been confiscated by customs. It was this case, *McGee v. Attorney General and Revenue Commissioners* (1971 and 1972), that would ultimately compel the state to relax its restrictions on contraception.

The McGee decision

Mrs. Mary McGee, represented by Mary Robinson and her colleagues, had initiated a High Court challenge to the 1935 ban on the importation and sale of contraceptives with the financial support of the Irish Family Planning Association (Fuller, 2004, p. 209). In a span of 23

months, she had given birth to four children (including a pair of twins) after extremely challenging pregnancies; with each, she had experienced pre-eclampsia, and once, she had suffered a stroke (McAvoy, 2015, p. 53). After the fourth child, medical professionals strongly advised her not to become pregnant again, but when she attempted to illegally import spermicidal jelly, the package was seized by customs (p. 53). Her action was dismissed by the High Court but she decided to appeal, which elevated the case to the Supreme Court. In December of 1973, the Supreme Court ruled that married couples had a constitutional right to make a private decision to limit the size of their families and were entitled to "reasonable" access to contraceptives (p. 53).

The ruling focused on the right to import contraceptives but did not establish a right to sell them, and therefore clarifying legislation was needed; this challenged the state's historic reluctance to legislate (Girvin, 2018a, p. 15; McAvoy, 2015, p. 53). However, in 1972, a new coalition government had been elected, made up of the Fine Gael and Labour parties, and though their members did not prioritize the legalization of contraceptives, they were collectively more open to legislative reform than their predecessors had been. After the *McGee* decision, the cabinet determined that any legislation should restrict access to married couples (Girvin, 2018a, p. 15). This stance was generally supported by public opinion; a survey in 1974 showed that 42 percent of the population was in favor of legalizing contraceptives for married couples (33% opposed legalization on any grounds, and 16% favored no restrictions at all) (Girvin, 2018a, p. 15).

A significant obstacle to passing legislation, however, was politicians' opposition to the legalization of contraception on moral grounds. In late 1973, before the *McGee* decision, the Catholic bishops had issued a statement opposing the legalization of contraception but, for the

first time, issued the caveat that legislators could, in conscience, vote for a law opposed by the hierarchy (Girvin, 2018a, p. 15). This might have enabled legislation to succeed, but an early attempt with "draconian restrictions" on access nonetheless failed miserably when members were permitted to vote with their conscience rather than according to their party's policy. It was clearly difficult for Catholic representatives to vote in defiance of Church teachings.

In 1977, Fianna Fáil came to power again, and Taoiseach Jack Lynch endeavored to persuade legislators - and the hierarchy - that legislation was badly needed (Girvin, 2018a, p. 16). The *McGee* decision had effectively undermined the state's regulatory regime, and contraceptives had become (even more) widely available. The Court's decision could not be reversed or set aside, Lynch argued, and some legislation was necessary to prevent young unmarried people from obtaining contraceptives (p. 16). The hierarchy, to the surprise of many, agreed. In a public statement, the bishops, while reiterating their opposition to contraception in principle, did not challenge the constitutional basis of the *McGee* decision. Instead, they acknowledged that "the present legal situation [was] unsatisfactory" and that "minimum amending legislation was required", effectively encouraging Catholic politicians to legalize access to contraception in order to minimize their social impact (pp. 16–17).

The bishops and the minister

Significantly, the government transferred responsibility for drafting new legislation from the Department of Justice to the Department of Health, identifying family planning as a health issue; nonetheless, restricting access to contraceptives continued to be prioritized over any health considerations (Girvin, 2018a, p. 17). The Minister for Health, Charles Haughey, insisted that the direct supply of condoms to the public would be politically unacceptable; he instead proposed

restricting the supply of all forms of contraceptives to pharmacists and health boards as a solution that would "limit the availability of these devices" and thereby be "desirable on general grounds of public morality" (p. 17). Still, Haughey appeared committed to seeking the advice of experts and potential stakeholders in crafting the legislation and consulted widely, meeting with the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA), the medical and nursing associations, the health boards, and, of course, religious institutions (p. 17). He successfully garnered support for legislative change from Ireland's Chief Rabbi, as well as leaders from the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the ecumenical Council of Churches (p. 17).

Haughey recognized, however, that the main obstacle to passing legislation would be the Catholic hierarchy. His own party, Fianna Fáil, was socially conservative, and many of its members were inclined to listen to the bishops on moral matters. The bishops again issued a statement of opposition to contraception in March 1978, questioning whether contraception should be a "normal part of health services," as in their view, no health problem required contraception (Girvin, 2018a, p. 18). Yet they also strengthened their earlier statement permitting Catholic politicians to participate in the development of legislation broadening access to contraception. They wrote: "we do not hold that the moral laws of the Church, merely because they are the laws of the Church, should be enforced by the State" (p. 18). Many viewed the sentence as a tactical move on the part of the hierarchy (p. 18). If conservative Catholic politicians felt that they could only advocate for a return to a universal prohibition, then the issue would be debated for years, and there would be no legislation restricting broad access. If they were permitted to draft and vote for legislation, however, they could institute a strict regulative regime quickly and end the "unsatisfactory" regulatory situation. Even if the move was tactical, the sentence represented a significant shift in approach; from then on, politicians who feared

public criticism by the Church if they voted in favor of policies that opposed its teachings could cite the bishops themselves on the distinction between the Church's moral law and that of the state.

Still, the demands and concerns of the hierarchy had to be considered if Haughey wanted his party to support legislative change. He met extensively with the bishops, particularly Bishop Cathal Daly, who made a number of demands (Girvin, 2018a, pp. 18–19). The bishops did not want a "comprehensive contraceptive service" throughout the country, as this would legitimize the use of contraceptives in "provincial areas, where there has been no demand for them in public opinion" (p. 18). They emphasized that the state should privilege "natural family planning" and provide financial support to promote this Church-sanctioned approach (p. 18). They insisted that intrauterine devices not be made available, that any sterilization practices be strictly controlled, and that advertising for contraceptives be restricted as much as possible (p. 18).

The bishops also expressed concerned that the legislation would undermine the state support provided for the family and for marriage in Article 41 of the Constitution, but their most pressing concern, they admitted, was the social consequences that would result if unmarried people were given access to contraceptives (Girvin, 2018a, pp. 18–19). Within marriage, the social consequences of contraception were "at least less immediate and less obvious than its consequences outside of marriage and for young people", they acknowledged, and they pressed Haughey to draw a distinction in the legislation between married and unmarried persons (p. 19).

It became clear that to the bishops this distinction was important for symbolic reasons. In a meeting Haughey asked Bishop Daly if it would be preferable for a woman who had decided to pursue a "certain lifestyle" to have access to contraceptives and to avoid the need for an abortion

if she became pregnant, the bishop replied that the hierarchy was opposed in principle to single people having access to contraceptives. “The incorporation of restrictions in legislation is not pointless,” he argued, “it indicates the legislative intent and the State’s commitment” (Girvin, 2018a, p. 19). In a joint public statement later that year, the bishops elaborated this perspective:

> In the area of contraception, laws can affect the way people think about marriages, about the family, about fidelity. Laws can affect people’s attitudes about relations between the sexes, both within marriage and outside it. . . . It may be said that conscience is a sufficient safeguard of moral standards. But conscience itself can deceive people into thinking that morality has changed also. (Fuller, 2004, p. 211)

As Louise Fuller (2004) argues, it is likely that the Irish hierarchy “had always felt this way in relation to the value of the law upholding moral norms, but they had never spelt it out quite so explicitly before” (p. 211). She posits that, until the 1970s, they had not needed to do so; “people’s compliance and deferential adherence” to specific teachings in the first decades following independence had “relieved them of this responsibility” (p. 211). They had been able to “speak in generalities” and “command people in a rather paternalistic way” about what they should or should not do in order to enter heaven, without explaining why (p. 211). In the wake of Vatican II, however, Catholics had become more confident in their own abilities to make moral decisions without instruction from the hierarchy, and so the bishops had to “think more creatively - make distinctions in relation to public and private morality” in order to present their perspectives in a more compelling way (p. 211).

Whether he found the hierarchy’s arguments personally compelling, or whether he found it politically necessary to address the hierarchy’s concerns, or likely both, Haughey produced legislation that closely reflected their position. “The records of negotiations between Haughey and the hierarchy,” Brian Girvin (2018a) writes, “confirm that he conceded every demand made by the bishops” (p. 21). The only exception was their proposal to restrict access to married

couples, but this was due to legal and constitutional constraints, not a disagreement with their demand. To get around these constraints, Haughey replaced the term "married couples" with "bona fide couples," an ambiguous term that in practice many interpreted to mean "married" (Girvin, 2018a, p. 20).

Passed in 1979, the Family Planning Act went into effect in late 1980, and according to officials at the time, the demand for contraceptives from pharmacists seemed to be "greatly in excess" of what the restrictive legislation would seem to permit (Girvin, 2018a, p. 21). This indicated, as many suspected, that sexual behavior had changed over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, but this was not reflected in law until the 1990s (p. 21). The legalization of contraception did not represent a dramatic shift in the state's approach to the regulation of sexual behavior; if anything, Haughey's legislation showed the state's commitment to restricting sex outside of marriage as much as possible and an effort to "contain the unwelcome consequences of a Supreme Court decision that could not be overturned" (p. 21).

Nevertheless, to many Catholics, both in the hierarchy and among the laity, the *McGee* decision and subsequent legislation on contraception threatened to destabilize a national identity that had been built on the state's commitment to upholding Catholic teachings on marriage and the family. Now, thanks to legislation that had been brought about by the work of liberal Catholics like Mary Robinson, and that had been sanctioned by a conservative Catholic government, Catholic married couples could access and use contraception against the guidance of the Church. Despite the fact that the new law on contraception corrected the ambiguous regulatory situation that had followed the *McGee* decision and addressed the demands of the hierarchy, it seemed to some to represent an erosion of national morality and a harbinger of what the new Pope, John Paul II, was calling the "permissive society."

Protecting unborn life, defending Catholic Ireland

"Sickness in Society"

The 1979 legalization of contraception for "bona fide couples" has been seen as a major catalyst for the lay Catholic grassroots movement that proposed a constitutional prohibition on abortion. Many of those who founded this movement had been concerned about liberalization and the erosion of traditional Catholic values. For years, they had feared that the Dáil Éireann or the Supreme Court could defy majority opinion on moral issues, and this fear had been realized when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Mrs. McGee (1973). The Court had developed its ruling within a natural law framework, but ultimately it had permitted access to contraception on the grounds that privacy was a fundamental right (Girvin, 2018b, pp. 418–419). This argument paralleled that of the United States Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* (*Roe v. Wade* 410 US 113 [1973]), which held that the right to privacy extended to a woman's right to abortion, and Catholic conservatives feared that the Irish Supreme Court might eventually do the same (Fischer, 2019, p. 122; Smyth, 2005).

At the same time, they were concerned that Ireland's 1973 decision to join the European Economic Community (EEC) might eventually compel the state to legalize abortion. Abortion had been illegal in Ireland since 1861 under the Offenses Against the Person Act, a law that had been carried over into the legal code of the independent state. However, as a condition of its membership, Ireland was required to allow EEC law to take precedence over Irish law, which posed a risk, according to the religious right, that Ireland would be required to introduce a liberal abortion regime similar to those of other European states (Fuller, 2004). Abortion services had been available in Britain since 1967, France since 1975, and West Germany since 1976, and even Italy, a country understood to be "traditionally" Catholic, legalized abortion in 1978 (Inglis,

1987/1998; Smyth, 1998). Further, the EEC protected freedom of movement between its member states, which allowed women to travel from Ireland to Britain and other countries to procure abortions. The Catholic right feared (correctly) that, even if abortion remained illegal in Ireland, the practice of traveling for abortions would be normalized. There was growing public awareness that since abortion had been legalized in Britain, many Irish women were traveling there for the procedure; in 1980, official statistics from England revealed approximately 3,500 women had traveled to Britain from Ireland in order to access abortion care (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 83).

The extent to which Catholic conservatives were responding to a domestic grassroots campaign to legalize abortion is unclear. A Woman's Right to Choose group was established in 1979, with two primary aims: the decriminalization of abortion in Ireland and the establishment of a feminist pregnancy counseling service (Connolly, 2002, p. 162). Inglis (1987/1998) says that the group had begun to press for the legalization of "some kind of abortion in Ireland" (p. 83); others, however, argue that the group, well aware of popular opposition to abortion, had pragmatically focused on providing information and support services for women traveling to Britain to obtain abortions legally and turned their focus to the legal/constitutional arena only after a constitutional prohibition on abortion was proposed (Connolly, 2002, pp. 162–163; Smyth 1998: 65).

What is clear is that the conservative Catholic laypeople who formed the Pro-Life Amendment Committee (PLAC), as it would come to be known, had been motivated in part by Pope John Paul II's 3-day visit to Ireland in 1979 (Fuller, 2004; Girvin, 2018b; Inglis, 1987/1998; Smyth, 1998; Lord, 2015; O'Reilly, 1992). John Paul II had become the head of the Catholic Church in 1978, and though personally he seemed to epitomize a "more 'relaxed' Catholicism," he had in fact long resisted the new, more democratic Catholicism that had

evolved from the Second Vatican Council (Fuller, 2004, p. 237). In the context of the division that had been caused by the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, he was keen to reassert papal authority and reinforce the conservative teachings that the encyclical had promoted (Fuller, 2004, p. 237). To this end, he became a "traveling Pope", in an effort to unify the universal church under his leadership and moral guidance (p. 237).

A quarter of Ireland's population —1.25 million people—turned out to see the Pope deliver mass in Dublin's Phoenix Park (Keogh, 1986, p. 1). In his homily there, he reminded those in attendance that for centuries, the union between Ireland and the Holy Roman Church had remained "inviolable and unbreakable" since the island's conversion in the fifth century, and that the Irish people had "spread [their] love for the Catholic Church everywhere they went, in every century" in their long history of persecution, exile, and missionary work. Yet the nation, he argued, was "not immune" from modern-day values, ideologies, and trends that previously had been "alien." Specifically, "new models of morality" were being proposed "in the name of would-be freedom," eroding the Church's teachings on "freedom, the sacredness of life, the indissolubility of marriage, [and] the true sense of human sexuality" and weakening the "moral fibre" of the nation. He urged the Irish to resist the temptations of this individualist and materialist sense of freedom which, he argued, in reality constituted a "new form of slavery."

The next day, at his mass for the youth in Galway, he cautioned the 300,000 young people in attendance (Keogh, 1986, p. 1) to "not close [their] eyes at the sickness that stalks your society today" (John Paul II, 1979b). This sickness, he warned, was "the lure of pleasure, to be had whenever and wherever it could be found," and it was likely to be presented as "part of progress towards greater autonomy and freedom from rules" (John Paul II, 1979b) People with this attitude would present Catholic moral standards as "obsolete and a hindrance to the full

development of your own personality," and any person—even religious people—could "[breathe these perspectives] in from the surrounding atmosphere, without attending to the practical atheism that is at their origin" (John Paul II, 1979b).

At the final mass of his visit, with 400,000 people attending (Keogh, 1986, p. 1), the Pope delivered his most direct warning:

> "Lay people today are called to a strong Christian commitment: to permeate society with the leaven of the Gospel, for Ireland is at a point of decision in her history. The Irish people have to choose today their way forward. Will it be the transformation of all state of humanity into a new creation, or the way that many nations have gone, giving excessive importance to economic growth and material possessions while neglecting the things of the spirit? The way of substituting a new ethic of temporal enjoyment for the law of God? . . . Will it be the way of subjugating the dignity of the human person to the totalitarian domination of the State?" (John Paul II, 1979c)

The Pope offered a vision of Ireland as a nation at the precipice of a moral breakdown that could only be prevented by greater adherence to Church teachings. He specifically addressed Irish parents, urging them to be "open to the gift of children," undoubtedly aware that soon they would have access to contraception (John Paul II, 1979c). "Have an absolute and holy respect for the sacredness of human life from the first moment of its conception," he instructed, shifting his focus from contraception to abortion (John Paul II, 1979c). The act of abortion was an "abominable crime," he proclaimed, "undermining the whole moral order which is the true guardian of the well-being of man" (John Paul II, 1979c). Preventing abortion, he suggested, would allow Ireland to preserve its moral order and to serve as an example for the world:

> "The defense of the absolute inviolability of unborn life is part of the defense of human rights and human dignity. May Ireland never weaken in her witness, before Europe and before the whole world, to the dignity and sacredness of all human life, from conception until death" (John Paul II, 1979c).

The Pope's words—witnessed, listened to, and read by a significant portion of the

population of Ireland—defined the nation in terms of its historic commitment to the protection and promotion of Catholic values even while under persecution from the British, effectively reproducing the national origin stories Irish political leaders had been telling since the early days of independence but with a new source of oppression: the modern desire for pleasure, "disguised" as individual freedom. This desire for pleasure, this "would-be freedom" could take many forms, including materialism, the liberalization of sexual morality, and demands for reproductive autonomy; all of them, the Pope suggested, threatened the common good of the nation. He alluded to the failure of "many nations" to resist new models of morality and challenged Ireland not to follow in their wake (John Paul II, 1979c). Appealing to the longstanding Irish desire for moral superiority, he suggested that the nation would serve as a moral example "before Europe and before the whole world" if it protected "unborn life" by preventing the legalization of abortion, as other European nations and the United States had failed to do (John Paul II, 1979c).

A campaign for moral superiority

The Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) officially was launched in April 1981, but the seeds of the campaign had been sown much earlier. After the papal visit and the subsequent passing of the Family Planning Act in late 1979, the Council of Social Concern and several similar Catholic lay organizations (with overlapping membership) began to discuss the possibility of an amendment to the constitution that would protect unborn life from the moment of conception (Hesketh, 1990). The aim was to make abortion not only illegal, as it was under the Offenses Against the Person Act (1861) but unconstitutional and therefore irreversible by any act of the Dáil or by the Supreme Court. After nearly a year of planning and outreach, in January

1981 the Council of Social Concern held a conference on the matter that drew together delegates from a number of conservative Catholic lay and professional organizations, including the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, the Catholic Secondary School Parents' Association, the Guild of Catholic Pharmacists, the Catholic Doctors Guild, the National Association for the Ovulation Method, the Catholic Young Men's Society, and the Responsible Society (Lord, 2015, p. 95). One of the organizers, John O'Reilly, warned attendees that a feminist abortion campaign had started in Ireland—"well financed and well organized"—furthering Ireland's progress toward becoming a "[morally] permissive society" (Hesketh, 1990, pp. 6–7). He was confident, however, that "the campaign for a pro-life amendment would enjoy widespread support right now," and that its success might even "halt the permissive tide in other areas" (Hesketh, 1990, p. 6). Another speaker at the conference, Dr. Dominic O'Doherty, seemed to echo Pope John Paul II's sentiments in characterizing the nascent pro-life amendment campaign as a "duty and privilege" not only to prevent abortion but also to "work to put Ireland in the forefront of civilized nations" (Hesketh, 1990, p. 6). The delegates concurred; all agreed to join and support the umbrella organization that would be called the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign.

A number of the delegates leading and attending the conference were also members of the Knights of Columbanus, an Irish Catholic lay fraternal order whose primary aim is the "creation and maintenance of a Catholic state for a Catholic people" (O'Reilly, 1992, p. 25). They have also been described as a "patriarchal, secret Catholic fundamentalist network of influential men who seek to exert power and influence through the infiltration of hostile groups and organizations, anonymous lobbying, and the targeting of individuals hostile to their orthodoxy" (O'Reilly, 1992, p. 25). At minimum, the membership could be said to have had significant influence in the government, medical, and educational sectors. This influence

facilitated PLAC's access to political party leaders within days of the organization's April launch (Lord, 2015, p. 95).

The timing of these meetings was key; the country was weeks out from a General Election, one of three that would be held within eighteen months, and in this unstable political environment, PLAC was easily able to exact promises from leaders of the major parties. Both then Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, and the leader of the opposition party Fine Gael, Garrett FitzGerald, agreed that if they were to enter government after the forthcoming election, they would hold a referendum on a constitutional amendment on abortion. Once in power as the new Taoiseach, FitzGerald was trapped with that commitment (Conroy, 2015; Inglis, 1987/1998; Fuller, 2004; Lord, 2015).

FitzGerald accepted the wording that had been drafted by the prior government, in consultation with PLAC:

> "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn, and with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and as far as practicable by its laws, to defend and vindicate that right."

Though the Taoiseach received legal advice warning that the wording was "ambiguous and might have the effect of preventing the safeguarding of the life of a pregnant woman," he initially supported this wording (Lord, 2015, p. 98); later, he would express his regret for this decision (Fuller, 2004). The proposed amendment was put to the electorate on September 7, 1983, and in the two years leading up to the vote, the referendum was a "ubiquitous issue in Irish society" (Connolly, 2002, p. 165).

A moral civil war

PLAC's messaging centered on the need to maintain the moral purity of the Irish nation for the future of its children, and Lisa Smyth (1998) argues that they did so by reproducing the

construction of a unified national identity centered on moral superiority over the British. As example, she points to a pro-amendment poster from 1981, which declared, “The abortion mills of England grind Irish babies into blood that cries out to Heaven for vengeance.” This poster, she says, ties the history of British oppression in Ireland to the issue of abortion in a “highly emotive way” while also distinguishing between Britain as the site of “brutal industrial capitalism” and Ireland as its “bloody, dying victim” pleading to God for vengeance (p. 65). It maintains and reproduces a division between “‘them,’ the mercenary, barbarous English”—who had legalized abortion years earlier—and “‘us’, the God-fearing Irish,” resisting the modern values that Pope John Paul II had warned of (p. 65). The poster is one iteration of a larger trend in campaign messaging that, firstly, constructed an idea of the “Irish people” as unified in their moral opposition to abortion and , secondly, presented abortion as a form of “outside [moral] influence that would lead inevitably to the fragmentation of national identity and the collapse of the nation” (p. 66).

To resist arguments that it was trying to impose Catholicism on the population—particularly at a time of increased sectarian conflict in the North—PLAC endeavored, unconvincingly, to obscure the fact that the moral values it wanted to protect were distinctly Catholic. The Chair of PLAC, Dr. Julia Vaughan, argued in the Irish Times that the organization’s claim that “the unborn person has a right to life” from the moment of conception was “obvious” and “not a question of religious belief” belief” (Hesketh, 1990, p. 49) However, as Hesketh has shown, the PLAC’s arguments against abortion clearly reflected a distinctly Catholic position on abortion, echoing the Church’s teachings: that the fetus was entitled to the status of full personhood from the moment of conception; that there were both biological and theological arguments in support of the idea that life begins at conception; that abortion is wrong

in every case, including rape; and that the termination of fetal life can be justified if it is an indirect effect of a treatment used to save the pregnant person (pp. 45–50). While there were (and are) certainly many anti-abortion Protestants in Ireland, the Protestant churches in Ireland did not make any of these specific claims.

PLAC did make an effort to distance itself from the Catholic hierarchy, both to appear non-sectarian and to retain lay control over the campaign's "tactics, policies, and methods" (Hesketh, 1990, pp. 50–51). PLAC leader John O'Reilly explained to the organization's membership: "in our own lives and in all our actions we must take moral and doctrinal direction from the magisterium [teachings] of the Church and this is possibly what has us in the pro-life movement in the first place. But it is quite a different thing to allow [the political campaign] to be unduly influenced or controlled by the Church or a single Bishop" (pp. 50-51). He expressed concern that in ceding power to a single Bishop, the movement could be "deflected from its purpose for reasons as mundane as the Bishop's desire to control everything which moves in his diocese, his desire not to be embarrassed by the movement not make a public stand he may not want to make, or by his desire to impose his own fallible and possibly mistaken ideas on how the campaign should be run" (p. 51). Ceding power over the campaign to the bishops collectively would be foolish, he argued, for Ireland then had over thirty bishops, and amongst them "there is no hope of any unified direction on a pro-life campaign" (p. 51).

In the course of the campaign, PLAC, with the assistance of the Knights of Columbanus, successfully mobilized "thousands of committed Catholics" involved in lay organizations and parish groups to do its canvassing; the grassroots network of potential lay Catholic activists had been there for years, Inglis (1987/1998) observes, but it had "never previously been mobilized as a unified force" (p. 84). The Pope's visit and emphatic reaffirmation of conservative Catholic

doctrine had elicited both an "air of religious revivalism" as well as anxiety about social change, and the amendment campaign provided an opportunity for people to take action to support what they understood to be "core Catholic and Irish values," bringing "Catholic moral principles to the front door of Irish homes" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 421; Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 41). As a PLAC spokesperson commented, the force of the campaign was the "ordinary people of Ireland coming out to canvas for their neighbors and friends" (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 41). And it was forceful: until the marriage equality referendum of 2015, PLAC constituted the "most successful populist campaign ever organized in Ireland" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 421).

This context proved extremely challenging for those who opposed the amendment. An Anti-Amendment Campaign (AAC) formed the prior year, made up of primarily of Right to Choose groups, prominent journalists, family planning clinic workers, and other feminist activists (Connolly, 2002, p. 164). Despite the claims made by PLAC, this campaign had not been preparing to persuade the public to legalize abortion; it also lacked sufficient financial resources for a national referendum campaign and found it difficult to recruit broad support. Left-wing political parties initially were hesitant to support the AAC, and even those within the movement hesitated to speak out publicly. "Most women had never discussed abortion in public—indeed not outside a circle of intimate friends," one campaigner recalled, and so few people had any idea "how to make a speech on the subject" (Connolly, 2002, p. 164; Jackson, 1986, p. 54). As the referendum campaign progressed, AAC leadership made the tactical decision to avoid arguments centered on women's reproductive autonomy for fear that the majority of voters would be put off by the idea of a "woman's right to choose." Instead, AAC volunteers produced leaflets and canvassed the electorate arguing that an amendment to the Constitution was unnecessary and would do nothing to help the Irish women who sought

abortions in Britain (Connolly, 2002, p. 164). In a deferential effort to win over those opposed to abortion, they contended that the amendment would make the introduction of abortion in Ireland "*more likely* than ever" (Connolly, 2002, p. 167).[3] At the end of the campaign, in a last-ditch attempt to limit the influence of the hierarchy and clergy, the AAC even asked priests not to preach about the amendment; they were largely ignored.

In a collective statement shortly before the referendum, the bishops acknowledged the "right of each person to vote according to [their] conscience", but they asserted the right to voice their opinion on issues of morality, where legislative or constitutional reform would have an impact on the common good of society (Fuller, 2004, p. 241; Inglis, 1987/1998). They stated plainly that abortion was wrong in all circumstances, and they framed votes against the amendment as support for the practice of abortion, stating that "defeat of the amendment could well be represented as a victory for the abortion cause" (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 84). Finally, they expressed their confidence that "a clear majority in favor of the amendment [would] greatly contribute to the continued protection of unborn human life" in Irish law, and argued that on "an issue of such fundamental importance," Catholics had a "clear responsibility to vote" (Fuller, 2004, p. 240; Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 84).

Some members of the hierarchy felt that the collective statement was insufficient and applied more direct pressure to the laity. The auxiliary Bishop of Dublin at the time, Dr Comiskey, reminded politicians that in concerning themselves with moral issues like abortion "they are engaging not merely in stagecraft but in soul craft" (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 84). In several dioceses, bishops requested that either their own letters be read out or that sermons be

[3] These arguments frustrated many of the feminist activists who had been involved in the provision of abortion information and non-directive pregnancy counseling; they wanted the campaign to address the experiences of women who had traveled for abortions, their reasons for wanting the choice to have an abortion, and the practical harms the proposed amendment might cause.

delivered urging the laity to vote in favor of the amendment. In Dublin, the largest diocese in the country, then containing nearly one-third of the electorate, a pastoral from the Archbishop Ryan was read at all masses in the diocese on the Sunday prior to the referendum directing parishioners to vote "yes."

After the "acrimonious and divisive campaign," the Eighth Amendment was passed by 66.45% in favor to 32.87% against, with about 50% voter turnout. Some commentators viewed the result as a "victory by conservative Catholics against the liberalization which had taken place in Irish society since the late 1960s" (Fuller, 2004, p. 240). The hierarchy may have lost the ability to influence social legislation passed by the Dáil, but Catholic moral principles could still be preserved in the Constitution (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 87). While the referendum results demonstrated the loyalty of the people to the teachings of their bishops, it also represented the political authority of lay organizations within the Church. While lay organizations previously had been involved in influencing social legislation, the referendum was "the first time that the laity were the vanguard, while bishops played a more covert role" (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 88).

But in spite of PLAC's significant success, the results did not suggest a return to the moral consensus that had existed in the first forty years of independence; instead, they revealed new divisions. There was now a "new and deep urban/rural divide in Irish society, with predominantly rural constituencies overwhelmingly voting yes, while urban, largely middle-class areas provided the strongest resistance to the amendment" (Fuller, 2004, p. 241). The results could also be interpreted to show divisions among Catholics. "If it is accepted that the statement of the hierarchy was an appeal to the loyalty of the people and that it was, as they stated, 'an issue of such fundamental importance' on which 'everyone has a clear responsibility to vote,'" Inglis (1987/1998) writes, then the proportion of the Catholic electorate who followed the

guidance of the bishops and voted 'yes' was only 37.5%. He notes, however, that this "extreme" statistic might be explained by those who, despite the urging of the hierarchy, did not vote; they may have opted "not to bother their conscience," Inglis observes, "especially since an opinion poll published two days before the referendum indicated there would be a 2:1 majority in favor (p. 87).

Not measured by the official statistics were the divisions in Irish society. The referendum campaign had fostered discord "in political parties, among doctors, lawyers, the Irish Farmers Association" and within families. Their disagreements were, for the most part, not over the issue of abortion. Instead, the issue that divided Irish society was "whether the Constitution should be changed to reflect the interests of [PLAC] and the Catholic Church" (Inglis, 1987/1998, p. 87). In other words, the referendum was interpreted as a test of loyalty to "the bishops, Pope John Paul II, and the teachings of the Catholic Church."

"It wasn't supposed to work out like this," the journalist Gene Kerrigan (1983) wrote in *Magill* shortly before the referendum:

> The thing should have slipped through as easily as a Finance Bill in the Dáil. Ireland, in the words of [PLAC Chair] Julia Vaughan, would have "once again become a beacon" which would "turn the tide in the Western world." In choosing such an emotive issue on which to fight, the traditional forces should have had a runaway victory by last March. People would be asked if they wanted to kill babies—answer, no, ergo triumph. Instead, a moral civil war developed.

Fáilte (Welcome) to modern Ireland!

The emergence of a liberal national identity

In the wake of the "moral civil war" over the Eighth Amendment, Ireland continued to be divided by moral issues, with a mix of "progressive" and "conservative" outcomes. While many

radical feminists “retreated from activism altogether” after the disappointment of the progressive and feminist organizations that had consolidated into the Anti-Amendment Campaign continued to work together, successfully expanding access to contraception in 1985 and eliminating the category of “illegitimate children” in 1988 (Connolly, 2002). When a constitutional referendum was held on an amendment that would legalize divorce in 1986, however, it was the network of conservative Catholic lay organizations that ultimately won out. This movement, bolstered by the success of the Eighth Amendment campaign, also successfully lobbied for the prosecution of organizations that provided abortion information and referrals (Smyth, 1998, p. 66). The Irish courts closed or severely restricted the activities of women’s advice and information centers, including the Dublin student unions; the state censored magazines that carried advertisements for British abortion clinics; and even librarians booksellers suppressed literature that might contain information on abortion for fear of civil action from “pro-life” campaigners, a fear that not unfounded (Smyth, 1998, p. 66). In the late 1980s, people began to challenge the suppression of information in tribunals at the European Union and the Council of Europe, and the international courts urged Ireland that it was obliged under its international treaties to allow free movement of persons across Europe and access to information on abortion services in other European countries (Conroy, 2015, p. 45). These issues were not settled, however, until the 1990s, when it became apparent that social and economic changes were leading Irish politics in a more progressive direction.

The election of Mary Robinson as president in 1990 presented the first major challenge to the conservative majority. As a “liberal, feminist, and human rights activist” who lobbied hard for the legalization of contraception and represented Mrs. McGee, she had become a “hate figure” among Irish conservatives, and over the course of the campaign, those conservatives—

many in the opposing party Fianna Fáil—criticized her "radical views" and questioned her status as a wife and mother (Girvin, 2018b, p. 425). Nonetheless, she had "wide appeal" and won the presidency with a significant majority of the vote. Two years later, conservatives in Fianna Fáil suffered again in a general election when their proportion of the vote dropped below 40% for the first time in 65 years. In an "unprecedented" move, Fianna Fáil ultimately entered into a government coalition with the Labour Party rather than with the more center-right Fine Gael, and adopted a program for government that "was broadly progressive and included a commitment to hold another referendum on [legalizing] divorce" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 427). Although this coalition struggled and collapsed in 1994, before a referendum could be held, Brian Girvin (2018b) writes that "this progressive turn in Irish politics was maintained" (p. 427).

It was through the debates, court decisions, and referenda on abortion in 1992 that it became apparent that there now existed a "liberal majority" in Irish society, with a new understanding of Irish national identity. Abortion politics that year centered on the case of 'X', a 14-year-old girl who become pregnant after being raped by a family friend and who was prevented from traveling to Britain with her family for an abortion by the Irish High Court. The Supreme Court then reversed the High Court's travel ban and additionally ruled that a pregnant woman who was suicidal had a right to an abortion under the Eighth Amendment. The Supreme Court's ruling outraged the hierarchy and conservative lay Catholics, and later that year three referendums on the Eighth Amendment were held to take account of the Supreme Court's decision. A significant majority of the electorate voted in favor of the Thirteenth Amendment, which stated that the constitutional prohibition on abortion would "not limit freedom to travel between the State and another state" (62.39% in favor to 37.61% against), and on the Fourteenth Amendment, which stated that the Eighth would not "limit freedom to obtain or make available,

in the State, subject to such conditions as may be laid down by the law, information relating to services lawfully available in another state" (59.88% in favor to 44.12%). Later, legislation would be passed that specified only health care providers and sexual health clinics could distribute information related to abortion.

The most controversial referendum that year was on the Twelfth Amendment, which had been proposed by conservative Catholic activists. It read, "It shall be unlawful to terminate the life of an unborn unless such termination is necessary to save the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother where there is an illness or disorder of the mother giving rise to a real and substantial risk to her life, not being a risk of self-destruction." The primary purpose of the amendment was to limit opportunities for doctors to intervene in a pregnancy on behalf of the pregnant person and to make absolutely clear that a "risk to the life of the mother" should not include the risk of suicide. This referendum was the most controversial of the three, and it was rejected, with 65% of the electorate against. It should be noted, however, that both liberal and conservative activists lobbied against the amendment, the latter because they felt that abortion should not be permitted in any circumstances (Girvin, 2018b, p. 427).

Lisa Smyth (1998) asserts that in public debates and discussions following the High Court's decision, new narratives emerged that fundamentally shifted Irish "discourses of sexuality and national identity" (p. 66). In contrast to the sense of "we, the people" marked by a commitment to Catholic social values, more and more, journalists, feminists activists, and members of the public put forth a liberal sense of "we, the people" marked by shame. This shame was multifaceted: there was shame that the state had failed to protect the family, as it was bound to do by the Constitution, by forbidding parents to travel with their raped child, and there was shame that the High Court's decision had shocked and appalled the international

community, including Britain. There emerged a narrative of a crisis of identity: had Ireland become its own barbaric "other," a "totalitarian regime which intruded into private family decisions," the type of state against which it had previously defined itself (Smyth, 1998, p. 70).

At the same time, feminist critics both in Ireland and abroad used the case to highlight the oppression and erasure that women could experience at every level of Irish society. After a Dáil debate in which four female TDs attempting to speak from the position of Irish women were told they were "out of order" and silenced, journalist Mary Holland wrote: "There were nine women deputies in the chamber and row upon row of middle-aged men in suits. It had been agreed that four of these men, all party leaders, would speak for 10 minutes each on the case of a girl pregnant as a result of rape. Why not? It was a man who raped her, a man who put her in court, a man who handed down judgment on her future." Holland went on to argue that women, even women in government, were at the bottom of the hierarchy, and that, along with the patriarchal legal system, made women in the state extremely vulnerable (Smyth, 1998, p. 75).

The birth of a modern, pluralist, European nation

As the population grappled with two competing models of national identity, life in Ireland began to change dramatically, and "seismic shifts appeared in attitudes, behavior, and values" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 421). The changes are associated primarily with "The Celtic Tiger," a period of rapid economic growth between the mid-1990s and the late 2010s with a lasting impact on Irish politics and society. Between 1994 and 1997, Ireland became an affluent country, finally comparable to its wealthy European neighbors. By 2003, its per-capita income had risen to 141% of the EU average, and for the first time, there was near-full employment. This was associated with a consumption boom and significant inflation in house prices, borrowing, and debt; by the

mid-2000s, it had become one the most expensive countries in Europe to live in (Girvin, 2018b). Unemployment and "involuntary" economic-driven emigration, issues that had plagued Ireland for decades, ceased to be significant political issues; instead, the electorate was more concerned with health, crime, and education (Girvin, 2018b, pp. 429–430).

With more demand for labor, women's participation in the labor market also increased dramatically (Girvin, 2018b, p. 430). Attitudes toward women and toward gender equality in the workplace also changed, due both to the increased presence of women in the workplace and legislation that favored their inclusion, often driven by EU directives. The Electoral (Amendment)(Political Funding) Bill 2011 had a significant impact on the role of women in Irish politics; the bill included a condition that if women constituted less than 30% of a political party's nominated candidates, that party's funding would be reduced (Girvin, 2018b, p. 430).

For the first time, Ireland became a *destination* for immigrants from within and outside of the European Union. Before the Celtic Tiger, Irish society had been extremely homogeneous; in 1991, the proportion of the population born outside of Ireland had been 6.5% (Central Statistics Office, 1996, p. 22). By 2006, this had increased to 10%, and by 2011, 17%, where it has since stabilized (Girvin, 2018b, p. 430). Within 20 years, it had become a "complex, multi-ethnic society," where hundreds of languages are spoken (Girvin, 2018b, p. 430). "For the most part these migrants were welcome during times of expansion," Girvin writes, "though there is evidence of prejudice and intolerance" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 430). In 2003, anxiety about migrant women giving birth to children in Ireland "solely to secure Irish citizenship for their children" led the Minister for Justice to remove the process through which migrant parents could apply to remain in the country on the grounds of their child's citizenship; this resulted in thousands of deportations. The following year, a public referendum was held on a proposal to eliminate *jus*

soli (birthright) citizenship and replace it with *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) citizenship; 78.9% of participating voters supported granting citizenship only to children who had at least one parent who was a citizen or entitled to citizenship (Lentin, 2019).

However, studies on levels of prejudice amongst the Irish have shown "a consistent liberalization in attitude" toward specific groups, particularly the British and Northern Irish Unionists (Girvin, 2018b, p. 430). In 1998, decades of violent conflict between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland, known as the Troubles, formally ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement by the British government, the Irish government, and eight Northern Irish political parties. The agreement clarified the political relationships between these actors, while also creating a framework and establishing institutions for managing those relationships. Despite "historically hostile" attitudes toward their former colonizers and those who wanted the island to remain part of the United Kingdom, Irish voters showed overwhelming support for the agreement; in a constitutional referendum that year, 94.39% voted to comply with the agreement and remove the all-island territorial claim made in Bunreacht na hÉireann.

This era—the 1990s into the present—has been marked by a significant decline in Catholic religiosity. Weekly attendance at mass had already dropped significantly during the 1980s, from 82% of Catholics in 1981 to just under 60% in 1990. This was before confidence in the Church was undermined by repeated scandals. Throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, journalistic investigations and government inquiries revealed widespread physical, sexual, and emotional abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests, nuns, and lay religious instructors; the forced separation of families and incarceration of young, vulnerable people in workhouses and laundries; the institutionalization of unmarried women and their children in Mother and Baby Homes; and the neglect of infants and children in a variety of institutions run by Catholic orders

(Hogan, 2019). These revelations, and the unwillingness of Church authorities to recognize the harm that had been done, seriously destabilized the moral authority of the Catholic Church. In 2008, according to the European Values Survey, 65% of those polled expressed "little or no confidence" in the institution of the Church (Girvin, 2018b, p. 431). While "regular church-going had been a major feature of Irish life," weekly mass attendance fell to 42% of Catholics in 2000. As of 2018, it had fallen, less precipitously, to 36% (Girvin, 2018b, p. 432). Yet, according to the latest census, a majority of the population—78%—continues to identify as Catholic, suggesting that most Irish people have retained some connection with the Church, "if much less enthusiastically than before" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 432).

In response to the scandals, politicians began to publicly criticize the Catholic Church. When a government investigative committee published its report on clerical abuse in the Diocese of Cloyne, then-Taoiseach Enda Kenny moved that the Dáil "[express] its dismay at the disturbing findings of the report and at the inadequate and inappropriate response, particularly of the Church authorities in Cloyne, to complaints and allegations of child sexual abuse" and "[deplore] the Vatican's intervention which contributed to the undermining of the child protection frameworks and guidelines of the Irish State and the Irish Bishops" (Dáil Éireann Debates, 2011, cc. 519–532). Strikingly, his motion did not elicit dissent from the politicians in attendance; in general, those participating in the debate gave their approval for this "unprecedented critical interrogation of the role of the Catholic Church in the Irish state" (Girvin, 2018b, p. 432).

As the social, political, and moral authority of the Catholic Church has declined, activists and politicians have successfully argued for the liberalization of laws that previously promoted Catholic social values. Most notable, prior to the abortion referendum of 2018, were the

referendums that amended the definitions of marriage in Bunreacht na hÉireann. In 1995, with fierce opposition from Catholic lay organizations and the hierarchy, the public narrowly voted in favor of an amendment that would remove the statement, "No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage," from Article 41 of the Constitution, legalizing divorce.

Twenty years later, the public voted to legalize same-sex marriage by adding text to Article 41: "Marriage may be contracted in accordance with the law by two persons without distinction as to their sex." Conservative Catholic lay organizations had again mobilized to oppose further modification to an article that had previously defined marriage in Catholic terms, and they focused their messaging on the threat same-sex marriage would pose to "traditional" family and gender norms. They argued that the "real threat" of same-sex marriage was the possibility that same-sex married couples could become parents, confusing children about normative gender roles and sexuality. "Children deserve a mother and a father," read one campaign poster that depicted a man and woman with a smiling baby. Just weeks before the referendum, the Archbishop of Armagh, the ecclesiastical head of the Church in Ireland, wrote a pastoral to be read out at all Sunday masses throughout the Republic, denouncing the referendum and reminding Catholics that "to interfere with the traditional definition of marriage was not a simple or trivial matter" (Martin, 2015). These appeals to "tradition" and Catholic values failed to get much traction, particularly when countered by the campaign supporting the amendment, "Yes Equality," which framed the legalizing of same-sex marriage as a matter of equality and inclusivity. The Marriage Equality Referendum passed with an overwhelming majority: 62% for, 38% against.

Ireland became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage by a popular vote, news that captured headlines internationally. In response, the Vatican Secretary of State,

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, called the result a “defeat for humanity” (Agnew, 2015). The Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, however, framed it as a victory for Ireland: “In the privacy of the ballot box, the people made a public statement,” he announced, “With today’s vote, we have disclosed who we are. We are generous, compassionate, bold and joyful people who say yes to inclusion, yes to generosity, yes to love, yes to gay marriage!” (McDonald, 2015). In Kenny’s framing, Ireland had become a moral example for the world—through its opposition to Catholic social values.

Part II

Chapter 4 Reconfiguring Moral Authority in Modern Ireland

Introduction

Over the course of Part I, we became familiar with a particular history of the Catholic Church and its relationship with Irish governance. In Chapter 2, we saw how the Church established its "moral monopoly" (Inglis, 1998/1987) and secured political power through controlling Irish social and biological reproduction, and in Chapter 3, we saw how that monopoly was dismantled. Now, in Part II, we turn to the lay Catholics in contemporary Ireland who are endeavoring to "remake" Irish Catholicism to revive a now struggling Church.

This chapter centers on a group of "young adult" Catholic laypeople in their twenties, thirties, and forties. Born in the late 1970s through early 1980s, these laypeople recognize that within their lifetimes a major shift has taken place in popular attitudes toward the Church. Like the historians cited in the last chapter, they attribute this shift in part to Ireland's economic growth – and a corresponding shift in values – and in part to the revelations of widespread abuse in Church-operated institutions. As a result of these events, they say, what was once a devout population has now become disaffected, disinterested, and at times scornful of the faith they were baptized into.

These laypeople are concerned that the Irish Church is struggling to reproduce itself. They speak often of the "priest shortage": a phenomenon Tom Inglis (1998/1987) documented thirty years earlier has now become a serious problem for the Church in Ireland. While Ireland used to source of priests for parish churches and evangelizing missions all over the world, fewer

and fewer Irish men are entering seminaries. The population of existing priests is aging; some are postponing retirement to ensure their parishes continue to have a priest. Nor are Irish women entering religious orders as often as they once did; a few decades ago, nuns populated Irish schools and hospitals, but their declining numbers mean that they have far less of a presence in Irish society. The laity, too, are less committed to their faith. The baptized Irish who might have produced the next generation of Catholics are marrying in the Church less frequently, producing fewer children, and not raising the children they do have in the faith. Accordingly, it is harder for Catholics committed to their faith – like those in this chapter – to fulfill their personal reproductive desires. Those who feel divinely called to marriage and to raising children have difficulty meeting partners who feel the same way.

It is in this context that we see Irish laypeople trying to reach out and convert the disaffected baptized, in keeping with the call for a New Evangelization. The laypeople in this chapter, many of whom have struggled (and continue to struggle) with disinterest and skepticism themselves, are trying to re-Christianize Ireland. Importantly, their effort to renew Irish Catholicism is not an effort to restore what Irish Catholicism was at the height of the Church's power. In fact, as I show through this chapter, they are critical of how the Irish hierarchy and clergy secured their power and the Irish people's devotion; they argue that, historically, the hierarchy and clergy promoted an unnecessarily restrictive understanding of how to be a good Catholic layperson, and that this approach has alienated laypeople who otherwise might have been more active in the Church. To draw Irish people back into the Church, these lay Catholics are promoting alternative ways for laypeople to practice their faith, while also demonstrating the significance of the laity within the Church through their own religious initiatives: the formation and leadership of groups, events, and activities for Catholic "young adults" in their 20s, 30s, and

40s.

Scholars of Irish Catholicism have long been interested in the lay-organized religious activities that developed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which affirmed the laity's participation in the mission of the Church. They have focused in particular on lay involvement in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), an international movement that originated in the United States and began to gain traction in Ireland in the early 1970s (Feller, 2006; Taylor, 1995, 1989; Szuchewycz, 1993). Drawing on Protestant Pentecostal theology, the CCR emphasizes features of Pentecostal religious practice including: "the establishment of a 'personal relationship with Jesus,' the baptism of the Holy Spirit, enthusiastic and demonstrative worship, spontaneous and extemporaneous prayer, and the manifestation of the 'gifts of the spirit' (speaking in tongues, prophesy, healing, etc.)" (Szuchewycz, 1993, p. 38). Taylor has argued that Charismatic prayer groups offered lay Catholics in Ireland a "new field of religious experience," that included contact with the divine unmediated by priests (Taylor, 1990, p. 97). While sanctioned by the Vatican, the CCR's growth prompted "strong reactions from clergy and laity alike", many of whom were skeptical of – or threatened by – religious activity not guided by the Irish hierarchy and clergy (Szuchewycz, 1993, p. 38). However, these researchers have shown that the laypeople involved in the CCR were in fact strongly pro-clerical; they welcomed, and often actively sought, guidance from the hierarchy and clergy (Szuchewycz, 1993, p. 52; Taylor, 1990, p. 107). Szuchewycz argues that this pro-clerical stance meant that "instead of the CCR initiating fundamental changes in Irish Catholicism", the guidance of the hierarchy and clergy "resulted in profound modifications in the ideological emphases and religious practices" of the Irish CCR movement, making them "much more congruent with traditional Irish Catholic norms" (Szuchewycz, 1993, p. 52)

The bulk of this scholarship on lay Catholics was conducted prior to the recent shift in popular attitudes toward the institutional Church. As I show through this chapter, lay Catholics are no longer actively seeking the approval and guidance of clergy. Rather, lay Catholics - and especially lay Catholic women – are asserting and demonstrating that they are better equipped than the clergy to evangelize and provide moral formation to lay Catholics who have become alienated from the Church. Mobilizing popular critiques of the clergy as impersonal and intolerant of dissent or disagreement, they frame their approach as comparatively patient, caring, and nurturing. They further justify this approach, and their claim to the jurisdiction of moral formation, by drawing on Catholic cultural materials that emphasize what women offer to the mission of the Church beyond biological motherhood and commitment to the religious life.

Contemporary Catholic adulthood

"Does anyone need a hot water bottle?" Catherine asked, holding up two. "They're going five-for-two at the Euroshop, so I bought fifteen!" Discerning Hearts met in a very drafty recreation room next to a church in the suburbs of South Dublin, and on a chilly day - or frankly, even a moderate day - most people welcomed the extra warmth.

Catherine would insist to me that she did not lead Discerning Hearts. From her perspective, this was accurate: the Holy Spirit worked through her to lead Discerning Hearts, and she served Him as a co-facilitator and teacher. "I get embarrassed if people say I lead the group," she told me, "I just book the resources - have the projector ready and some of the content and materials, like a teacher does, but it's His group." She would also downplay her contributions as "teacher" or "facilitator", stating that the role moved around, as each person offered their own insights, experiences, and interpretations.

Yet the other members of Discerning Hearts recognized that Catherine put in far more

work than anyone else in the group. She booked the recreation space, organized the schedule and maintained the mailing list, sent reminder e-mails with the scripture passages to be discussed at the next session, and despite some discomfort with social media, maintained the group's online presence. She researched and prepared a presentation on the "faith topic" of each week, such as "purgatory" or "the sacrament of reconciliation", which she often supplemented with an explanatory video or two. On the day of each session, she'd arrive to the recreation hall an hour early, armed with fresh milk and biscuits. She'd turn on the industrial hot water heater in the small church kitchen, set out the tea, Nescafe, and mugs[1], and move the tables scattered around the room into a larger rectangle, so everyone could be seated together. By the time I arrived - often half an hour early myself - Catherine would be settled at the table, quickly finishing her meal of fish and chips. "Hi, love!" She'd call out to each familiar face. And if she spotted someone new: "Welcome, welcome! Come in - would you have a cup of tea?"

The members of Discerning Hearts came from all over Dublin - and sometimes beyond - to attend the nearly three hour meeting each Monday. For some, the rush hour commute to South Dublin took nearly an hour, but they were more than willing to put up with the traffic. Though the group had only been existence for six months by the time I arrived in Dublin, most participants had made Discerning Hearts a fundamental part of their weekly routine. Though they would not admit it outright in front of the group, several people later confided to me that their attendance at Discerning Hearts was considerably more regular than their attendance at weekly mass. "Honestly, I feel I get more out of it", one person told me. Though people stressed that they knew the importance of receiving the Eucharist, they found they had little patience for their local priests' sometimes stultifying homilies.

Though most made Discerning Hearts their priority, the group's participants also

[1] These, I would learn, seemed to be essential provisions for any Irish workplace or public event.

frequented other Catholic groups, seminars, and recurring events led by laypeople that targeted young adults. The vast majority of these activities, I learned, had been created within the prior three years. Young adults are "thirsty" for a Catholic community, people told me, and so they attended as many groups and activities as their schedules would allow. One might attend Discerning Hearts on a Monday evening, a Charismatic *Life in the Spirit* seminar on Wednesday, and *The Encounter*, an Hour of Adoration hosted by the Dublin Diocese, on Friday. Over time, as they attended more events and saw more of the same faces, my interlocutors in Discerning Hearts, who only recently had felt isolated in their faith, began to see themselves as part of a thriving, vibrant Catholic community.

In theory, this community was made up of "young adults". In practice, at thirty, I was often among the younger participants. Sometimes, groups or events would define "young adult" as "18-35" or "20-40", but most people I met through these activities were in their mid-to-late thirties, and inevitably, no matter the age cut-off, there would be a smattering of attendees who exceeded it. The vast majority of "young adults" at these events had never married, though most hoped - and prayed - that they would. The single women I accompanied would often scan the room at the start of a larger event, looking for a new, ideally attractive, attendee - perhaps a recent convert - but with no success. Among the truly younger set - those under thirty - participants occasionally dated, but those above 35 struggled to find partners. Several women in this older age bracket told me they suspected most Catholic men committed to their faith wanted to be able to have a slow courtship, then marry, and then have several children; this meant that they sought younger partners, whom they presumed to be more fertile.[2]

At the activities I attended, participants tended to be white, Irish, and middle class, but

[2] I have no idea whether this was actually the case; among the limited number of men who spoke to me about their romantic/dating lives, most had resigned themselves to chastity or were in fact dating women who did not participate in the "young adult" Catholic community (something they tended to conceal from those within it).

the demographics could vary. At a particularly large group in central Dublin, there were often migrants from Eastern Europe and Latin America, and at Charismatic Catholic seminars and workshops, I often met members of the Travelling Community, an indigenous ethnic group whose members traditionally have been nomadic. Because Discerning Hearts was small, its demographics could vary a lot, even week to week, but in general it was majority white, majority Irish, and all "settled" (as opposed to Travelling). It seemed to be more economically diverse than other groups, though - some participants were extremely wealthy, some were working class, and some were on state assistance.

Priests rarely participated in these activities, except when invited by lay leaders to do - usually as a guest speaker on a particular topic of interest[3] or to perform tasks limited to the ordained. This was the case at a popular monthly event known as *The Encounte*r, which sought to create a welcoming, aesthetically beautiful environment for lapsed Catholics to "encounter" Jesus. In a darkened nineteenth-century church lit by hundreds of candles, attendees were led through a Holy Hour of Adoration by Fiona, a lay woman who worked for the Dublin Diocese, and by a guest musician. Jesus's presence at the event required an ordained priest, the only person able to perform the sacrament of the Eucharist, transforming a wafer and wine into the material body and blood of Christ. After placing the Blessed Sacrament on the altar before attendees, the priest would retreat into the shadows at the back of the church, available "for a chat" or to perform the sacrament of reconciliation if anyone desired it, but otherwise would remain silent and unobtrusive while Fiona guided participants to convey their fears and anxieties directly to Jesus, and to "feel the warmth of His love" in return. Regular participants in the Dublin Catholic Young Adult social scene never questioned the fact that lay women directed

[3] For example, I heard Father Pat Collins, a self-appointed expert on exorcism and the discernment of spirits, give talks at three separate events.

most of its groups, events, and activities; as I shall explore further in the next section, most felt that lay women were uniquely suited to the task of bringing lapsed Catholics back into the fold.

It was taken for granted that all participants had "lapsed" at one time or another.[4] As teenagers and in their twenties, usually, they had broken - or outright rejected - the rules of their faith, particularly those about their sexuality. When they later felt motivated to return to the faith – often after the death of a family member or while completing treatment for addiction or mental illness - they harbored some doubt about the institution of the Church and those in positions of religious authority. Some of this doubt had been caused by the abuse perpetrated against women and children in the many institutions operated by Church orders. One man told me that despite re-committing himself to his faith, he still struggled with an instinctive distrust of priests; if he saw an older priest at mass, he would get distracted by suspicions that the priest must have known something about "what went on". More often, though, people told me they had just felt that people in the religious vocations could not possibly relate to their own experiences - and especially to their sins. As children, they had been judged and chastened by religious authority figures, both at school and in the confession box, for actions they now viewed as fairly trivial. As adults, they were not especially motivated to return to these figures to explain and defend the more egregious sins they had committed while their faith had lapsed.

What adults returning to the faith wanted, I was told, was to be welcomed personally, by someone who could relate to their experience and who could accept them, even if their relationship with God was still halting and tentative and at times fraught. Catherine, for many Catholic "young adults" both inside and outside Discerning Hearts, seemed to embody the ideal Catholic evangelist. As a group facilitator, she was warm, personable, and very attentive to needs

[4] Over the course of a year, I met precisely one participant who claimed to have never lapsed - largely because he had committed to his faith as a teenager before he had the opportunity to, in his words, "sin too badly"

of those in the room, whose religious and educational backgrounds varied considerably. Outside the church recreation room, she made herself available to anyone who needed assistance, no matter how well she knew them. “Honestly, I don’t know how she does it,” Eileen, a widowed “young adult” of sixty who had raised three children herself, once remarked. “She’s a mother to us all.”

Mary, motherhood, and the “Feminine Genius”

Catherine hesitated to identify herself as a “mother”, even metaphorically. “I’m more of ‘cool aunt’, like” she told me, laughing, and as if to prove the point, stepped outside in her leather jacket to smoke a cigarette. When I met Catherine, I had taken her to be my age - about thirty - and had been stunned weeks later to discover she was forty-five. In her two-and-a-half decades of young adulthood, she had become a lapsed Catholic, returned to her faith, nearly joined a convent, and then nearly married. She was surprised to find herself unmarried and without kids in her mid-forties - “I always felt I would”, she admitted - but she was becoming more comfortable with the possibility that she would remain single. “I still find a lot of pleasure in other things,” she said, “…with my friends, and my, you know, outside activities, I wonder how I’d ever fit a family anyway…life is certainly full.”

Yet she saw herself, and all women, as sharing a set of God-given qualities with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Catholic theological traditions have long framed the Mother of God as God’s most significant human creation[5]. As Catherine would explain, “she’s not just a simple Jewish girl that had the baby,” but Mary herself is a “focal person in [God’s] salvation plan”. This is largely explained through a series of parallels Catholics draw between Mary and Eve, the first woman created by God, who was without sin until she ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

[5] Catholic theology regards Jesus as both fully human and fully divine, while Mary is fully human and not divine.

That act, and its consequences - her and Adam's exile from the Garden of Eden, woman's experience of painful childbirth, and the long period of human disobedience to God - are referred to as "the fall of man." Catholics teach that Jesus will save humankind from the "fall", freeing them from sin and ultimately allowing them to live in Heaven, alongside God, for eternity. But it is Mary, the co-creator of Jesus, who is seen as a key catalyst for salvation from the fall. According to Catholic tradition, she herself was conceived without sin - the first woman and human to have been created in a "pure" state since Eve - and so ushers in a new era of humanity's relationship with God. In the Scriptures, not only does she accept and fulfill God's request that she carry His Son, but she recognizes Jesus's significance, encourages Him to reveal his divine capabilities, and supports his ministry. Additionally, for Catholics, because of Mary's close relationship with her Son, she serves as both a model for how to relate to Christ but also as a conduit for human communication with Him; praying "to Jesus through Mary", such as by praying the rosary, ensures that Christ will hear your prayers both from you and from his mother.

Catholic men and women alike are encouraged to emulate the qualities of Mary that make her both a devoted servant to God and dedicated to the needs of others. To illustrate these qualities, Catholics in Ireland turned to three specific moments in scripture. First, they spoke of "Mary's 'yes'" at the Annunciation - the occasion when the angel Gabriel announced that Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, would carry and give birth to the Son of God, and she replied " 'Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word'" (Luke 1:38-40). In discussing her consent, the members of Discerning Hearts marveled at how readily Mary, then a teenager, chose to accept God's will for her, even though a pregnancy might risk her future marriage to Joseph. She had been so brave and poised to receive His will and declare herself His servant, when they, ostensibly God's servants themselves, struggled every day to follow his most

basic commandments.

Second, they turned to the Visitation - the period immediately following the Annunciation, when Mary traveled to her aging cousin, Elizabeth, to help her prepare for the birth of the infant who would become John the Baptist. Though Elizabeth, recognizing that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah, showed her cousin honor, "Mary didn't go to see Elizabeth to be honored", Karen once said. Karen, in her late 30s, was one of the few members of the group who had taken classes in Catholic theology, and Catherine often turned to her for support when preparing materials for Discerning Hearts sessions. "Mary goes to prepare the diapers, she goes to like help her cousin with her own difficult pregnancy, and I just love that idea of Mary that like her first response when the angel tells her 'and your cousin' - who was well past [Mary's] age - 'is pregnant', she gets up and she immediately goes to her, it's a beautiful thing." This response, to others in Discerning Hearts, exhibited how Mary placed others who were in need above her own interests - a model they felt they ought to follow. She sets aside her fears about her future with Joseph, about the responsibility of raising the Son of God, and instead turns her attention to others, Catherine said, before summarizing: "always in service".

Third, the wedding at Cana also spoke to Mary's "service" as well as to her role in bringing about the first of Jesus's miracles, furthering God's plans for salvation. At the wedding, attending by Mary, Jesus, and his disciples, Mary observed that the host's supplies of wine had run out. "They have no wine," she remarked to her son (John 2: 3) - a statement many Catholics interpret as Mary prodding her son to help the bridegroom save face by performing a miracle. Though Jesus initially appears to rebuke her, chiding "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2: 4), she ignores him and instructs the wedding servers to follow her son's instructions. Jesus obliges his mother, transforming jars of water into

particularly fine wine, earning the bridegroom a compliment from the headwaiter. To members of Discerning Hearts, the event revealed not only Mary's attentiveness to the needs of others - specifically the bridegroom's reputation and the thirst of his guests - but also to her sensitivity to what needed to occur in order to further God's plan for salvation. By encouraging Jesus to demonstrate his divinity before his disciples, Mary strengthened his ministry. Laypeople, too, could follow her model, Catherine advised, by serving others but also by helping others discern the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ's lingering presence on earth.

However, Catherine and Karen often stressed that, even as all Catholics are encouraged to emulate Mary, "the dignity of woman" was distinct from the "dignity of man". Women, they told the group, had a special predisposition toward receptivity, care for the human person, recognition of the human person as a gift, and awareness of the role of the individual in God's plan for salvation. In his influential *Mulieris Dignitatem (On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman)* (1988) and *Letter to Women* (1995), Pope John Paul II referred to these graces collectively as the "feminine genius", whose contributions, he argued, had been overlooked and underappreciated throughout history. The feminine genius, he suggested, manifested differently depending on a woman's particular vocation. For example, a married woman would demonstrate her care in her love for her spouse and children. A consecrated woman or a woman committed to chastity, on the other hand, would be more open to "pouring out love" to anyone she encountered within her "range of activity". Both forms of care, Pope John Paul II argued, constituted "motherhood" - one primarily physical, one primarily spiritual. The notion of a spiritual motherhood, he said, could be seen in scripture, when Jesus, with his mother seated at the base of his cross, instructor his disciple John to "Behold [his] Mother!" (John 19:27).

In the following section, I will show how Catherine strove to emulate Mary's qualities in

her creation and facilitation of Discerning Hearts. While she encouraged all of the members of the group to follow Mary's example - and hoped they would - I suggest that seeing these qualities in terms of "feminine genius" allowed Catherine and others to see moral formation as something particularly well suited to women.

Saying "Yes" to spiritual motherhood

Discerning Hearts, several participants told me, had only formed as a result of Catherine's receptivity to their demands. Catherine, however, saw her affirmative response as one moment in her renewed commitment to serve God by being open to His direction. Her commitment to her faith had wavered in her twenties, when she moved to "Secular Sydney" to pursue a career in marketing. Though she "never stopped being a Catholic", she had found the religious diversity of Sydney enthralling. With new friends and colleagues, she dabbled in New Age - "you know, collecting crystals, dreamcatchers, all these things I had never seen before" - but her experimentation was not serious. What concerned her more, as she looked back on her time in Sydney, was that she had "played life [her] own way", ignoring the moral principles of her faith. Compartmentalizing her moral values and her behavior had been easy while she lived abroad. "Rules of, like, you don't have sex before marriage," she explained, "I left that in Ireland…I was living where my parents couldn't see me. God was back in Ireland. When I wanted him to be, he was living there."

However, God surfaced in Australia rather dramatically when Catherine nearly drowned while white-water rafting. Stuck under the raft and pinned against a rock, she experienced the "pinnacle of her faith" when she "let go" and prayed, "Lord, I'm yours." It was only a matter of time, she had thought, and that was all she could say - until she was abruptly pulled up from under the water, allowing her to take in a single breath of air before her friends pushed her under the boat again so she would not be smashed against the rock. This time, though, she had no fear

at all: “I resigned, like I completely resigned…I was aware that I was resigning to let God take me.” Moments later, though, her friends successfully pulled her back onto the boat.

The incident made her confident that she had been gifted life in the face of death, and she was determined to let God guide her path forward. She recalled that she had prayed, “Lord, whatever it is - you’ve got a plan for me, and I’m going to be open to it…maybe you’ll open doors for me, and I’m going to say yes to all those doors…it was just a little promise I made to Him.”

She kept receiving invitations, and she kept saying “yes” - first to a prayer group led by an order of religious women known as Verbum Dei (Word of God), where she was taught for the first time to pray with and interpret scripture - a practice that had not been encouraged in Ireland, where priests mediated lay access to the text. Then she said “yes” to returning to Ireland to care for her mother, who had been diagnosed with breast cancer. In the decade she had lived in Australia, her parents and younger brother had grown considerably more religious, which helped affirm her own faith, but she struggled to find a Catholic community of her peers in Ireland. The recession had driven most of her friends out of Ireland altogether, and those who remained were not especially interested in Catholicism. She kept praying: “ ‘Lord, there is very little out here - I don't know where to go. I need friends who are my age or not too far away from it at least.’”

God, apparently, was fairly blunt in his response: “Go start [a group],” she heard him say, again and again, “Go make your own.” Hesitant, she negotiated: “okay, Lord, I’m going to do what I did in Australia, I’m going to say yes to the next invitation but maybe you could open the door and show me?” Within days, she received a panicked call from her younger brother. He had been asked by their local priest to run an Alpha course to encourage young adults to participate in the parish, and her brother, worried about having to contend with a demanding parish council,

was thinking about refusing the request. This, Catherine felt sure, was her invitation. “Don’t worry,” she told him, “I’ll help.”

Catherine’s prayers to God to give her opportunities to follow His will - and her subsequent consent - strongly echo Mary’s “yes” to the Angel Gabriel, allowing Catherine to demonstrate the same devout obedience she so admired in the Mother of God. She, like Mary, could be passive in accepting God’s will but active as a catalyst for bringing about God’s plan. Yet, unlike Mary, she was not fully clear on how facilitating a faith group would bring about God’s plan.

Much later, after she had successfully run the Alpha Course and established Discerning Hearts, a faith group of her own, she voiced her concerns to members of the group. On this occasion, she had, to her own amusement, forgotten “single life” while listing possible vocations. “I knew there was another group with a huge amount of the population out there,” she laughed, before attempting to make sense of her omission. “To be a married person, that’s a mission; you’re sent by God to procreate and bring family and probably nurture and raise God-loving people, you know, and so that in itself is a very holy mission. The religious life is a very holy mission. The lay, or the single life, is a little bit more” - she paused, emitting a high-pitched “ahhh” - we could be doing anything, but at the same time, it’s obviously that we have a mission to” - and again, she hesitated. She then offered a tentative description of the place for single people in God’s plan, relative to the place of married Catholics:

> I was thinking about it, like, if you think about God’s big plan - like he has a creation plan, and married couples are sometimes asked to help in that creation plan, to create and bring forth new life. And then there’s a salvation plan, you know, to help save souls. Maybe you could look at those kind of plans and go, which one would I be identifying more with? Because if I’m not procreating, maybe I’m part of the salvation plan rather than the creation plan, you know what I mean?

Her fellow participants - almost all single themselves - sharply cut her off. They refused to accept that a single person necessarily had to "choose", or even that the creation plan and salvation plan were distinct.

"They overlap," Karen said, "there are married people who can't have children. There are single people who do." She argued that raising families and saving souls weren't mutually exclusive anyway, and that single people could participate in both of those missions simply by helping those around them.

"Really helping people, not just talking about it," Padraig added, and more quietly: "you do that."

"She really does, doesn't she?" Conor said excitedly, proud of his friend. "You're always doing things for us, for other people - you're saving souls, aren't you? You're saving my soul, anyways!" Catherine laughed and waved away the compliment.

In the next section, I will show how members of Discerning Hearts - including, at times, Catherine herself - did indeed see Catherine's work in creating and facilitating the group as the work of moral formation. It was not, of course, the work of a mother providing moral instruction to her children, or a priest providing moral instruction at mass or in school, but they had all received such guidance from their mothers and from priests as children and teenagers, and it had not been satisfactory or particularly effective; all of them had lapsed at one time or another, and very few knew much about the faith. Catherine, though, had created a new space for adults like themselves to receive religious and moral instruction - a spiritual home of which she was a spiritual mother.

Between Protestantism and priests: The moral formation of Catholic adults

The task of bringing single people - or really any adults - into a faith group in Ireland could be enormously challenging. It had not been necessary to "convert" people to Catholicism

in Ireland for a long time, and many Irish Catholics felt that compared to the Protestant missionaries they sometimes encountered, they were not especially good at evangelization. Even though most Catholics I spoke to had been children or teenagers during the sectarian violence of the Troubles, they nonetheless spoke admiringly of Protestant techniques for evangelization. They were particularly in awe of Protestants' fluidity with scripture and ability to foster personal relationships with Jesus. At an event I attended in the fall of 2017 on evangelizing Catholic youth and young adults, a research group presented findings that echoed these sentiments; Irish Catholic young adults felt they lacked an understanding of their own purpose in God's plan and thought that a more intimate, personal relationship with Jesus would help. At the event, many older adults chastised the anonymous research participants for their self-centeredness and suggested that the participants wouldn't feel quite so disconnected if they actually showed up at mass. Yet the fact that Catherine was asked to help facilitate the Alpha Course in particular suggested that priests themselves were turning to Protestant models for evangelization in order to address the needs of young adults. I describe the Alpha model below and suggest that it allowed Catherine to demonstrate qualities associated with Mary and the "feminine genius" and, later, to develop techniques of religious and moral instruction that appealed to many single adults in contemporary Ireland in a way traditional priest-led instruction did not.

"Alpha", as it is commonly known, is a ten-week course first developed by members of the Church of England in the late 1970s to introduce those interested in Christianity to its basic beliefs. Through the years, it has been revised several times, and adaptations and supplementary materials have been developed in order to allow the course to be used by Christians who do not belong to the Church of England, including Roman Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans, and those belonging to Eastern Orthodox churches. According to the course website, it has been taken by

over 24 million people and distributed across more than 100 countries. The iteration of the course that Catherine facilitated included a series of short films featuring Nicky Gumbel, an Anglican priest who runs the Alpha program. While most of the material did not contradict Catholic theology, the Alpha course provided Catherine with material that would allow her to point out places of divergence between Gumbel's statements and Catholic teaching.

As she would later do for Discerning Hearts, Catherine performed most of the administrative and preparatory work for the Alpha Course. The way the course was set up, they would watch the films which raised questions about one's purpose, life after death, and the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, and then they would discuss these videos in small groups. Catherine appointed herself the facilitator for a group of twelve young adults, most of whom had never met before, and when the course began, she was delighted to see how the videos were "fantastic to reawaken the questions" that she felt every Catholic and Christian had wondered about when they were children.

The participants in Catherine's group appreciated the videos, but they felt that Catherine herself had been critical to the reawakening of these questions. Right away, they said, they felt at ease in Catherine's presence, even though they barely knew her. She was open about and confident in her faith but she was also easy-going and non-judgmental. She asked meaningful, personal questions, which they appreciated, and she encouraged them to voice their own questions and reactions. They hadn't experienced such a "free" religious environment before, and they wanted it to continue. Several of them asked Catherine if she would be willing to carry on when the course was done.

Even before her peers had asked her to continue leading their discussions, Catherine had quietly been critiquing the program she led and envisioning her own improvements. While the

Alpha course had served as a compelling "introduction" to Christianity for Catholics who had lapsed, she felt frustrated with the program's emphasis on raising questions without providing answers. Encouraging people to wonder about their relationship to God was, of course, she told me, a good thing, but you couldn't just stop there. "There was a lot of things left outside of, you know, the Alpha world," she said, referring to its Anglican orientation. "There was no real formation in terms of, you know, molding where the sacraments come in, for example, or in answering some of those questions…what the mass is or what the Eucharist is or how God revealed himself in a particular way to answer those questions." The whole time, she said, she thought about what else she could say if the course weren't designed by Anglicans. "I wouldn't say that Nicky Gumbel, you're missing all of these things, because for him, he was missing nothing," she said, laughing. "But for me, it was lacking."

Furthermore, people seeking "something greater" than themselves without receiving more answers and guidance could easily be led astray. She often cited the case of her friend Angela: a woman who had been curious about Jesus but who had been "seduced" by New Age ideas, rituals, and practices - which Catherine knew to be the work of evil spirits trying to undermine God's plan for salvation. Proper moral formation, Catherine explained, required providing the right answers - or at least providing people with a set of tools they could use to find the right answers for themselves.

She was keen, therefore, to introduce her new friends from Alpha to the practices of reading and "praying with" scripture she had learned with the Verbum Dei sisters in Australia. Most Catholics, she knew, only ever encountered scripture at mass. Reading scripture, she told me, was not a dynamic that was encouraged when she was growing up; in primary school, teachers read the Bible aloud, interpreting it, and in secondary school, they were expected to read

scripture on their own occasionally and only for their religion class. In adulthood, Catholics would only hear scripture at mass, from designated readers and from the priest. “And while generally we hear three pieces of scripture every time we hear mass,” she said, “I think there’s very little time to digest it…and often it’s forgotten when leaving.” Other participants in Alpha who would later join Discerning Hearts agreed. The homily was meant to provide context and the priest’s insight about the scripture - what moral lessons one could find in the text - but priests often delivered these messages dryly and without interest, causing parishioners to lose focus. Sometimes the homilies hardly mentioned the scripture that had been read at all. Catherine hoped that she could encourage participants in her group to foster a more robust and personal relationship with Jesus through reading, praying with, and interpreting scripture, as she had learned to do in Australia. She taught techniques for doing so, and she emphasized that they should not only try to comprehend the scripture together but they should try to discern the moral teachings and think about how those teachings might apply to them, individually and collectively, as they endeavored to live their faith in contemporary Ireland.

Recognizing that hardly anyone in the group understood the moral reasoning behind their beliefs and practices, she surveyed participants in order to put together a massive list of all “faith topics” people wanted more information about, and then systematically began teaching these topics each week. She reasoned that no one could come to love the Church without truly knowing it, and unfortunately, most participants had never truly been taught much about their own faith. “If you come to know and love what a sacrament is, you’ll appreciate it,” she reasoned, “and if you understand the beauty of the sacraments, you’ll want them - if you really knew the Mysteries of the Trinity or the real presence of the Eucharist, you’d want it every day, and that’s the idea - that maybe people would fall a bit in love with the Church and the teachings

if they first knew about them, so education [is] key". Catherine, though in love with the Church herself, found that teaching allowed her to learn more about her faith that she ever had previously, despite growing up in a devout family and attending a convent school. As every teacher knows, she explained, "you have pressure going, 'oh, I could be asked questions on this,' so that part of me would say, 'right, Catherine, if you're going to bring up a topic, you'd better know it, or at least bits of it' - you don't have to know everything, but you have to do the research." For example, she said in an interview, only the day before she had watched five videos on what Catholic theologians had said about heaven. Along with everyone else, she was "learning and questioning".

It was important to Catherine to not assume familiarity or comprehension in conveying the teachings that she herself had often only just learned and to encourage people to ask questions and contribute to her explanations. The range of educational backgrounds in Discerning Hearts was broad; most of the group had attended university, and a few had further degrees, but several had started working full-time straight after secondary school - or even earlier. Catherine did not want to alienate those who were less educated, and she found it infuriating when she attended events for Catholic adults that would be inaccessible to those without higher education. She specifically selected materials that were aimed at a general audience, and in advance of meetings, she made sure that she herself knew the definitions of any theological terms that might be less familiar to the group.

She also wanted to make everyone, no matter their background and relationship to Catholicism, feel welcome as they explored their faith, and she was proud to include participants who had felt alienated from other Catholic groups. Conor, for instance, a dedicated member of Discerning Hearts since its earliest days, often felt ill-at-ease in other faith groups and at events

for Catholic adults around Dublin, because he was one of the few people in the broader community who bore obvious signs of low socioeconomic status: a wardrobe of tracksuits and a thick, working-class Dublin accent that was difficult even for many middle-class Dubliners to comprehend. At these events, he fretted that others were looking down on him, and sometimes he was right; younger middle-class Catholic men and women, in particular, kept their distance, and few people took the time to try to comprehend his accent, moving on to socialize with others in attendance. Yet in Discerning Hearts, he told me, he felt like part of "the family." He had been very shy at first, almost silent, but Catherine had encouraged him to contribute, and the more he did, the more others understood him and appreciated his sense of humor. He now spoke freely with the other members about what had led him back to the faith - his recovery from a 10-year heroin addiction - and his struggles to maintain both his faith and his sobriety.

Catherine encouraged patience and respect even when members of the group disagreed with the orthodox teachings she was trying to convey. This was most obviously exhibited in the group's relationship with Kevin, a man in his late twenties who had returned to the faith a couple of years before joining Discerning Hearts but struggled with Catholic social doctrine on sexuality. Kevin started attending Discerning Hearts when I did, and for nearly three months, he avoided disclosing his sexual orientation in front of the whole group, referring occasionally to a "partner" but never using gendered pronouns. Though several of the most vocal members of the group, including Catherine herself, viewed homosexual activity as inherently sinful and to be discouraged, no one in the group questioned Kevin about his sexuality or about the gender of his partner. Instead, everyone followed his lead in referring to the unnamed significant other only as "Kevin's partner." Gradually, he began to come out - first, shortly before Christmas, to Catherine, who despite her orthodox views, made Kevin feel appreciated and cared for. "She's so

kind and made me feel so welcome," he later told me, "I knew she'd stay that way when I told her, but I was so grateful anyway that I bought her a Christmas gift". Catherine, too, was grateful for his continued presence and for his increased openness with the group. "He's using his [partner's] name now, which is huge," she recounted with a smile, "He could've bolted, but luckily our group is so inclusive in every which way with the heart, he knows he's in a safe environment where he doesn't have to agree with us.[6] And we all know we don't have to agree with him."

She defended the moral teachings of the church as she taught others about the faith, but she maintained - and repeated aloud to the group - that their different backgrounds, different interpretations, and even their theological disagreements kept all of them engaged, interested, and learning. Discussing, sharing, "dissecting and questioning", she said, was "definitely a necessary part of people's journey". While she often asserted that she herself was "in full agreement" with Catholic moral teachings, she recognized that most Catholic adults had never had the opportunity to interpret scripture for themselves or express their own reactions to and ideas about the Church's teachings; these things had been discouraged by their families, by priests, and by their religious educators at school. But she now firmly believed that "dialogue" and "people expressing themselves" was essential for the moral formation of a community, so that people could keep making the faith relevant to their own lives and to keep each other continually considering and re-considering their beliefs and moral judgments. Sometimes it might be difficult to have a disagreement, she admitted, but she was confident that the Holy Spirit was working through members of the group so that they would lead each other toward good moral behavior, and ultimately, salvation.

[6] "Us", here, referred to other members of Discerning Hearts.

Reforming a single-parent church

As can be seen throughout the last section, as Catherine and other members of Discerning Hearts described the appeal of learning about their faith within the group, they often assigned some blame to priests for not making Catholic scripture and social doctrine seem relevant when they had the opportunity to "morally form" the participants at mass and in school. In this section, I explore their criticisms in more detail, and I show how Catherine and others in Discerning Hearts mobilized their critiques of the clergy to both demonstrate the expertise of lay women as moral instructors and to advocate for the expansion of lay women's leadership within the institutional Church.

A narrative I heard repeated in Discerning Hearts, as well as among other Catholics, was that the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland had sought to claim a larger vocational jurisdiction that they ought to have in taking on responsibilities that belonged to the state (and previously to the colonial authorities): schools, hospitals, social welfare programs, etc. Perhaps they had good intentions, some people reasoned, initially, and perhaps they had wanted to help the Irish displace colonial authorities, but they had clearly become "ego-driven" and "power-hungry". They went beyond their priestly responsibilities when they used their financial and moral authority to control state institutions and state laws, Karen complained whenever the topic of the hierarchy's historic influence arose. Why not use their authority as priests to guide laypeople to take on these social responsibilities? Karen, and others, were reluctant to suggest that Catholic priests should never, for example, sit on the boards of hospitals or schools; instead, they said, priests should have focused on the primary responsibilities of their vocation: proclaiming and explaining the word of God, administering the sacraments, and guiding their congregations to make moral decisions that will lead to the salvation of their souls. Instead, Karen suggested, the priests in Ireland had "stretched themselves too thin" in an effort to have moral and political

authority across a number of domains.

Members of Discerning Hearts took up the idea that the priests were "stretched too thin" to criticize the moral instruction priests had provided they provided the public, instruction they described as overly efficient. As Padraig once described, priests in Ireland had essentially given their flocks a long checklist of things to do and things not to do in order to make it into heaven, and then refused to provide any further explanation or entertain questions. Few in Discerning Hearts disputed this description, though some offered a more generous explanation: priests had so feared hell that they attempted to provide something of "shortcut" to salvation, a "forbidding of things", not realizing that down the line, their decision to limit the moral agency of laypeople would be viewed as oppressive, alienating their own flocks. Those, like Padraig, with a more cynical perspective on priests, though that clergy and religious educators had simply not wanted to give up any of the power or wealth they were able to accrue by keeping the Irish blindly devoted to the clergy.

"The people thought they were Gods," Kevin once commented.

"They thought they were Gods, too," Padraig added.

"Clericalism has done so much damage in this country," Karen said. "Don't get me wrong - I love the priesthood - it's a beautiful thing, but priests are meant to be like servants." She suspected that the hierarchy had viewed laypeople's questions and attempts at discussion as challenges to their authority, and because they did, in fact, wield considerable social, political, and moral authority, they could censor theological debate. This, she thought, had slowly "deadened" the culture of Catholicism in Ireland.

According to Karin, being "stretched too thin" also limited the priests' capacity to stay up-to-date with the theological discussions that were occurring outside the island of Ireland. For

example, she argued, for “far too long” – til the end of the twentieth century - many Irish priests erroneously asserted as fact the idea that infants who died before being baptized were sent to “limbo” rather than heaven - a theory that has never been made official doctrine and fell out of favor in Europe decades ago. For the same reason, she said, the Irish hierarchy and clergy had not any students (in the national schools or in the seminaries) theology pertaining to the body, sex, and sexuality (“or maybe they were too embarrassed to discuss it”, Padraig laughed). The failure to discuss the permissibility of natural family planning, some in the group felt, had done a huge disservice to Catholic families. One participant grew up in a rural region where it was common for families to have twelve or fifteen children, and in retrospect, many of these children felt that the local priest’s insistence on procreative sex had forced their parents into an unsustainable situation, where they could not financially support their children, nor could they provide sufficient love and moral guidance.

According to Catherine and Karen, the Irish hierarchy’s seeming refusal to teach about equal dignity between the sexes had led “to many misconceptions about the place of women in the Church” - both among the hierarchy and the lay public. Instead, Karen asserted that the Irish hierarchy had discouraged women from “living their dignity” by appropriating vocations and ministries that, in her view, would be better filled by women - really any sort of public care labor - for themselves. She said that they had, in effect, tried to control the Irish church as “single fathers”, refusing the “natural duality of parenting”. “If we know that an ideal structure of our family is a father and a mother, why would we think the Church should be any different?” She asked, prompting affirmations from everyone in the room.

Women, members of Discerning Hearts argued, should have leadership roles at all levels of the institutional church. “I do think women would be a bit more - they would definitely think

about things differently," Kevin said. He elaborated: "A lot of men think about things in like very black-and-white and women would be kind of more a bit - they kind of look at something and say-"

"It's more emotional, yeah?" Another member, Marianne, supplied, as others nodded.

The naturally different dispositions of men and women, they reasoned, meant that women might have the advantage in areas where priests had lately been struggling. Being "more nurturing" and better at fostering personal relationships, women were likely the superior evangelists for the present moment, when so many Irish people felt betrayed by the institution of the Church. Men had more than adequately demonstrated the "paternal" side of the Church by exercising their clerical authority; now, in a time of crisis for the Church and for the moral authority of clergy, women could demonstrate the Church's "maternal" side by providing a different kind of guidance: focused on the person, inclusive, and patient in the face of dissent. It went unsaid that the guidance they were describing was taking place within Discerning Hearts.

Yet the members of the group were divided about what "maternal" authority might look like in the institutional church; specifically, they disagreed on whether the Church ought to allow women to become priests. "Women can access power in other ways," Karen once said in frustration. There were female canon lawyers, she added, and women who had administrative authority at the Diocesan level, and as part of evangelization initiatives. While she agreed that the hierarchy ought to create more opportunities like these, and expand the scope of these positions, to allow women to become priests, Karen said, would be to confuse the natural complementary division of the Church. Only men could be a part of the hierarchy, she went on, because only men could act as Christ - in *persona Christi*; women must take on roles that allow them to act as the Virgin Mary. For her, and others in the group, maintaining this gendered

vocational division was the only way that women could challenge the domain of the clergy while retaining moral authority by staying committed to what they viewed as fundamental Church teachings.

Affronts to the dignity of women

Though she and others in Discerning Hearts complained that the Irish hierarchy had failed to promote women as complementary partners in the leadership of the Catholic Church, Catherine could not fathom the accusations of misogyny that feminist activists leveled at Catholicism. At Discerning Hearts one day in March, she asked if anyone had seen Mary McAleese's recent guest appearance on *The Late Late Show* - an interview she had found astonishing. Mary McAleese, the second president of Ireland, had been known to be a practicing Catholic and scholar of canon law, but in recent years, her religious views had become less orthodox and she had committed herself to reforming the institution of the Church. During her visit to the exceptionally popular Irish talk show, McAleese had referred to the Catholic Church as an "empire of misogyny".

"She actually uses the word - *misogyny*!" Catherine exclaimed, shaking her head in disgust. McAleese had used the guest appearance to advocate publicly for the ordination of women as priests. Two priests had appeared on the show to respond to this call: one, belonging to an organization of progressive priests in Ireland, supported women's ordination; the other did not, but to Catherine's profound annoyance, had failed to muster a case against it. "It was so cringe," she lamented. "He had no answer ready…he didn't even mention God or Christ."

"I don't know," Kevin mused, "I think she has a point about women priests."

"I agree!" Eileen said earnestly. "I've never understood why women can't become priests. I think they'd be quite good at it."

"Of course they'd be good at it," Catherine said, with some impatience. "That's not

point." She had not been especially surprised by the priest's stilted response - she suspected he, like other priests in Ireland, might not know how to theologically explain why men and women should have different roles. However, she had not anticipated pushback from members of Discerning Hearts on the topic of female priests. It was a topic that the group would return to again and again in the coming months, particularly in anticipation of the referendum on the Eighth Amendment in May and the papal visit in August. While neither event dealt with the issue of women priests, it was a topic that routinely emerged in public discussions about whether that Catholic hierarchy had directly and indirectly contributed to the oppression of women in Ireland.

Catherine strongly believed that women who wanted to be priests could only be seeking power and authority if they were to blatantly disregard the traditions of the Church. Christ himself had been the first priest, she argued, and he, in the role of priest, had offered himself, the son of God, as a sacrifice to his father - "imagine that, the one God playing three roles: himself sacrificing himself to himself" - he was a priest, a son, and a father. And for millennia afterwards, there had been a lineage of priests who were also children of God and "fathers" to their congregations. Why change this tradition now?

Kevin and Eileen pushed back. Mary McAleese was arguing for more equality between men and women in the church, they said, and they supported that. It seemed ridiculous to argue that there was equality now, when men, as priests could administer sacraments, and women in the religious vocations could not. "If I were in the religious life, I'd want to do all that," Eileen said, "but nuns here are all - well, cloistered away, just praying, and yes, yes, I know-" she saw Catherine about interject - "I know prayer is so important, I'm not saying it's not. But personally, I'd want to be more involved with people; I'd want to be in the world, doing things."

"And you can!" Catherine was growing exasperated. All she was saying, she insisted, was that men and women already were equal in God's eyes and from the perspective of the Church, and to suggest otherwise was to ignore the significant role that Mary occupied within Catholicism:

> "The most powerful creature in the world, that God made, was his mother Mary, and no one supersedes Mary, the most powerful lady. He didn't make her an apostle or Pope or make her priest. You know what he did do? He made her queen of heaven and earth…[if you're a woman and] if you want to look at a role model, don't look at priests, look at the queen of heaven and earth. She's a female. If it is the female issue… then look at the most exalted creature he made. She's a female. Higher than any Pope who has walked on the earth. Higher than any priest or saint."

Eileen appreciated the argument and said she'd need to think about it more. Kevin said he'd do some research. Catherine later viewed this as a successful interaction - she had successfully communicated the teaching, allowed them to express their skepticism, and now they would likely engage in critical thinking, prayer, and further discussion with the group. In that way, they were carefully and responsibly engaging with Catholic moral teachings rather than just accepting without questioning.

Conclusion

Engagement with Catholicism was key to the renewal Discerning Hearts, and other "young adult" groups in Dublin sought to bring about. For those leading and participating in these groups, disinterest was a significant problem for the social reproduction of the Church, as well as for their own aspirations to marry, have children, and raise their children in the faith. However, while my interlocutors in Discerning Hearts lament that popular commitment to the Church has deteriorated, they also recognize that some of what they view as devotion to the Church was not entirely freely chosen but coerced by the hierarchy that abused its moral authority by not permitting questioning, discussion, and dissent. In other words, from their perspective, the hierarchy and clergy did not produce a pious nation by correctly forming the

moral consciences of the Irish but by insisting on the population's submission to their teachings. The members of Discerning Hearts want to see a vibrant Catholic culture return to Ireland, but they want the Irish people to freely choose to be committed to Catholicism. To that end, they use this group to learn about, discuss, and teach their faith without intervention from the hierarchy, effectively claiming the jurisdiction of moral formation for the laity.

While Discerning Hearts does not seek out clerical guidance, nor do clergy attempt to intervene in the workings of the group, it is important to the group to establish that seizing the jurisdiction of moral formation for the laity is not a threat to the authority of the hierarchy. Catherine and others recognize her work of founding and organizing Discerning Hearts as a lay intervention into traditional modes of moral instruction, and more specifically, an improvement on the Alpha course from which the group originated. However, Catherine in particular is keen to emphasize that this intervention is not a challenge to the hierarchy but a "service" to God, the Church, and to other Catholics, that emulates the service of the Virgin Mary. She and Karen also call on the idea of equal dignity of men and women to suggest that this work of moral formation is naturally outside the domain of priests and within that of the laity, especially lay women. In doing so, they suggest that the moral formation of adults is a form of "spiritual motherhood." This "spiritual motherhood" enables Catherine, and other single women who have not entered religious orders, to meaningfully contribute to the social reproduction of the Church while leaving themselves open to being divinely called to marriage.

Chapter 5 Teaching Pro-Choice Catholicism

Introduction

On the second floor of a converted Georgian townhome just north of the River Liffey, about a dozen women - and several men - sat a little uncomfortably in a U-formation, intently focused on the five or so strips of paper they had just been handed. It was half past 9 on a Saturday morning in late 2017, and the participants had travelled from all across Dublin to attend what was then called, somewhat ambiguously, "Values Clarification Training". The event was led by two volunteers with the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), a grassroots abortion rights organization committed to advocating for "free, safe, and legal" abortion on the island of Ireland. In recent months, the number of people volunteering for ARC - and for all other abortion rights organizations in Ireland - had surged dramatically. In June, a government-commissioned Citizen's Assembly had, after months of witness testimony and debate, recommended that the government radically reform its constitutional prohibition on abortion, known as the Eighth Amendment, to allow for broad access (Laffoy, 2017). Shortly thereafter, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar called a government committee together to evaluate the impact of the Eighth Amendment and discuss the possibility of holding a public referendum on its repeal. Now, with a repeal referendum tantalizingly close, many people who had never previously been involved in abortion rights advocacy but now wanted to more actively support the movement.

This "Values Clarification Training" had been organized specifically for new volunteers, both from ARC and from organizations with which ARC liaised. The event had been advertised as an opportunity for volunteers to become stronger advocates for repeal by gleaning a more complete understanding of their own views on abortion and a more empathetic understanding of perspectives with which they might disagree. Through a series of exercises, participants would familiarize themselves with Ireland's history of abortion and reproductive legislation, carefully

consider the complex moral questions surrounding pregnancy and abortion, and practice articulating their own perspectives on abortion in light of perspectives they might not have previously considered. The point of this training was *not* to change participants' minds, the trainers stressed in their opening comments, but to empower them to have nuanced and informed conversations about abortion with friends and family, particularly those inclined to defer to moral authority of the Irish Catholic hierarchy.

The participants got their first glimpse of what those conversations might look like in the first exercise of the day, the construction of a timeline of abortion and reproductive legislation in Ireland. On a large chalkboard, the trainers had drawn a timeline, from the 5th century to the present day. The participants were to examine the five slips of paper they had been given, which described undated events, and estimate when the events had occurred. We would attempt to organize the events chronologically and discuss each event as a participant taped it along the chalk timeline.

Who thinks they have the first event, sometime around the 5th century? One of the trainers asked.

I glanced at my slips of paper. "I think I do -" and read the text aloud. "St. Brigid performs an abortion on a nun who is pregnant; she makes the fetus disappear." The room erupted into laughter, but several women quickly raised their hands to their mouths to stifle the sounds. Saint Brigid of Kildare is one of the three patron saints of Ireland, meaning that she, along with Saints Patrick and Columba, is regarded by Catholics as a heavenly advocate for the people of Ireland (McCafferty, 2020). However, scholars have long debated whether she was a real person, a Christianized version of the pagan goddess Brigid, or an amalgamation of person and goddess (Condren, 1989; Lawrence, 1996; Maney, 1994). In pre-Christian Irish mythology,

Brigid belonged to the Tuatha Dé Danann, a tribe of supernatural beings who interacted with the human world, as well as other otherworldly tribes. She was associated with healing, fertility, and smithmaking (Condren, 1989). In recent years, some abortion rights activists loosely affiliated with Neo-pagan movements have claimed Brigid-the-goddess as a symbol for a non-Christian Irish feminism and progressive reproductive politics. To Catholics, Brigid was a real human woman, distinct from the pre-Christian goddess, who became a saint for her work establishing the first consecrated orders of religious women in Ireland and for her many miracles - most of which, incidentally, involving healing and fertility (Condren, 1989; McCafferty, 2020).

This account of St. Brigid's miracle was initially received by participants as a bit mocking and blasphemous. Abortion activists had claimed Brigid-the-goddess as a symbol of progressive politics, and now that symbol was being extended to Saint Brigid. However, the facilitators - still smiling at the reaction - insisted, correctly, that this miracle had been attributed to Brigid back in the 7th century. *The Church claims that it's always been opposed to abortion*, a trainer explained, *but that's not the case. Brigid made a pregnancy disappear - that's an abortion. Which means that Catholics have been disagreeing about abortion for centuries.*

That this workshop created space for dissent from orthodox teachings on abortion was no accident. Between 2016 and the referendum on the Eighth Amendment in May of 2018, trainers facilitated numerous workshops that touched on these themes. All had been modeled in part on the "Values Clarification Workshop" developed by the Catholics for Choice (CFC), a pro-choice advocacy organization based in the United States. Staff from CFC had assisted several Irish organizations in developing their own versions of this workshop and had trained Irish staff and volunteers how to be effective facilitators. Though different organizations provided the workshop to different audiences, and though the structure and content of the workshops varied,

they generally involved three similar activities: history of abortion in Ireland; individual values; and difficult questions.

When I spoke with trainers about the workshops, they lauded the programming for giving women - and some men - a warm, non-judgmental space for thinking about the moral issues surrounding pregnancy and reproductive decision-making. Over the last century, in most parts of Ireland, there had been few such spaces. Most people, the facilitators told me, had never been formally educated about sex, sexuality and reproduction. Even when they did receive some form of sex education in schools, it mostly centered on the changes that occur during puberty and the dangers of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. This was particularly true in schools operated or governed by Catholic orders (which make up over 90% of schools in Ireland) where an established "Catholic ethos" could restrict instructors from teaching content at odds with Church teachings (Republic of Ireland, 2020, p. 14). In recent years, teachers have often been given the freedom to teach secondary school students about contraception, but to respect a school's Catholic ethos, they must make clear that contraception is at odds with Church teachings and also discuss Church-preferred reproductive options, such as abstinence, marital sex for the primary purpose of bearing children, and "natural family planning". In other words, for most people in Ireland, sexual and reproductive acts were framed as either "in accordance with Catholic morality" or "in violation of Catholic morality". For many, this moral framework for thinking about sex and reproduction could be hard to abandon; as I will show through this chapter, even people who no longer considered themselves practicing Catholics and who were skeptical about the moral authority of the Catholic hierarchy nonetheless struggled to conceptualize morality as distinct from church teachings.

Recognizing that this could be a significant obstacle in their efforts to repeal the Eighth

Amendment in a popular referendum, abortion rights activists used Values-Clarification workshops to introduce a new moral framework for thinking about reproductive decision making, one that emphasized each individual's capacity to make moral decisions. However, the workshops did more than simply discourage participants from viewing Catholic orthodox teachings as inherently moral and advocate for freedom of choice. In the process of doing so, I argue, the workshops created space within Catholicism for dissent about the morality of abortion. Moreover, they framed the capacity for the individual Catholic to dissent, even from orthodox teachings, as fundamental to Catholic morality. This allowed Irish voters who might have otherwise been hesitant to vote for increased legal access to abortion to see their vote as an act consistent with Catholic values even as they defied orthodox teachings on abortion.

In the first part of this chapter, I explore the guiding theological principles of Catholics for Choice, the organization that developed the model on which Irish Values-Clarification workshops were based. I suggest CFC's argument that the *primacy of the individual conscience* is an under-recognized Catholic value allows the organization - and lay Catholics more generally - to both critique the hierarchy's orthodox position on abortion as well as their efforts to maintain a moral monopoly and repress dissent. Next, I discuss how abortion rights organizations, in conjunction with CFC staff, adapted Values-Clarification workshops for the Irish context. I provide an overview of the structure and content of the workshops and show how, while giving participants a space to learn about Ireland's history of abortion and to think about their personal views on the issue, the activities also encourage participants to see Catholic morality as capacious enough to allow for a diversity of opinions on abortion and critique the hierarchy on theological grounds for failing to value or encourage individual moral thinking. Finally, in the conclusion, I suggest that Irish Values-Clarification workshops lay some critical groundwork for

the success of the national campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment in part by framing dissent with Catholic teachings as *engagement* with the Catholic Church.

A pro-choice Catholicism

Nearly a year after the referendum, I met the developer of the Catholics for Choice Values-Clarification Workshop, Jonathan O'Brien, in his office in Washington, DC. Though he had been living in the US for just over two decades, he had grown up in Ireland and made a name for himself in the early 1990s for his work with the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA). At the time, contraception could only legally be sold in pharmacies or in family planning clinics and not to anyone under the age of 18. The IFPA, in defiance of this law, had started to sell condoms at its "safe sex information counter" at the Virgin Records Megastore in Dublin (Miller, 2014, p. 178). In 1992, O'Brien was arrested by an undercover police officer for selling him a condom and was later tried and convicted (Miller, 2014, pp. 178–179). His conviction soon became a cause célèbre. Virgin Megastore Group Head Richard Branson attended the hearings and publicly expressed his horror that, in the midst of the AIDS crisis, the Irish state had chosen to pursue charges against the IFPA for selling condoms, and soon after, the rock band U2 offered to pay the court-ordered fines on behalf of the IFPA (Enright and Cloatre, 2018, pp. 272–273). The next year, the laws restricting the sale of condoms were overruled. Soon after, Jonathan O'Brien took a job with the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and in 1996, he moved to the United States in order to work with Catholics for Choice, a pro-choice advocacy organization founded in 1973, shortly before Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in the United States (Miller, 2014, p. 179).

The feminist theologians who founded Catholics for Choice - Joan Harriman, Patricia Fogarty McQuillan, and Meta Mulcahy – sought to leverage their theological knowledge to assert the moral legitimacy of a pro-choice position within Catholicism and to challenge the

Catholic hierarchy's efforts to suppress dissent about abortion (Miller, 2014). In the 1980s and 1990s, when the Catholic hierarchy began to align itself with the Christian Right, CFC adopted a second mission: resist the hierarchy's efforts to translate its doctrine on sexuality and reproduction into law, both within and outside the United States. In the decades since its founding, CFC has worked with medical professionals, political representatives, grassroots activists, family planning associations, and feminist organizations from countries around the world to communicate about abortion, contraception, and pregnancy in ways that recognize and respect the complexity of reproductive decision-making while affirming the moral capacity of all people to make decisions about their own lives.

A key theological principle guiding CFC's work is the *primacy of conscience*. According to the CFC, "at the heart of church teachings on moral matters is a deep regard for an individual's conscience" (Catholics for Choice [CFC], 2011, p. 4). Many of the organization's publications quote directly from the Catholic Catechism that "a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1997, para. 1790). Certain judgment on a moral matter requires considerable research and self-reflection, and CFC concurs with orthodox teachings on the formation of a moral conscience that Catholics are obliged to learn and thoughtfully consider the teachings they receive from the hierarchy. However, they argue that if an individual, after much deliberation, comes into conflict with orthodox teachings, that individual "not only may but must follow the dictates of conscience rather than the teachings of the Church" (McBrien, 1994 as cited in CFC, 2011, p. 4).

CFC suggests that a critique of Catholic orthodox doctrine on abortion is well-warranted. While the Catechism claims that "the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion [since the first century]" and that "this teaching has not changed and remains

unchangeable", CFC argues that this is incorrect; the reasons for the Church's opposition to abortion have changed dramatically (CCC, 1997, para. 2271; CFC, 2011, pp. 4-5). For centuries, they say, the Church had little concern for the fetus; in fact, two of Catholicism's preeminent theologians, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, argued that the fetus in early pregnancy did not constitute a person (CFC, 2011, p. 5). The church's early prohibitions on abortion were based on the idea that only people who wanted to end a pregnancy were those who had engaged in forbidden sexual activity. In other words, this opposition to abortion was concerned primarily with restricting sex to married couples and for the primary purpose of procreation. Because abortion "perverted" sex, it was immoral - in the same way that, according to Church teachings, contraception perverts sex (Dombrowski and Deltete, 2000, as cited in CFC, 2011, p. 5). Only later did church officials come to oppose abortion from the ontological perspective that the fetus is a person from the "moment of conception", a position that the CFC asserts relies on faulty 17th century science. One CFC pamphlet explains: "…[those] scientists, looking at fertilized eggs through magnifying glasses and primitive microscopes, imagined that they saw tiny, fully formed animal fetuses" (CFC, 2011, p. 5).

Further, CFC argues that the teaching authority of the church depends not only on the pronouncements of the Catholic hierarchy but also includes the "scholarly efforts of theologians and the lived experience of Catholic people" (CFC, 2011, p. 7). In particular, CFC calls for greater recognition of the "principle of reception" - the idea that for a church teaching or law to be an effective guide for the faithful, it must be accepted by the community; the "obligatory force of church law" relies, in part, on how that law is received by Catholics (Coriden, 1990 as cited in CFC, 2011, pp. 7-8). Catholics around the world, CFC states, drawing on a number of sources of survey data, have soundly rejected the hierarchy's teaching on contraception, and the

majority also disagree with the hierarchy on abortion (CFC, 2014; Catholics for a Free Choice, 2004). This dissent, CFC suggests, should not be ignored or glossed over by the hierarchy but instead should prompt a church-wide discussion of the institution's teachings on reproduction - a discussion that ought to include laypeople.

These arguments, I argue, have been taken up by Irish people through their participation and replication of the CFC Values-Clarification Workshop designed by O'Brien. O'Brien told me that the workshop he developed is not exclusively a Catholic workshop and not exclusively a Catholic resource. It's designed, he said, to get people to reflect on their own values and to thoughtfully consider an array of perspectives on reproductive and moral decision-making. The Irish activist organizations that adapted this workshop, too, never characterized it as "religious" or about Catholicism. Nonetheless, I suggest Irish adaptations of CFC's Values-Clarification Workshop introduced hundreds, if not thousands, of participants to several new ideas about Catholicism: that it places a high value on the individual conscience, that Church teachings can be in tension with each other, and that moral authority in the Catholic Church belongs not only to the hierarchy but to the laypeople who make up the majority of the church.

Clarifying (Catholic) values

When I arrived in Dublin in the fall of 2017, several pro-repeal and feminist organizations had developed their own iterations of the CFC Values-Clarification Workshop, and they had recruited staff and volunteers to deliver the trainings around the country. Hundreds of people, both women and men, attended these trainings between 2016 and the spring of 2018. The majority of participants were affiliated with abortion rights groups, as volunteers or friends-of-volunteers, but some facilitators held workshops for "whoever asked" - a group of university students, a community of Traveller women, an organization for migrant women, and many, many loosely collected sets of acquaintances and friends. "Once I set up in one place," a trainer

told me, “then they [a participant] would tell their WhatsApp group, and then they would ask me to come, and then like - so it kind of just kept going.” There was a single woman in Cork, she said, who had invited her to facilitate two or three workshops: “she just kept having me down there, she was like, more people need to hear this, more people need to hear this.” As it became apparent that the then-government planned to hold a public referendum on the Eighth Amendment, the demand for workshops grew. “From the start of [2018] til early February,” another trainer told me, he and his organization’s other trainers had delivered the training to “about 10 people a day” - nearly 400 people.

There were only a small number of trainers delivering versions of the CFC Values-Clarification training workshop, and to preserve anonymity, I will describe them only in broad strokes: all the trainers I spoke with and/or observed were white, Irish, and aged between their late 20s and late 30s. The majority of trainers were women. Most delivered the trainings as part of their volunteer work and were unpaid; one did so as part of their employment. None of the trainers had children at the time, though some have had children since. The majority had been raised Catholic, and some had “remained faithful” through their teenage years, but all those who were raised Catholic now identified as either atheist or non-practicing. They typically did not disclose their religious identifications to participants in the workshop.

In order to become facilitators, they had all attended some version of the workshop themselves, and they had found it extremely compelling:

> “It’s really effective. Like, and it’s - the way it’s run, I find, fascinating. Like, it’s just so well thought out and respectful…it’s the way it was conceived, was to be inclusive, to be compassionate and nurturing, to be really effective at moving people’s opinions on abortion…like I - I didn’t really have like sort of concrete opinions on “free, safe, legal” [abortion] until the first time I went through this training, and then I was like, ‘fuck! It’s so simple when you put it like that!’”

And while most of the workshop participants did not identify as practicing Catholics, facilitators felt that, in the Irish context, it was particularly important to be able to communicate about the compatibility of a pro-choice perspective on abortion with Catholic moral thought. About 80% of Irish residents then identified as Catholic, but it was widely understood that only a fraction of this population - "less than a quarter", many people told me - attended mass regularly and remained committed to the core tenets of the faith (Central Statistics Office, 2017, p. 72). The recent scandals surrounding Church-run institutions - revelations of widespread physical and sexual abuse of children, the maltreatment of unmarried mothers, forced adoptions, and repeated cover-ups – had weakened trust in the Catholic hierarchy. Still, adults who had been raised Catholic, even if they now did not practice or only rarely attended mass, often still felt hesitant about directly challenging the moral positions of the hierarchy. The structure and content of the values-clarification workshops, however, seemed to empower people to overcome this hesitancy.

In the following sections, I will describe the activities that were involved in the values-clarification workshops to show how they facilitated this transformation. I suggest that the workshops gave participants the information necessary to understand freedom of conscience as a Catholic value. This would enable them, in conversations with Catholic family and friends, to challenge the hierarchy's teachings on abortion and to advocate for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment from a Catholic perspective, on the grounds that allowing women to exercise their moral autonomy required allowing them to exercise their reproductive autonomy.

A history of abortion in Ireland

Values-Clarification workshops often began with an educational component, such as the "Timeline of Abortion" discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The Catholics for Choice guide - *Abortion Values, Perspectives, and Realities: a Guide to Facilitating a Values-*

Clarification Workshop (2008) - did not specifically recommend this practice, but Irish facilitators felt that most participants needed to be educated about the Irish legal system and the debates surrounding the state's regulation of reproduction in order to understand how a prohibition on abortion had come to be a part of the state's constitution. "We have terrible civic education in Ireland", one trainer told me. For her own workshops, she had developed an "education pack" that included an introduction to the Irish system of law and governance. "People don't really know about *Bunneacht Na hEireann*" she said, and so she typically started her workshops by explaining that the Constitution is a document that "belongs to the people" of Ireland, outlining their rights and protections. These principles, she would stress to workshop participants, can be changed as "we [the voters] see fit", meaning that all proposed reforms must be approved in a public referendum before becoming law. This meant of course that the Eighth Amendment existed because the majority of Irish people in 1983 had voted in favor of it. It also meant that the Eighth Amendment could be reversed if the majority of the voting public found that the prohibition on abortion did not align with their values.

Though the educational component could take different forms - usually timeline or lecture, with some guided discussion - the trainers I met all provided their participants with an overview of Irish legislation on reproduction. The inclusion of an abortion prohibition in the Constitution, they showed, had come about in response to international and domestic reforms that threatened the idea that sex should only take place within marriage and for the purpose of reproduction.

Abortion had in fact already been prohibited in Ireland since it had been under British rule; the 1861 Offenses Against the Person Act had been incorporated into Irish law after the establishment of the independent Republic. Yet by the 1970s, there were hopes - and concerns -

that the global spread of the Sexual Revolution would threaten the state's constitutional commitments to protecting both marriage and the family, laws that had been grounded in the language of the Catholic Catechism. In 1967, the British parliament passed the United Kingdom Abortion Act, legalizing abortion in England, Scotland, and Wales (but not Northern Ireland); six years later, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Roe v. Wade* that abortion should be accessible under the right to privacy. Shortly thereafter, the Irish Supreme Court similarly used the right to (marital) privacy to defend a woman's right to purchase contraceptive jelly from overseas. In 1979, facing mounting pressure, the Irish government legalized the sale of contraceptives for family planning purposes and by doctor's prescription only, which the public largely interpreted to mean that only married couples could access contraception. Still, the legalization of contraception provoked an enormous backlash, and in an effort to prevent the further liberalization of reproductive policies, anti-abortion activists successfully campaigned for a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion, known as the Eighth Amendment. The text of the amendment read:

> "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right" (Republic of Ireland, Article 40.3.3)

If its proponents thought the Eighth Amendment would protect sex within marriage for the primary purpose of reproduction, they were quite mistaken. Facilitators, whether lecturing or through the timeline activity, traced Supreme Court cases, constitutional referenda, and state laws to show how the strict regulation of contraception and abortion was gradually weakened. In the mid-1980s, it became legal for pharmacists to sell contraceptives without a prescription (Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Act 1985), and in the early 1990s, they could be widely

sold in non-medical settings (Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Act 1993). Around the same time, the Supreme Court ruled that suicide constituted a threat to the "life of the mother", and so women threatening suicide were entitled to receive abortions (after significant psychiatric evaluation) (*Attorney General v X* [1992] 1 IR 1). Shortly thereafter, the Eighth Amendment was amended - again, by popular referendum - to make it legal for people to travel outside of the state for an abortion and to receive information about abortion services outside of the state (The Regulation of Information (Services outside the State for the Termination of Pregnancies) Act 1995).

But it was also immediately apparent that the prohibition on abortion was neither protecting the right to life of the mother nor was it preventing sex outside of marriage. Facilitators showed this by discussing three high-profile and controversial deaths that had occurred since the public referendum on the Eighth Amendment in 1983: in 1983, Sheila Hodgers, whose doctors stopped her breast cancer treatment for fear it would harm her pregnancy; in 1984, Ann Lovett, a 15-year-old who concealed her pregnancy and died after giving birth alone; and in 2012, Savita Halappanavar, who learned she was suffering an inevitable miscarriage but was nonetheless refused an abortion and developed an infection that turned septic.

Facilitators also pointed to recent judgments and commentary from the United Nations expressing concern about Ireland's prohibition on abortion. In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) found that Ireland's abortion laws negatively impacted girls' human rights and recommended liberalizing its laws, including the Eighth Amendment (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. 13) . Later that year, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), in the case of *Amanda Mellet v. Ireland*, ruled that the state's denial of abortion services

for a woman whose fetus was diagnosed with a condition that would result in miscarriage or in death shortly after birth constituted "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment" and violated her privacy (UN Human Rights Committee, 2016, sections 7.6 and 7.8). The state was compelled to pay Mellet €30,000 and at the HRC's urging, began a process of re-evaluating the Eighth Amendment.

The Catholic hierarchy, clergy, and orthodox lay Catholic activists were largely absent from the histories that were delivered or collectively compiled in these workshops. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, all three were very much involved in the development of the Eighth Amendment and its successful incorporation into the Constitution. Trainers were aware of this history, too. One facilitator, in an interview, gave me part of the history she wished she could have delivered, on the role of the Knights of Saint Colombanus, a Catholic fraternal organization, in the successful passing of the Eighth Amendment:

> So they started this wildly successful amendment campaign, and it was the Knights of Colambanus and they just went, it just went - it was unbelievable that they managed to systematically go through - the Knights of Colombanus were like the fuckin' Illuminati; they had people everywhere, and they just went from place to place to place, drumming up support. And they never had to be the front of it; they just got other people to do it

However, she said that she was committed to remaining "unbiased" and refrained from sharing more than simply the facts. "I had to be completely impartial," she explained, "My role was to stand there, and as a legal person, explain all of these things, not saying if they were right or wrong, just saying these are the facts of what happened, and then at the end of it, take any questions they have."

But the presence of Catholicism was not erased altogether from these accounts. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, reproductive healthcare, Church teachings, and Catholic

institutions have been closely intertwined, and so it seems to me impossible to tell a history of abortion or the legislation of reproduction without including the Catholic context that shaped women's reproductive lives. In the stories of each high-profile death recounted at the workshop, Catholicism made an appearance:

> Sheila Hodgers, who was pregnant and suffering from breast cancer, dies in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda two days after delivering her pregnancy two months premature. Her baby dies almost immediately after birth. Sheila Hodgers' cancer treatment had been stopped by the hospital, which claimed it would harm the pregnancy. She had also been denied an x-ray and pain relief.
>
> Ann Lovett: A 15 year old schoolgirl with a concealed pregnancy gives birth alone in a grotto in County Longford. The young girl and the new born baby are later found dead in the grotto.
>
> Savita Halappanavar dies in Galway University Hospital in circumstances where she was refused a termination during inevitable miscarriage because a foetal heartbeat was detectable. The report into her death found over-emphasis on the need not to intervene until the foetal heart stopped, together with under-emphasis on managing the risk of infection and sepsis.

Sheila Hodgers died at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, which had been founded and operated by a Catholic religious order, the Medical Missionaries of Mary. Ann Lovett, it was later revealed, had become pregnant through rape, but concealed the pregnancy, likely out of shame; in the Ireland of the early 1980s, "unmarried mothers" were heavily stigmatized and often concealed their pregnancies from their families and communities by taking up residence in a church-run Mother and Baby Home (Hogan, 2019). Lovett did not do so, but instead climbed to the grotto overlooking her village, where she died giving birth beneath a shrine to the Virgin Mary. The activity slip did not need to specify this; most people in Ireland would understand "grotto" to mean a Catholic shrine set into a rock-face. Decades later, Savita Halappanavar, an Indian dentist who had migrated to Galway, was told by a nurse that the reason she was refused

an abortion was that "this is a Catholic country"; this wasn't strictly accurate, but it was nonetheless a key part of the controversy surrounding Savita's death.

I want to argue that the workshops, in highlighting these cases as significant events in the history of Irish abortion legislation, suggest that the orthodox Catholic ethos that has shaped reproductive legislation and healthcare in Ireland, which is focused on the protection of the fetus and the preservation of sex within marriage, has failed pregnant women in Ireland.

Yet, as I showed in the introduction to this chapter, these were not the sole mentions of Catholicism. The inclusion of St. Brigid's miracle suggests to workshop participants that there exists a Catholic ethics of reproduction outside of that which dominated Irish society in the 19th and 20th centuries. And through the workshop's subsequent activities, this new Catholic ethics is explained and explored.

Whose morality? The Church and individual moral autonomy

After a brief break for tea and chat, the focus of the workshop would turn to the views of the participants. In the Catholics for Choice Values-Clarification guide, the activity takes the form of a survey to be completed individually; participants are presented with a series of declarative statements, and they must indicate whether they "agree", "don't know", or "disagree" (CFC, 2008). The declarative statements are separated into two categories: "Abortion Legality and Morality" and "Personal Views about Abortion". The section on "Abortion Legality and Morality" asks participants whether abortion should be legal in a variety of circumstances, such as "if the woman's life is at risk" and "on request; it is a woman's right", and also asks participants to consider whether abortion is moral "only in serious circumstances,", "for a wide range of reasons", or simply "never". The second half of the survey, "Personal Views about Abortion", encourages participants to think about their attitudes about abortion within the

broader social context of reproductive decision-making. Rather than focusing solely on "mother" and "child", the declarative statements in this section require participants to consider who should and should not be involved in the pregnant person's decision to have an abortion. The statements sometimes ask participants to reflect on their personal views about others' decisions - for example, "I support legal abortion, but I wish more women used contraception and did not need abortion" or "A woman should not have an abortion unless her partner agrees." At other times, the statements invite participants to consider what their response would be in hypothetical scenarios: "If my teenage daughter became pregnant, I would support her decision to have an abortion." The guidebook suggests that these surveys be completed early in the workshop, to allow the facilitator to tabulate and present the results later in the day. It notes that the questions "might need to be adapted if certain issues related to abortion are high profile in the country or the organization."

In fact, the trainers I met with in Ireland had not only adapted the questions but transformed the activity from a "5-minute survey" completed individually to a group activity. The specific form of the activity varied depending both on the hosting organization and on the size of the participating group. One organization, for example, divided the room with a line of tape on the floor, marking one side "Agree" and the other "Disagree"; when a trainer read a declarative statement aloud, all participants would indicate their agreement or disagreement by moving to the appropriate side of the room. They could demonstrate greater "strength" of their opinion by moving further from the dividing line, and participants who were uncertain about their viewpoint or needed greater reflection could stand on the line itself. Another organization taped a long piece of string to the wall and marked one end "I strongly agree" and the other "I strongly disagree". As the trainer read declarative statements aloud, participants would place a

sticker representing themselves to the appropriate location along the string.

For trainers in both organizations, it was important that participants' perspectives not be anonymous, as they would have been with the Catholics for Choice survey. As one trainer, Miriam, told me, they wanted to use the workshops to normalize talking openly about abortion, because many attendees (as well as trainers) had never had the opportunity. "There was so much silence," she said, a silence only broken occasionally by the chants of activists or whispers of a friend or relative who "needed to travel". The group activity form encouraged participants who might never have publicly discussed their own views on abortion to try it out in an environment where the point was not to judge whether their views were "right" or "wrong" but simply to reflect on their views and on the question of abortion with others who wanted to do the same.

The declarative statements had been adapted to reflect contemporary discourses about abortion in Ireland. Trainers often began by issuing a statement like "I agree/disagree that abortion should be legal if the woman's life is at risk". This allowed participants to express a personal perspective on abortion that was in keeping with Irish law as well as with the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Trainers would then go on to present statements about the so-called "hard cases" - a short gloss for pregnancies resulting from rape, pregnancies resulting from incest, and pregnancies where the fetus had presented with abnormalities that would likely result in miscarriage or death shortly after delivery. As discussed in the Introduction, the vast majority of people in Ireland agreed that abortion should be made legal for these cases, and this held true at Values Clarification workshops, as well.

After participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with the declarative statement, some trainers offered additional context. For example, when all participants at a training I attended stepped over the line to "agree" that people whose pregnancies had resulted

from rape ought to have access to abortion, one of the trainers explained that people in Ireland - including many politicians - have argued that the nation should keep the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on abortion but make a "rape exception". However, she explained, they rarely think about the logistics of giving access only to people who have been raped; either doctors would have to provide abortions to anyone who said that they had been raped or they would demand some kind of evidence. *That would mean that if you became pregnant from rape, you would have to report it to the Gardaí,* she explained, *and maybe pursue criminal charges. Not everyone is in a position to do that. And what if "proof of rape" means a guilty verdict?* She asked. *We all know how likely that is.* There was a collective groan of frustration. *And even if you did manage to get a guilty verdict*, a participant said wryly, *by then you'd be bringing your baby to court!*

Other declarative statements provoked more division. Even among groups who broadly supported the legalization of abortion in Ireland, participants had diverse opinions about whether the gestational age of the fetus should be a factor in abortion access, whether minors ought to be able to access abortion without parental permission, and whether access to abortion should be determined by the reason for the request. Miriam recounted that there were two reasons for abortion that made many of her participants uneasy or even angry: first, "I believe a woman should have access to abortion if doctors detect a genetic condition in the fetus that will lead to a serious disability", and second, "I believe a woman should have access to abortion for socioeconomic reasons". "They *hated* those," she told me, "they just felt those [reasons] were wrong", but the debates among participants that these statements generated could be, in her view, productive for fostering empathy.

Yet to Miriam's surprise, the declarative statement that provoked the most outrage was one that required participants to take a stance on the morality of abortion. When she read aloud

"abortion can never be moral", she recalled, "people went *mad*." Everywhere, she recalled, even amongst groups of participants who wanted broad access to abortion, people responded furiously. "People were angry at me for asking this question," she told me, laughing, "and I was like, you just put down whether you agree or disagree, and then we would have a discussion about it". It was through those discussions that she realized why her participants were reluctant to bring morality into a conversation about abortion access:

> And I would say, but why? And they would say, morality has to do with the church; it has nothing to do with me. So then we would have to pull that apart. And I would be like, do you think you are a moral person? Do you think that you have ever made a decision outside of your own moral [guidance] - we kind of go through the whole idea of like personal morality. And - what I got from most people - was they didn't think abortion was moral, but they didn't think that that was relevant. And we would talk that through, and that basically was, morality is the Church, and the Church says it's wrong, so I'm not going to say that it's moral, but - I think I should still have the right to decide what's happening.

Most of these participants identified as "raised Catholic"; they no longer practiced, but they still felt morality belonged to the domain of the Church. It was like they had "schismed" in their brain, Miriam said, "morality is over here, and that's to do with the Church", and so abortion could never be moral. But the fact that it wasn't moral was not relevant to their determinations about whether to have an abortion or to what extent abortion access should be made legal.

Yet because the purpose of the exercise was to have participants gain clarity about their own moral thinking on abortion, Miriam would press on, asking questions that prompted participants to consider the relationship between morality and the decisions they make: "Do you believe yourself to be a moral person? How does your morality show? Have you ever made a decision outside of your own morals? Would you make a decision outside of your own morals? Do you believe that a person can have morals?" They were leading questions, she admitted, but

"it was very much about getting them to, 'oh, actually I do have morals' - otherwise there's no point in me telling them that [abortion] is a moral decision." It was also significant that these discussions often occurred amongst groups of friends and acquaintances, Miriam felt, because participants knew each other's personal histories and could therefore encourage each other to reflect on their decisions in a way Miriam could not. When a participant couldn't bring herself to call her own decisions "moral", her friends would usually intervene.

> Their friends would go, 'ah, come on, of course you have your morals'…and a lot of them would say 'you don't go to church, but you still have your morals, like you wouldn't go steal a car now, would you?

Before talking it out in this way, Miriam said, many participants "really felt that they had no authority to speak on morals. But by the end of these conversations, in every one of her workshops, the mood would shift, and "everyone felt they were allowed to have a say as to what was or was not moral".

Answering difficult questions and defending dissent

The final activity of the Values-Clarification Workshop encouraged participants to build on the knowledge they had gleaned about the history of abortion and about their own values to articulate their own answers to questions (or accusations) that might come up when speaking with friends, family, and - if they were activists - the general public about abortion. The Catholics for Choice workshop guide, which is designed for larger organizations, suggests selecting a "panel" of 5-6 participants who will then respond to a series of "tough questions" posed by the remaining participants. Irish trainers, however, modified the activity; they would have participants form pairs and pose a set of "difficult questions" to each other. Many Irish participants had heard iterations of these questions before, sometimes at home or among friends, and certainly in the public debates that regularly took place on radio and television programs.

But the trainers were conscious that many had never had the opportunity to formulate and practice their responses in a private and encouraging setting, and they were keen to give each participant the opportunity to do so.

Each pair of participants would be handed a 9-page document of "Difficult Questions" that had been designed specifically for the Irish context by Jonathan O'Brien of Catholics for Choice, in partnership with his former colleagues at the Irish Family Planning Association. One participant would read a "question" - often a multiple-sentence combination of statements and questions - to the other, who would imagine aloud how they would respond. The "asker" would then be given the opportunity to practice answering the question themselves. Then, both participants would turn back to the document to read the suggested response, and they would discuss what elements of the response they would like to incorporate into their own conversations going forward.

When I first attended a training, after only a couple of months in the field, I was struck by how many of the "questions" I had already encountered in casual conversations about abortion with Catholics in the lay adult faith formation groups discussed in chapter 4. Some of these directly addressed the teaching that the "life within the womb" has full personhood from conception and that ending that life therefore constitutes murder:

> The Foetus is a person from the moment of conception. I care about the mother too, but you can't ignore - or kill - the little person inside her.
>
> You would not kill a baby after it has been born. What's the difference between the foetus one day before birth and one day after birth? Murder is murder.
>
> Abortion does unspeakable horrors to little babies in their mothers' wombs. Look at this picture of a foetus that has been torn limb from limb before it was killed.

The suggested responses to these “questions” provided participants with a few different strategies, but here I want to focus on the response to the first in order to show how the document challenges this teaching while still claiming a Catholic moral perspective:

> Well, that might be your personal point of view, but as a Catholic, let me tell you that this is not the catholic position. If one studies Catholicism carefully one will find that the Catholic Church says that it does not know when the foetus becomes a person. Therefore, we as Catholics believe that individuals should be able to follow their own consciences on abortion.
>
> Women and foetuses are not comparable beings. All life, including foetal life has value, but the exercise of rights entails complex social interactions that only persons, including women, can enter into. To grant an absolute right to life to foetuses in all stages of development from a single cell to viability, is to relegate women's lives, health and capacities below their reproductive capacity. In Ireland, women's rights are ignored because of an absolute value on foetuses and this punishes women.
>
> I respect your belief, but in fact - most of the world's scientific, medical, legal and religious communities do not share that view. Even the Vatican says that science and medicine cannot tell when the foetus becomes a person. Different religions and different societies present different ideas. There is no definitive statement on which everyone agrees. This is why in the US when the Supreme Court considered the question of foetal personhood in Roe v. Wade, the court concluded it was "not in a position to speculate as to the answer."
>
> The idea that a fertilized egg is a person can be traced back to faulty science from the 17th century when scientists looked at fertilized eggs through primitive magnifying equipment and imagined they saw tiny, fully formed animal foetuses
>
> Society will not likely settle this question in our lifetimes, and we are certainly not going to settle it tonight. Good people will disagree. The questions is: What kind of law should we have when a respectable diversity of views both scientific and religious - exists on the status of the foetus? I think it is unjust and unworkable for the law to forbid something that is widely accepted.
>
> While we really have no consensus in society on when the foetus becomes a person, we do agree that the pregnant woman is a person. She is the one who must decide under what circumstances it would be morally justifiable for her to have an abortion. She has to make her own decisions.

> No matter what value you place on foetal life, you cannot ignore the consequences of illegal abortion on the quality of a woman's life. When women are deprived of information and the ability to decide to have or not have a legal, safe abortion, they suffer, men suffer and children suffer - everybody suffers when abortion is illegal

For most Irish participants who were raised Catholic, this is an astonishing response. It encourages the respondent - presumably a layperson - to defy teachings they have likely heard from the Catholic hierarchy and to claim to have more expert knowledge on Catholic understandings of personhood than their priests and religious instructors. Twice, the response asserts that the Catholic Church does not, in fact, teach that personhood begins at the moment of conception. This assertion is technically accurate; Catholic catechism teaches that *life* begins at the moment of conception and that all life is valuable and that pre-natal life must be protected and treated as a person, but the Catholic hierarchy has stated that it cannot conclude definitively when full personhood begins.

The response, echoing CFC's literature, traces the origins of this association of personhood and conception to inferences from 17th century science, suggesting that those who do equate personhood with conception are, probably unknowingly, relying on long-outdated ideas. It suggests there are a variety of stances on when developing life becomes a person, and there is no clear agreement, either within Catholicism or outside of it.

The response also introduces the idea of "primacy of conscience" - that Catholics can rely on their conscience for complex moral questions, as long as they take the time to consult and consider the issue. The response itself then illustrates what informing one's conscience can look like: the text turns to the hierarchy's teachings to distinguish between life and personhood; it draws (presumably) on historical research to conclude that the notion that full personhood begins

at conception relies on outdated and incorrect scientific observations; it assesses scientific research and other religious and ethical sources to determine whether there is any sort of consensus on when the developing fetus can be considered a person and concludes that there is not. The response then observes that while there is not a consensus on whether a fetus is a person, there is consensus that women are full people. And as full people, the response reasons, they have the same right as the respondent to inform and then act on their conscience when it comes to making decisions about the morality of abortion.

Through issuing such a response, a person challenges the moral authority of the hierarchy and other anti-abortion lay Catholics by critiquing their elision of life and personhood. More significantly, though, the response allows participants to challenge the moral authority by asserting the primacy of the individual layperson's conscience. This challenge is both direct and indirect: the person directly claims that their well-informed conscience has greater moral authority than the teachings of the hierarchy; the person also indirectly critiques the hierarchy for not following its own teaching on the primacy of conscience. If the hierarchy were to follow this teaching, then it would encourage every human person to follow their conscience on complex moral matters, and that would mean encouraging pregnant people to make their own well-informed moral decisions about abortion.

This connection between individual moral autonomy and reproductive autonomy is reinforced throughout the document. The suggested response to "What's the difference between the foetus one day before birth and one day after birth" states, correctly, that abortions do not occur that close to expected due dates; at that stage of pregnancy it would be possible to induce delivery. But the response then reiterates the idea that there's no clear point at which pregnancy becomes person: "the foetus develops as the pregnancy develops - there is a big difference

between that cell on day one and a foetus at a later gestation." With no clear answer as to whether the fetus is a person or at what point that transformation occurs, each individual person must make their own ethical decision: "We want each individual woman to make a decision at the time that suits her on the basis of what she knows and believes."

If a pregnant person cannot make that decision, the document suggests, then they are effectively forced to follow someone else's moral guide rather than their own. This point is raised as part of the response to the "question": "Abortion does unspeakable horrors to little babies in their mothers' wombs. Look at this picture of a foetus that has been torn limb from limb before it was killed"

The suggested response first acknowledges that abortion does end fetal life and that abortion can be a "sad event". The text then asks the questioner to consider what the absence of safe and legal abortion would mean for the life of the pregnant person, arguing that "women experience horrific circumstances when forced to carry a pregnancy to term".

Sometimes participants bristled at the acknowledgement that abortion can end a fetal life and that this can be sad. Trainers reported that younger abortion rights activists often resisted efforts to describe the developing fetus as "life", even "potential life", for fear this would undermine the pro-choice position. One facilitator recalled that some university students had "freaked out" at the suggestion that abortion killed a potential life. The facilitator endeavored to convince them avoiding this would do them no favors when trying to convince others:

> I'd say, well, this is what you're going to be told. And this is what you're going to come up against. And you can't argue that you haven't just intentionally ended a potential life. Now you have to defend that. There's no use pretending that abortion doesn't do that. Because if abortion didn't do that you wouldn't need it. And the whole you reason you have an abortion is you don't want to continue this potential life. But using the word potential in front of life is the key to that, because it's not yet life sustained on its own, and so, it was to try and get people

> to the point where you could be pro-choice and defend your position. Because so many people, I felt, have come to the point where they were pro-choice, but like that morality thing, they didn't really feel there was any backing to their claim; they just wanted, and they didn't want to have to interrogate their position because they were scared that if they interrogated their position then they wouldn't agree with it anymore.

Similarly, at a training I attended, facilitators gently encouraged participants to respect decisions of women to make the determination of how to understand the developing life inside them for themselves. *Plenty of parents, including pro-choice parents, think of the fetus as a person*, one trainer explained. *They name it; they think of it as their child, and if they lose it in miscarriage, it's a real loss - they grieve.* It was essential, the facilitators reasoned, to the diversity of views on personhood and not to gloss over the complexity of reproduction and human development that has led to that diversity. Pragmatically, this was important, too; many people who might be inclined to support broader access to abortion could easily be put off by pro-choice messaging that suggested or implied that fetal life has no value or is irrelevant.

In a similar vein, the document encouraged respondents to view the concept of a "right to life" is reductive and insufficient. One "difficult question" used the language of the Catechism to illustrate an anti-abortion talking point in Ireland frequently used to challenge "women's rights" and "human rights" discourses: "The right to life is the most fundamental of rights, on which all others depend."

The suggested response argues that conceptualizing the "right to life" as the "right to physical existence" sets the bar for human rights "far too low". In fact, the text says, the possibility for continued physical existence is often determined by the exercise of "real rights" that support human well-being and flourishing. "Grave harm", it reasons, can be done to children and adults when their needs and entitlements are equated with those of the fetus. The promotion

of the "right to life", the text says, leads to the "misconception that the best and only way of serving 'life' is to focus on the foetus, rather than on the rights of people in society."

At times, the document even directly critiques the Vatican for endeavoring to curtail individual autonomy by influencing reproductive legislation around the world in order to support the fetus's "right to life". In response to the prompt "Abortion is an instrument of population control. You people want abortion to be available so that you can keep poor people and minorities from having children", the text argues that "we oppose all coercion in reproductive matters" and that "we are for choices, freedom, and autonomy in these decisions" before challenging the "asker" to consider whether the Vatican itself endeavors to control the population. The Vatican, along with antiabortion advocates, the text suggests, seem "willing to force women to have children by denying family planning choice and legal abortion". A similar argument is suggested as a response to the prompt "Abortion is a radical feminist export and we don't want it here." After defending women's need for abortions worldwide, the suggested text reads:

> I'd like to turn the tables here and ask about the Vatican's exhortations. Certainly the Vatican is no stranger to trying to impose its doctrine on people around the world. What do you think about its attempts to shape public policies to conform to church teachings that forbid contraception and abortion?

As the text demonstrates, the organizations that held values-clarification workshops imagined that their participants would likely encounter arguments against abortion grounded on the hierarchy's teachings. Rather than discourage engagement with these arguments, the suggested responses on the "Difficult Questions" document provide workshop participants with theological reasons to support broadening access to abortion. The text, along with the other workshop activities, carved out a space for Catholics to see thoughtful dissent with the hierarchy

as not only permissible but exercising the Catholic value of informing and acting on one's conscience. Whether or not the participants themselves were practicing Catholics, the workshop enabled them to share with friends and family the idea that Catholicism did not have to involve following the moral dictates of the hierarchy - a welcome message for an increasingly skeptical population.

Dissent, autonomy, and Ireland's political future

The trainers of the Values-Clarification workshops were well aware that successfully repealing the Eighth Amendment would require convincing the majority of Irish voters to support legalizing an act that had been forbidden since before there had been an Irish state and to act against the teachings of the Catholic hierarchy who had for so long monopolized popular moral thinking on sex and reproduction in Ireland. Yet the trainers found the responses they received from their workshop participants encouraging. Not only did the workshops help to "really personalize things", as one trainer was told, but "people came away feeling like they had answers and they had ammunition - as in they were armed with facts now, and they had indisputable facts." The trainer elaborated: "…they had stuff that they could use then in their discussions with family and friends - and that was the whole point, it was, there's supposed to be open conversations that allowed you to [have] open conversations with other people." It wasn't simply the facts, another trainer recalled, but the workshop's emphasis on personal values made participants feel like it was possible to communicate their views on abortion with others who disagreed:

> I [have] had a couple of people come up to me afterwards and say "this has given me the words to have the conversations that I've always wanted to have"…I remember [a participant] saying something like, "I might be able to have this conversation with my brother without murdering him now."

For the small number of participants who were practicing Catholics, the workshop provided a moral framework that allowed them to reconcile their faith with their views on abortion. I spoke with Kathleen, a Catholic woman in her thirties who had "always" disagreed with the orthodox teachings on abortion but had largely compartmentalized her faith from her abortion advocacy. Late in her twenties, she said, she had attended a mass where the priests had invited a pro-life doctor to give a sermon on the evils of the contraceptive pill, which she had taken for some time in order to mitigate the severe pain she had from cramps during menstruation. The sermon had forced her to confront that her "belief system and the belief system of the faith [she] had jarred", at least on the surface. After attending a Values-Clarification workshop, however, she had come to recognize that her views on reproductive decision-making, while in opposition to Catholic orthodox teachings on the matter, could still be understood as grounded in Catholic moral thinking.

> And they had, you know, these really clear, concise arguments about infallibility and all of these teachings and everything. It was like, wait a minute, I am on the right track - these guys [the Catholic hierarchy] are off-kilter and shouldn't be preaching this. This isn't infallible teaching, this isn't right, and yeah, that was - that was really, really nice. It was - it was just really refreshing, and kind of gave me hope, I think?…it was nice to be able to just have this conversation around [abortion] and tease it out and reading [Catholics for Choice's] material and learning things I'd never known before.

Kathleen felt that the workshop, and the Catholics for Choice literature she consumed afterwards, allowed her to introduce others - family, friends, and strangers - to a Catholicism that they had never encountered before. There's an assumption in Ireland, she said, encouraged by many pro-life Catholic clergy and laypeople, that if you don't follow the hierarchy's teachings, "well, you're excommunicated, you're out of the club, you're punished." Laughing, she replied to this hypothetical set of interlocutors by claiming superior understanding of

Catholic theology and teachings: “And I’m like, no, actually, I’m not. Like, you know, reread the rules.” As part of her abortion rights activism, she began to speak and write about how broadening legal access to abortion aligned with the values of her faith. “If you take the core values of what this [Catholicism] is supposed to be about, then they actually fit and align with repeal,” she told me, “because….you know, that is kind of the whole messaging around being a good Catholic and a good Christian…it’s being kind to other people.”

Through this chapter, I have shown how the Values-Clarification workshops made it possible for participants like Kathleen to critique the Catholic hierarchy’s teachings on abortion by asserting their own moral authority as laypeople with well-informed moral consciences. To some extent, this work performed by workshop trainers - and those, like Kathleen, who carry forward the workshop’s messaging - parallels the work performed by the lay single women discussed in Chapter Four, who challenged the authority of the Catholic hierarchy to provide moral formation to the Irish public and to establish themselves as naturally superior educators. Yet the women who led Catholic evangelization and faith discussion groups asserted their moral authority while operating within and promoting orthodox Catholic teachings. The Values-Clarification workshops, however, claim moral authority for Catholic laypeople individually and collectively, regardless of gender, while challenging orthodox Catholic teachings; moreover, they claim that dissenting from orthodox Church teachings is, in fact, permissible within Catholic moral thinking.

In doing so, they made it possible for the majority Catholic population to shift their moral frameworks for thinking about abortion. While many Irish people had been taught that they could either adhere to orthodox teachings and remain good, moral Catholics, or reject orthodox teachings and become bad, sinful Catholics, the Values-Clarification workshops encouraged

people to see that it was possible to reject orthodox teachings, vote to expand legal access to abortion in Ireland, and still consider yourself a moral Catholic. The facilitators believed that holding Values-Clarification workshops around the country would increase the likelihood that the majority would be comfortable defying Church teachings in order to repeal the Eighth Amendment. “When we heard the referendum was coming,” one trainer told me, “I turned to [my co-facilitator] and said, can we just bring the entire country to [the workshop]? Just make it work? There’s going to be about 20% of people we’ll have to kick out of the room, but everyone else - we’ll get them there”.

Chapter 6 Campaigning for a More Compassionate, Caring Catholicism

Introduction

In the last chapters, we have seen how Irish people - in faith sharing groups and in pro-choice workshops - are creatively drawing on Catholic teachings and religious reasoning to claim greater moral authority for lay Catholics and to frame challenging Church teachings as a form of piety. This chapter now looks at similar efforts to remake Irish Catholicism in the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment.

I focus here on one strategy Together for Yes employed for securing the votes of the "middle ground": assuaging the religious concerns of Catholic undecided voters. To be undecided voters at all, these Catholics would not be fully committed to adhering to the hierarchy's teachings. However, as abortion rights activists learned in the Values Clarification Workshops (Chapter 5), some Catholics worried about the social and spiritual repercussions of challenging Church teachings on abortion. I argue that the pro-repeal campaigners eased voters' worries about disobeying the hierarchy by reconfiguring the campaign's main narrative of national transformation to frame voting "Yes" in the referendum as an opportunity for Catholics to transform the Irish Church to be more "caring and compassionate". In the following sections, I explore three ways the campaign circulated a message of religious transformation: through abortion stories that involved Catholicism; through the distribution and circulation of Catholics for Choice pamphlets; and through the social media presence of an organization established at the start of the campaign, Catholics Together for Yes.

The need for a kinder Church

It was one week before the polling date, and the "Get Together for Yes" tour had arrived in North Wexford. Since early May, a van of campaigners from headquarters had been traveling

around the country to support and energize regional TFY groups, particularly in regions where volunteers might not have robust local support. Every few mornings, a small group of volunteers would arrive at headquarters early to load extra pamphlets, posters, and merchandise into the tour van - along with attention-grabbing banners, large cardboard cutouts of the campaign logo, and, of course, the volunteers' small suitcases. On several occasions, when there was sufficient room in the van, I was permitted to join as an embedded researcher, as long as I agreed to help load and unload the materials from the vehicle.

Once the van was fully packed, we began the multi-hour drive to our destinations for the day. Usually, there would be an afternoon stop in a small town to provide extra bodies, pamphlets, and campaign badges for the local TFY group's information stall. After a couple hours of fielding questions from local voters and passing out campaign materials, the tour group would move on, arriving at a new location to set up an event called "Conversations for Choice", a panel and question-and-answer session featuring both local campaigners and "star" spokespeople. As these panels were open to the public, they often generated publicity for the local TFY group, which was especially important in areas with more "middle ground" voters, where pro-repeal campaigners sometimes struggled more to make their presence known.

I had initially assumed that the "Conversations" panels would be attended by both supporters of repeal and "soft Yes" middle ground voters, who were likely to vote yes but who remained hesitant about elective abortion for the first trimester. I was, however, mistaken: the audience of "Conversations" was typically made up of local activists, other committed "Yes" voters, and sometimes reporters. The panels did not appeal **to** middle ground voters directly; rather, the speakers communicated talking points, lines of argumentation, and narratives that would appeal to middle ground voters, and they encouraged Yes voters in attendance to take up

these discourses in conversations with their family, friends, and community members. If there were reporters at the event, their coverage of the speakers would also transmit these messages.

The panel was facilitated by a local activist, Lauren, who had started a Parents for Choice coffee morning with a friend the prior year. For two months, she said, it had been just her, her friend, and "a lot of cake and a lot of coffee" - but eventually others joined. Now, she said, "our group is an amazing group of diverse people":

> We have everybody from single mums, we have working mums, we have students, we have parents with three and four kids, and everyone is putting every bit in that they can, between work and school runs and college work and course work and homework for some of them!

About a dozen of these volunteers, clad in green hoodies that read "North Wexford Together for Yes", had joined the Conversations audience that evening. It was a smaller event than others I had attended - no more than 40 people total - but everyone seemed lively and energized. Most people seemed to know, or at least be familiar with, each other, but there were also some newcomers; they were greeted warmly at the door to the small hotel conference room where the event was held, offered a cup of tea or coffee, and escorted to open seats.

Seated behind a conference table that took up the width of the room, Lauren and the four featured speakers were surrounded by the branded merchandise we had brought from headquarters: a large cutout of the tour's hashtag, #gettogetherforyes; a vertical standing banner with the campaign name and logo; and three large cutout speech bubbles with the campaign name ("Together for Yes"), the location ("North Wexford"), and a campaign slogan ("She lives on your street"). Each of the speakers on the panel represented a different part of the campaign and conveyed different aspects of the campaign's messaging. Colm O'Gorman, the Executive Director of Amnesty International Ireland, characterized the Eighth Amendment not only as a "cause of grave and systemic human rights abuses here in Ireland on a daily basis" but also as

part of a long national history of treating women "as nothing more than incubators"; voting yes, he asserted, would begin "a process of finally dismantling that aspect - that shameful aspect of who we are and who we have been". Dr. Fionán Donohue, an obstetrician and member of Doctors Together for Yes, spoke from a medical perspective about the harms caused by the Eighth Amendment, explaining that the Amendment restricted his ability to care for his patients when they wanted - or needed - a termination until those patients were close to death. Orla O'Connor, a co-director of Together for Yes and the Director of the National Women's Council of Ireland, urged volunteers, for the last six days of the campaign, to have "as many conversations [about abortion] as you possibly can with somebody new - not with your circle of friends, but with somebody new" and to talk to people about coming out to vote. "It's going to be so tight," she said, "every single vote matters."

Many "Conversations" panels included a speaker who shared her personal experience of terminating her pregnancy. Their stories, Orla O'Connor said in her speech at North Wexford, allowed people to see the "reality of abortion". "It's so powerful," she explained, "because so many people in our cities and towns, they haven't really heard of the harshness the Eighth [has caused] or of what the experience is actually like when women are forced to travel." Most of the women (and some men) who shared their story on the tour had obtained terminations for what were considered exceptional circumstances; as I noted earlier, middle ground voters were generally supportive of expanding abortion access for the "hard cases": rape and incest, fatal fetal abnormality diagnoses, and when the pregnancy threatened the life of the mother.

On this occasion, Dr. Siobhán Donohue, the Chair of Terminations for Medical Reasons, served as that speaker. Below, I recount the speech she gave, which detailed her experience of receiving a diagnosis of a fatal fetal abnormality for a wanted pregnancy, making arrangements

for her accommodations and medical care in the United Kingdom, and traveling to Liverpool for an early induction. Her speech serves as an example of one of the many personal narratives about abortion that circulated throughout the campaign. It also demonstrates how people took up and reproduced the campaign's narrative of a national transformation, from a harmful past to a compassionate future, within their personal stories. Primarily, though, I share Siobhán's speech because her personal story, like several others circulating throughout the campaign, involved her Catholicism. In reproducing the campaign's narrative of a national transformation within her story, I argue, Siobhán also hinted at the possibility for a transformation in Irish Catholicism.

Siobhán's story

In September of 2011, on her third pregnancy, Siobhán had been diagnosed with a fatal fetal anomaly: anencephaly, a condition where the top of the fetus's head never forms. "Literally, no scalp, no skull, no brain," Siobhán explained to the audience, "These babies don't survive. They will either die during the pregnancy, or if they survive til delivery, they will die during delivery or shortly thereafter." In shock, she was advised by her GP to go home, speak with her husband, and consider her options for a couple of days.

She had two choices. If she stayed in Ireland, she could continue working with her current care team but she would have to continue the pregnancy for another twenty weeks, until delivery. If she decided to terminate the pregnancy, she would need to arrange to have the procedure take place in the UK. Her Irish medical team could not legally make a referral to a specialist; they could only refer her to the IFPA, who would give her the contact information of providers in Liverpool. She herself would have to arrange the appointment. She would also have to book flights and a few days' accommodation in Liverpool, arrange childcare for her children, pay for the procedure, approximately €5,000. She felt fortunate to have passports, the ability to

travel, the financial means to have termination as an option, she said - “many people don’t”.

It was not long before she made up her mind to arrange for a termination. In the two days between her scan and follow-up appointment, she had started to realize what continuing with the pregnancy would be like. At a child’s fourth birthday party, a friend asked if she was alright; she apparently looked a little pale. Siobhán, not wishing to disrupt the party, said she’d talk to her friend about it later. And then she realized that, if she continued the pregnancy, she would be having similar conversations for the next twenty weeks:

> And it became very apparent to me that this conversation would repeat itself everywhere you went. Taking the children to crèche, going to the supermarket, working as a GP. ‘Cause everywhere you go, even as a GP, when you’re pregnant, people talk to you about it. “When are you due?” “Do you know if it’s a boy or a girl?” Would you just pretend everything is okay and play along? Or would you need to tell the awful news every time? I would be able to operate as a GP. I wouldn’t be able to do anything. That, and I have two children to take care of. Just trying to move normally through my day-to-day life was becoming a torture.

Even the bodily experience of being pregnant was becoming intolerable. “I began to resent every feeling of my baby moving,” she told the audience. “That lovely feeling you get when you start to feel your baby moving? I started to resent that, because I knew this baby was not going to survive, and I knew I was not going to be able to continue with this pregnancy to term.” She told her doctor, and she and her husband began making the arrangements.

The journey to Liverpool felt surreal and isolating, she recalled. There was a “hen party” - a bachelorette party - on the plane with her and her husband, and the two felt disconnected, suspended in their grief, as they watched “normal life going on” around them. She dreaded the idea that other passengers might talk to her and ask about her travel; she imagined trying to awkwardly explain that they needed to travel “out of our own country” to receive healthcare. It was only when she arrived at hospital in Liverpool, Siobhán said, that she began to feel “a bit of

lightness":

"As soon as we got there," she said, "we were wrapped in a blanket of care and compassion". The midwives, nurses, and doctors treated her and her husband "with kindness, care, and with concern", continually expressing how sorry they were; reflecting, she remarked "they were more aware than we were of how awful this situation was, of having to travel outside your own country for needed care". They soon learned that because they had flown, if they wanted to return with their baby's remains, they would have to have the baby cremated, and they would also have to arrange for an undertaker to meet their plane in Dublin - "we had to involve yet another person in what should be a private event", she said resentfully.

The procedure was not referred to as an abortion, or even a termination; it was called a "compassionate induction of labor", Siobhán explained, "and that's exactly what it was." She described the process: she was given medication to start the procedure, and then had eight hours to walk around Liverpool "like tourists, with this heavy secret between us". She then returned to the hospital to deliver her baby, 19 weeks before her initial due date, "and as expected, he did not live." They named him TJ, and they were allowed to hold him. The hospital staff had covered the malformed part of his head with a tiny mitten, and "they took photographs and handprints and footprints and put it all together in a memory book for us." She paused for a moment, looking off to the side, before turning back to the audience: "They keep copies of the photographs in the hospital, in case anything happens to your originals. They think of everything."

One thing the hospital thought of was to ask Siobhán and her husband if they would like a priest, the hospital chaplain, to collect them after the surgery, and she said, "we said yes".

Her decision may have surprised some in the audience: an early induction is considered an abortion according to Catholic teachings, and it is a grave sin, worthy of excommunication.

For this reason, Catholic women who terminate their pregnancies after receiving an FFA diagnosis can be hesitant to talk to their priests about the matter, as Siobhán herself explained to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth while giving testimony on behalf of TFMR. "How do we arrange a funeral? Do we ask a priest to officiate?" She had asked then. "Some of us are afraid to tell the truth in case we are judged…" (TFMR, 2017a). The official report her organization submitted to the JOC elaborated on this predicament:

> For a lot of parents, receiving a blessing and having a religious service are important too. The acceptance of their Church is an important part in their spiritual recovery. However, many find themselves afraid to approach their priests. They do not want to lie but they are also afraid of rejection and condemnation.
> (TFMR, 2017b, pp. 11–12)

The elderly priest did not condemn Siobhán. "A kinder man I have not met in a long time," she told the audience, "again, just purely full of care and compassion." She did not relay what he had said to her in the immediate aftermath of the termination, but the interaction had been profoundly meaningful to her, and on her return to Ireland, she told several friends about the experience. One tracked him down for her, and Siobhán and her husband later returned to England to meet with him again. She described this second meeting:

> He said, in situations like mine, he felt he would like to be Jesus to us. That we didn't need anybody's judgment; we just needed someone's compassion, and that's what he offered: pure compassion.

The "deep sadness" of losing her wanted child, Siobhán said, was not the hardest part of her experience: it was the compassion and care she received, and that other Irish women received, in the United Kingdom. "We have this opportunity," she said, alluding to the referendum, "to take care of people in these circumstances in our community." In her final remarks, she again spoke of the referendum in terms of an opportunity for social change, echoing the campaign's narrative that a "Yes" vote bring about a more caring and compassionate Irish society:

> So I really feel, that this day next week, this huge opportunity we have to bring that compassion home to Ireland. To show the women and families of this country that we actually care for them. That we give a damn.

Compassion, "being Jesus," and transforming Irish Catholicism

The conclusion of Siobhán's speech, like the main narrative of Together for Yes, represented the referendum as a potential site of national transformation. With a Yes vote, she suggested, the nation would no longer be a place that harmed women like her by forcing her to continue with a pregnancy that would result in a dead child or to leave her home, her family, and her medical team - at significant financial cost - to terminate her pregnancy in England. With a Yes vote, the Eighth Amendment would be removed, and the harms it caused would be eliminated. Moreover, through voting Yes, Irish voters would demonstrate that they had compassion for women who wanted to end their pregnancies and that they would ensure those women received care in Ireland - or, to paraphrase Siobhán, that they gave a damn.

Siobhán's full story, however, reconfigured the campaign's narrative of national transformation; in her telling, this referendum represented a potential site not only for historic change but also for the importation of values from outside Irish borders. Within her personal narrative, she did not receive the support she needed in Ireland; legally, her doctors could not provide it. It was only once she arrived in Liverpool, she said, that she was "wrapped in a blanket of compassion and care" - by her doctors, by the hospital staff, and by the priest who comforted her and her husband after the procedure. Her description of the referendum as an "opportunity to bring that compassion home" reinforced the idea that compassion was located outside Irish borders. Voting yes was an opportunity to bring *outside* values *in*.

I also see another, more subtle reconfiguration of the campaign narrative in Siobhán's story, in which the referendum could be understood as the site for a potential change in Irish

Catholicism. This reconfiguration rests on the speech's association of compassion with "being Jesus". In the context of her story, it is the Liverpool priest who makes this association when he explains why he had comforted her and her husband, when Siobhán had just terminated her pregnancy; he felt he needed to "be Jesus" to them, which he defined in terms of showing compassion, of suffering alongside those who are suffering. The characterization of Jesus as compassionate is standard within Catholicism. In scripture, Jesus feels the suffering of others: he has compassion for the "harassed and helpless" crowds he encounters on his travels (Matthew 9:36); he is "greatly disturbed and moved" when he sees Lazarus's sister and friends grieving and weeps alongside them (John 11: 33-35). Catholic Catechism states that Christ's "compassion for all who suffer goes so far that he identifies with them: 'I was sick and you visited me'" (CCC 1503). In telling her story, Siobhán affirms that the priest fulfilled his desire to show Jesus's compassion: "that's what he offered," she says, "pure compassion".

The narrative's association of compassion with "being Jesus" adds a layer of meaning to Siobhán's description of the referendum as an opportunity for change: if it's an opportunity to "bring compassion home", it can also be understood as an opportunity to bring "being Jesus" home**.** As with her framing of compassion as being *outside* Irish borders, this implies that "being Jesus" is something that occurs outside Ireland, not within it, and so calls into question the commitment of the Irish Church to being disciples of Christ. At the same time, if listeners interpret Siobhán's narrative to mean that the referendum is an opportunity bring "being Jesus" home, they might see the referendum as an opportunity to bring a different way of being Catholic into Ireland, one that - to paraphrase the Liverpool priest - is concerned less with judgment and more with compassion for the suffering.

Whether Siobhán herself saw the referendum as an opportunity for a transformation in

Irish Catholicism is unclear; however, there were others who certainly did. As I shall show through this chapter, pro-repeal activists, in the process of campaigning to repeal the Eighth Amendment, endeavored to bring new ways of being Catholic into Ireland - or more accurately, to challenge historically entrenched understandings of what it meant to be a "good Catholic" in Ireland. In the next sections, I look specifically at two ways campaigners sought to reach Catholic middle ground voters: distributing pamphlets from the US- based Catholics for Choice and using social media to make visible the existence of a supportive pro-choice Catholic community in Ireland. Through these different forms of media, I argue, campaigners communicated to the middle ground Catholics that, despite what the Irish hierarchy said on the matter, voting to expand access to abortion was not merely permissible within Catholicism but in fact demonstrated a commitment to Catholic values.

Learning new ways to be Catholic

The regional activists I met through the TFY national tour always seemed pleased to receive extra campaign materials from Headquarters, but there were some materials that elicited genuine excitement. Campaign badges, in particular, were highly sought after; these small, durable circles - which featured the words "Yes" or "Tá" against a background of yellow, green, and purple - could be pinned to clothes or bags to silently signal support for repeal. Yet activists also were eager to obtain a far more mundane item: a simple red pamphlet titled "The Truth about Catholics and Abortion". The pamphlet had been produced in 2011 by Catholics for Choice (CFC), a US-based pro-choice advocacy organization that "lifts up the voices of the majority of Catholics who believe in reproductive freedom" (CFC, 2021). Even though the pamphlet did not specifically address the referendum - or even Ireland - activists found it to be a useful document, and it was always in demand.

They went fast, an activist in Westport told me after we delivered a small stack of the

pamphlets to a TFY stall in the town center in May; it was a fairly religious community, she explained, and people kept taking multiple copies to distribute among their more religious family members. On a few occasions, I saw passersby approach volunteers at TFY stalls specifically to ask if they had the "Catholic pamphlets", or when they volunteers would be getting more. While the pamphlet contents were available online, there was a limited supply of professionally printed hardcopies, and these were coveted. Close to the polling date, I asked a volunteer at TFY Headquarters if I could keep one copy for my research, and the request was politely - but quite firmly - denied. There weren't many left, the volunteer admonished, and they needed to make sure every last one reached people who could actually vote.

When tracing how the pamphlets had ended up in Ireland, I learned a small number had been left by representatives from CFC on a visit to provide guidance on conducting Values-Clarification Trainings, and during the campaign, CFC shipped a larger supply to TFY. In Chapter Four, I discussed the history of CFC and explored how Irish activists drew on its materials to develop its own set of Values-Clarification workshops for the Irish context. These workshops, I agued, guided participants to see Catholic morality as capacious enough to allow for a diversity of opinions on abortion and to critique the hierarchy on theological grounds for failing to value or encourage individual moral thinking. As the workshops were initially developed by CFC, it should be no surprise that the key principles and lines of argumentation used in the workshop appear in the 2011 pamphlets. However, the workshops and the pamphlets did different kinds of work: while the workshops presented participants with texts they could use in personal conversations with friends and family, the pamphlets were meant to persuade the reader that "Catholics can, in good conscience, support access to abortion and affirm that abortion can be a moral choice" (CFC, 2011, p. 8).

The pamphlet introduced readers to a version of Catholicism that framed skepticism of the hierarchy's moral authority and dissent from its teachings not as "lapsing" but as exercising one's moral conscience and participating in the governance of the Church. For the Catholics who made up the undecided middle ground, this framework could be reassuring. Belonging to the Church was important to them, spiritually and socially, and most of the time they were comfortable existing in a "religiously ambiguous space": participating in the sacraments, going to mass, adhering to a "general Christian code" while also rejecting the "more hardline Catholic doctrine, irritated by a hierarchy that is often detached and dogmatic or lacking in compassion" (Mullally, 24 May 2018). However, the teachings on abortion were harder to reject outright: they had been taught that the practice was intrinsically evil, and they worried that voting to expand access to abortion would alienate them from the Church.

I saw middle ground voters express those concerns at an event for Catholics held at a church in Dublin about two weeks before the vote. After listening to a pair of lay speakers - one voting in favor of repeal, the other against - attendees were instructed to write down any thoughts or questions they have for the speakers on small sheets of paper, which were then collected reviewed by the priests facilitating the event. After reviewing the notes, a priest announced that he'd noticed that there was one very common question that seemed more for him than for the speakers: "will I still be a Catholic if I vote Yes?" Yes, he said, voting Yes would not be excommunicating yourself from the Church, but you should carefully consider, reflect, and pray on the Church's teachings on abortion before you decide how to vote. The latter part of his statement was barely audible, drowned out by a low grumble amongst many of the attendees. *They shouldn't be*, a man next to me muttered, shaking his head. I wondered how those who asked the question felt; the priest's words might have been reassuring, but the response from the

crowd might have made them feel isolated and unwelcome.

In this section, I consider the work the CFC pamphlet did to ease middle ground Catholic voters' concerns. I show that while the text was not direct at Irish voters, its argumentative content could reassure Catholics that a Yes vote is not only permissible in Catholicism but that there are religious justifications for voting Yes. The text makes two key claims: first, that there is a theological basis for Catholics to support access to abortion, and second, that the Church's teaching authority does not belong to the hierarchy alone but also to the laity. Below, I discuss how the text supports these claims, with particular attention to what evidence is used and how that evidence is presented. First, though, I consider how the design of the pamphlet contributed to its implicit claim to be a credible source of information (as suggested by its title: *The Truth about Catholics and Abortion*), particularly when compared to the design of other pamphlets that circulated during the referendum campaign.

Establishing credibility through pamphlet design

At first glance, the CFC pamphlet did not stand out among the myriad paper materials TFY circulated to regional groups over the course of the campaign. On a regular basis, pamphlets, flyers, postcards, and even a trade union newspaper were packed tightly into boxes and driven by volunteers across the country, where they would later be placed on tables at campaign stalls or handed out by canvassers. The bulk of these materials had been designed by TFY itself and reflected its branding: the three-speech-bubble logo; the green, pink, and yellow color scheme; photos of and quotes from real people who had been affected by the Eighth Amendment and/or planned to vote Yes. Other materials, though, had been published by organizations on the campaign platform, designed their materials in line with their own

organization's aesthetics. Migrants for Ethnic and Reproductive Rights, for example, printed a double-sided flyer that featured the organization's logo - two overlaid raised fists, one green and one red - on a black background. In Her Shoes, a Facebook page that published anonymous abortion stories, each accompanied by a photo of the writer's shoes, designed a 12-page booklet that replicated features of the online page: a white background, black text, and lots of photos of shoes. So while the bright red cover of the CFC pamphlet was not exactly in line with the aesthetic of TFY - in fact, it was more in line with that of Save the 8th - it was part of a larger set of paper materials whose designs varied widely.

Still, on closer examination, the CFC pamphlet did stand out from the other campaign materials in that it replicated characteristics of published scholarly books, including the graphic design, the structure of the text, and its style of citation. I argue that these features enabled the pamphlet to be understood not solely as a political document but also as a credible source of information, reinforcing its title's claim to represent the "truth" about Catholics and abortion, and possibly making the reader more likely to accept the arguments presented in the text. Below, I describe the pamphlet in detail, noting the features that made it appear book-like, and discuss how these might foster the impression of the pamphlet as a trustworthy document.

The front page of the pamphlet took the form of a book cover. Set against an orange background, there was a title ("The Truth about Catholics and Abortion") in a large yellow font, the name of the author ("Catholics for Choice") in a smaller white font, and at the left and right edges, pen-and-ink-style sketches of groups of people. Opening the pamphlet, you would see that the orange background with sketches of people continued onto the first interior page, akin to a book flap. The pamphlet also had a red "back cover", which featured a description of CFC, a list of its Board of Directors, and the organization's contact information, as well as an ISBN, and an

orange back “book flap”, which contained a small paragraph referring the reader to the CFC website to find similar publications.

The interior pages, which contained the main content of the pamphlet, were all white with predominantly black text. The first interior page took the form of an “inside cover”: there was the title, the author, and then, in very small font, the copyright year (2011) and place of publication (Washington, D.C.). On the subsequent pages - which were numbered at the top - most space was taken up by text in a 12 pt font size.

The text was divided into four main sections: an introduction, a history of Catholic perspectives on “Abortion and Moral Decision-Making”, an argument that “Church Teachings May Not Be Imposed”, and a conclusion, or “Summary”. The text within each section was divided into full paragraphs made up of complex, grammatically correct sentences. Like many academic works, CFC cited secondary sources to support (most of) its claims, and whenever it quoted these texts, it included parenthetical citations that included the last name(s) of the author(s), the title, the publisher, and the publication year.

By drawing on these features of book design and academic writing, the CFC frames the pamphlet as a scholarly document, which gives its claim to offer the “*Truth* about Catholics and Abortion” (emphasis added) additional authority. Establishing the document as an authoritative source of credible information is important, as the pamphlet presents arguments that explicitly challenge the credibility and authority of the Catholic hierarchy. Below, I provide a brief overview of these arguments and show how the particular texts cited enabled the pamphlet to present itself not just as a credible source of information but as a credible source of information about Catholicism in particular.

The individual conscience vs. the hierarchy's teachings on abortion

The section entitled *Abortion and Moral Decision Making* presents a two-part thesis:

> Church teachings on moral decision making and abortion are complex. In Catholic theology there is room for the acceptance of policies that favor access to the full range of reproductive health options, including contraception and abortion.

To support these claims, the pamphlet advances four arguments that challenge not only the hierarchy's official teachings on abortion, but also the idea that an individual Catholic must accept the moral teachings of the hierarchy. The text asserts its own religious authority by offering carefully selected evidence from sources that the reader would likely already trust: theological works, Catholic Catechism, and Vatican documents.

The first argument in this section concerns the relationship between the individual conscience and the moral guidance of the Church. The text argues that Church teachings are an excellent resource for moral guidance, and that Catholics are "obliged to know and thoughtfully consider Catholic teaching", but in the end, in a conflict between a person's conscience and the moral teachings of the Church, "a well-formed conscience reigns" (CFC, 2011, p. 4). Demonstrating the authors' respect for the guidance of the Church, the text justifies its argument using Catholic Catechism: "a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience" (CCC, 1997, section 1790). The argument also is supported by quotations from theologian Fr Richard McBrien's *Catholicism* (1994), including his statement that in a conflict with the moral teachings of the Church, Catholics "not only may but must follow the dictates of consciences rather than the teachings of the Church" (McBrien, 1994 as cited in CFC, 2011, p. 4). The inclusion of McBrien foreshadows an argument that will come in the section *Church Teachings May Not Be Imposed* - that the teachings of the Church historically have not relied only on the statements of the hierarchy but on the works of Catholic theologians.

The second argument in *Abortion and Moral Decision Making* directly challenges the Catholic hierarchy's claim that the prohibition on abortion is both "unchanged" and "unchangeable"; this, the pamphlet reads, "does not comport with the actual history of abortion teaching, and dissent within the church" (CFC, 2011, p. 4). The text uses the Catechism's discussion of abortion as a starting point. First, to illustrate the significance of abortion in this body of Catholic teachings, the pamphlet states that there are "only six paragraphs on abortion", then refers to it as a "brief section". Then, the pamphlet challenges the Catechism's assertion that "since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every proclaimed abortion" (CCC, 1997, section 2271) by offering a historical account of Church attitudes toward abortion. "The early prohibition of abortion was not based on concern about the fetus," the pamphlet states, "…[but] on a view that only people who would engage in forbidden sexual activity [e.g. outside of marriage and not for the purpose of having children] would attempt abortion"; in other words, abortion was immoral because it was presumed to result from immoral sexual behavior (CFC, 2011, p. 5). The text then undermines the Catechism's claim that the Church's teaching on abortion "has not changed" (CCC, 1997, section 2271) by tracing the shift from the earlier "perversity view" of abortion to the later "ontological view", which sees abortion as immoral because it constitutes the murder of a human person. Underlying the ontological view is the notion that the fetus is a person from the moment of conception; the pamphlet argues that this notion emerged from "faulty science" - specifically the 17th century mischaracterization of fertilized eggs as "fully formed animal fetuses" (CFC, 2011, p. 5).

The third argument in this section challenges the Catechism's claims by demonstrating that, historically, there has not been consensus within the church on the matter of when developing life can be considered a "person". This, the pamphlet says, has been acknowledged

by the Vatican itself in its 1974 *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, quoting a line from the text: "There is not a unanimous tradition on this point and authors as yet are in disagreement". As further evidence, the pamphlet states that "neither St. Augustine nor St. Thomas Aquinas, two of the most important theologians in the Catholic tradition, considered the fetus in the early stages of pregnancy to be a person" (CFC, 2011, p. 5).

The fourth and final argument moves the discussion from the morality of abortion *within* Catholicism to the problem of reconciling Catholic moral teachings on abortion with the regulation of abortion in a religiously plural society. The pamphlet contends that "even in a predominantly Catholic country, laws governing access to abortion need not adhere to the official Catholic positions" (CFC, 2011, p. 6). It justifies this claim by citing the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which according to the pamphlet "reinforced the call for Catholics to respect the position of people of other faiths" (CFC, 2011, p. 6). This is particularly important when it comes to law and policy concerning health, the pamphlet continues, because "the Catholic hierarchy's positions on health policies, including abortion, are more conservative than those of other major faith groups" (CFC, 2011, p. 6). The text goes on to remind the reader that "as noted, many Catholics do not support the Vatican's position on abortion" (CFC, 2011, p. 6).

Strategically, the pamphlet does not mention that Catholic Catechism, in its discussion of abortion, contends that "the inalienable right to life of every innocent human being is a *constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation"* (CCC, 1997, section 2273). The teaching includes two excerpts from *Donum vitae*, or *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation* (1987). The first, following the natural law theory of human rights, states that "civil society and the political authority" must respect the

“inalienable rights of the person” on the grounds of natural law:

> "The inalienable rights of the person must be recognized and respected by civil society and the political authority. These human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession made by society and the state; they belong to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took his origin. Among such fundamental rights one should mention in this regard every human being's right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until death." (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1987)

The second excerpt contends that a state’s failure to protect these natural rights for a particular category of human being is unfair and unjust, “denying the equality of all before the law” (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1987). It emphasizes that the “more vulnerable” citizens deserve special protection from the state , specifically mentioning the “unborn child” as a category of vulnerable citizen:

> "The moment a positive law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to accord them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations of a state based on law are undermined. . . . As a consequence of the respect and protection which must be ensured for the unborn child from the moment of conception, the law must provide appropriate penal sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child’s rights" (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1987)

The Catechism’s argument is clear: states ought to protect the natural, God-given right to life of the unborn from the moment of conception.

Rather than engaging with this fairly well-known position, the pamphlet simply offers readers an alternative argument, also from the hierarchy: to respect the faiths of others in a plural society, Catholics should not impose their views. For those already familiar with the catechetical argument on abortion and state law, the discussion of the Second Vatican Council might offer more evidence for the pamphlet’s suggestion that the hierarchy’s teachings are not always consistent. Moreover, it provides a *religious* justification for voting for laws that contradict the

official teachings of the Church; in the pamphlet's framing, whatever their individual position on abortion may be, Catholics can both "appreciate the Catholic tradition" and "[honor] the views of other faith groups" in supporting state laws and public policies that allow people to make reproductive decisions in accordance with their own moral values (CFC, 2011, p. 6).

The limits of the hierarchy's teaching authority

The second argumentative section, *Church Teachings May Not Be Imposed*, challenges popular understandings of teaching authority within the Catholic Church, contending that all "Catholics have a role to play in the establishment of church law" (CFC, 2011, p. 6). The section first deals with two misconceptions - that the Church's official teaching on abortion is infallible and that the teaching authority of the Church lies solely with the hierarchy. The text argues that neither of these claims are true: the teaching of abortion is not infallible, and the teaching authority of the church comes from the scholarship of theologians and the lived experience of Catholic people, including the laity. As with the preceding argumentative section, the text supports these claims by citing trusted sources of religious teaching: a Vatican pastoral and a person identified as an expert in canon law. By relying on sources the reader will likely trust as committed to Catholic teachings, the pamphlet advances the argument that readers should take a more expansive view of Catholic teaching authority and, specifically, consider the Catholic laity's collective opinion on moral matters as a valid source of information.

The text suggests that the idea that the Church's teaching on abortion is infallible comes from one of two sources: "ultra-conservative groups" who wrongly claim it is infallible, and people who mistakenly believe that "whatever the pope says on a serious topic" is automatically infallible (CFC, 2011, p. 6). The pamphlet asserts that the teaching on abortion "does not in fact meet the definition of an infallible teaching" (CFC, 2011, p. 6). The text does not actually define

the doctrine of infallibility, which requires the pope to declare that a teaching is firmly held by the entire Catholic Church and to do so while speaking *ex cathedra*, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority. Rather, the text illustrates how narrowly the doctrine of papal infallibility has been applied by pointing out that only three teachings have been made infallible: the Immaculate Conception of Mary; the Assumption of Mary; and the declaration on infallibility itself. The pamphlet does acknowledge that Pope John Paul II considered declaring abortion infallible in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*; Cardinal Ratzinger (then the Vatican's chief doctrinal officer) later explained that it was considered in the early drafts but was rejected (CFC, 2011, p. 7).

The pamphlet then asserts that the teaching authority of the Church "is not based solely on statements of the hierarchy" but on the people who made up the body of the Church (CFC, 2011, p. 7). To support this assertion, the pamphlet includes a quotation from *Communio et Progressio* (1971), the Vatican's pastoral instruction on public media; while the instruction primarily focused on communications media, the pamphlet cited a part of the document that considered the role of public opinion *within* the Church:

> Since the Church is a living body, she needs public opinion in order to sustain a giving and taking between her members. Without this, she cannot advance in thought and action.
>
> (*Communio et Progressio*, 1971, 115)

The pamphlet suggests that within the Church, "public opinion" on moral teachings derives from the "scholarly efforts of theologians and the lived experience of Catholic people" (CFC, 2011, p. 7).

Returning to the issue of abortion, the text argues that "among leading theologians", there are varied perspectives on the Church's official teaching and that this has been the case for decades. "As long ago as 1973", the text states, "noted Catholic theologian" Charles Curran wrote in *The Jurist*, a scholarly publication on canon law, that there was "a sizable and growing

number of Catholic theologians who do disagree with some aspects of the officially proposed Catholic teaching that direct abortion from the time of conception is always wrong" (Curran, 1973 as cited in CFC, 2011, p. 7).

The text also claims that there is a religious basis for assessing the obligatory force of a moral teaching in terms of how well that teaching is received by the Catholic community. Quoting "leading canon lawyer" James Coriden's discussion of the principle of reception, the text asserts that for centuries, experts in church law have understood that "for a [church] law or rule to be an effective guide for the believing community it must be accepted by that community" (Coriden, 1990 as cited in CFC, 2011, p. 7). The pamphlet stresses that Catholic law should not be "taken lightly or rejected" (CFC, 2011, p. 8). If Catholics approach rules and laws with "thoughtful and prudent consideration" (CFC, 2011, p. 8) - and CFC assumes they generally do - then reception constitutes "legitimate participation by the people in their own [religious] governance" (Coriden, 1990 as cited in CFC, 2011, p. 8).

According to the pamphlet, the faithful have not willingly received the hierarchy's teachings on reproductive health. "Rather," the text reads, "Catholics all over the world have soundly rejected the church's ban on contraception and in many countries only a minority of Catholics agree with church leaders on abortion" (CFC, 2011, p. 8). To support the latter claim, the pamphlet includes data on how Catholics in the US and in Catholic-majority countries view the permissibility of abortion. For example, the text states that "only 14 percent of Catholics in the US agree with the bishops that abortion should be completely illegal" and that "majorities of Catholics in Bolivia (66 percent), Colombia (54 percent), and Mexico (69 percent) feel abortion should be permitted under some or all circumstances (CFC, 2011, p. 8). The pamphlet also presents data from Italy, which it describes as "97 percent Catholic", to show that "74 percent

favor the use of RU-486" (popularly known as "the abortion pill", which can be used in place of surgical methods of termination during early pregnancy) (CFC, 2011, p. 8). None of this data is sourced. Nevertheless, for a reader who might be persuaded by the pamphlet's arguments, but who worries that adopting a more liberal position on abortion will alienate them from other Catholics, the data could provide reassurance that there is a robust, transnational group of Catholics who reject the hierarchy's teaching on abortion.

Evangelizing pro-choice Catholicism

The CFC pamphlets had not been designed specifically for Irish middle ground voters, but it addressed their concerns, chief among them: would they still be Catholic if they supported expanding access to abortion? Yes, the pamphlet reasoned, it was permissible; in any conflict between the individual's moral conscience and the hierarchy's teaching, Catholics should follow their conscience. As the pamphlet suggested, there was especially good reason to question the hierarchy's teachings on abortion, for those the teachings were not as consistent as the Catechism asserted. Additionally, the pamphlet argued that supporting access to abortion constitute a rejection of the Church's official teachings on abortion, but it reflected other values that the Catechism and hierarchy encouraged: respect for the individual conscience and respect for the faith of others.

The pamphlet, I argue, offered middle ground voters reassurance not only about supporting access to abortion but also about the way they lived their faith more generally. The text legitimated their more liberal approach to Catholicism by drawing evidence from authoritative Catholic sources: the Vatican, theologians, and canon lawyers. In other words, it suggested that middle ground Catholics were not in a "religiously ambiguous space" at all; their

liberal approach to Catholicism, from the perspective of the pamphlet, was a valid way to be Catholic.

By citing authoritative sources and replicating the design of published scholarship, the pamphlet presents itself as a credible source of information about Catholicism. Establishing itself as credible makes its critique of the hierarchy's teachings on abortion more persuasive, and it reinforces the text's claims that the teaching authority of the Church lies not only with the hierarchy but also with theologians and the laity. For middle ground voters skeptical of the hierarchy's moral authority, the pamphlet confirms their views and also offers them what is likely a new way to think about their role in the Church: through the formation of their consciences, and through their lived experience, they determine the force of Church teachings. In other words, the laity collectively, in their actions and opinions, show which teachings are important to the people who make up the Church - and which aren't.

There's a final way the pamphlet provides reassurance: the text repeatedly suggests that Catholics who want to expand access to abortion are far from alone within the Church. In the argumentative sections of the pamphlet, the text sometimes states this outright. For example, at the end of the section *Abortion and Moral Decision Making*, the text concludes: "Catholics can and do support public policies that acknowledge the moral agency of women, respect developing life, and appreciate Catholic tradition while honoring views of other faiths" (CFC, 2011, p. 6). In the section titled *Church Teachings May Not Be Imposed*, data is presented to show that "Catholics all over the world" have rejected the Church's teachings on abortion. In the introduction and conclusion, the implication that there is a community of liberal Catholics is reinforced by the authors' use of the plural first pronouns. The first paragraph of the introduction, for example, declares:

> We strive to be an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people. We are part of the great majority of the faithful in the Church who disagree with the dictates of the Vatican on matters related to sexuality, contraception, and abortion. (CFC, 2011, p. 2)

TFY's distribution of the CFC pamphlets through its regional networks introduced voters to the idea that it is legitimate and valid to be a liberal, pro-choice Catholic. However, while the pamphlet suggests "the majority of the faithful" disagree with the dictates of the Vatican on abortion, the existence of liberal, pro-choice Catholics in Ireland was not altogether obvious in the first months of 2018. Yet over the course of the campaign, those Catholics began to organize and to establish a visible and vocal presence, as I discuss in the next section.

Irish Catholics, Together for Yes

In early March, a new organization joined the Together for Yes Platform: Catholics Together for Yes (CTFY). On Facebook and on Twitter, CTFY characterized itself as "a group of Catholics in Ireland coming together to vote yes in the upcoming referendum on the 8th amendment" (CTFY, 2018a and 2018b). In truth, there were very few active members of CTFY, and most wanted to remain somewhat private. There was only one public-facing representative, Yvonne Ahern, who spoke to the press and at several TFY campaign events, including the Conversations tour. At a panel in Galway, she told the audience that Catholics activists in favor of repeal were often questioned about how they reconciled their views on abortion with their faith. Following CFC's line of argumentation, she explained that her stance on repeal had been guided by her moral conscience, and that following one's conscience was more than simply permissible within Catholicism: it was mandatory. "The Vatican's own statement says Catholics have a duty to follow their conscience," she said, alluding to the Vatican's 1974 statement on procured abortion[1] (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974). "When I examine

[1] While Ahern's statement was technically accurate, the Declaration on Procured Abortion strongly implies that a well-formed conscience - one that considers the teachings of the Church - will come to oppose abortion

my own," she went on, " I think of kindness, compassion, and understanding. How could I do anything but vote yes?"

Although CTFY benefited from having a public representative - without Yvonne Ahern, there would no name associated with the organization - the people who attended the TFY campaign events where she spoke were not undecided voters; they already supported repeal. The organization's messages reached a much broader audience online. There were two ways the organizations disseminated its messages: a public Facebook community (CTFY, 2018a) and a Twitter account (CTFY, 2018b), both created in April of 2018. By the end of May, the Facebook page was followed by 259 people and had 246 "likes"; the Twitter account had 537 followers and 986 "likes". Both accounts posted a variety of content: original messages directed at Catholic voters (the same text was posted on both accounts), re-posts of content from TFY and other platform organizations, and information about upcoming events. Compared to the Facebook account, the Twitter account was more active, perhaps due to the nature of the medium and how it is popularly used. In addition to the above listed content, the person or people behind the Twitter account posted their reactions to the televised debates, re-posted content from individual users, and circulated messages from Catholics for Choice, whose writings had strongly influenced members of CTFY.[2] The Twitter account also had comparatively more engagement from supporters of the organization, as well as from its detractors, who argued that Catholics Together for Yes had misinterpreted Catholicism and/or condemned them for advocating murder.

Here, I explore how CTFY communicated with Catholic voters by examining the content posted (and re-posted) on the organization's Twitter account. I suggest that the CTFY Twitter

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(Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974).

[2] For example, in Chapter 5, I discussed how Kathleen had found the CFC Values-Clarification workshop very valuable; her experience with CFC influenced her decision to join CTFY.

relied on two complementary strategies to mobilize Catholic voters to vote yes in the referendum. The first was to persuade Catholic voters that voting to expand access to abortion was morally permissible and even good. I show that CTFY drew on discourses from both CFC and TFY to produce persuasive messages tailored to Catholic voters, and in the process, crafted a campaign narrative that situated the referendum as a site for a transformation in Irish Catholicism. The second strategy was to reassure pro-repeal Catholics who felt isolated and alienated from others in the Church that there was in fact a community of Catholics who shared their values, even if that community was primarily visible online. Together, these strategies promoted Catholic support for expanding access to abortion while also legitimating a Catholicism centered on respect for individual autonomy.

The moral case for voting "yes"

With its close affiliations with Catholics for Choice (CFC) and the Together for Yes (TFY) campaign, it is not surprising that the Catholics Together for Yes (CTFY) Twitter account took up and reproduced discourses from both organizations. Below, I show the ways in which the account's original content drew on and reconfigured moral discourses from CFC within the context of the referendum. Then, I discuss how the account drew on TFY's discourses of "care, compassion, and change" and cultural conventions of "looking after" others to reinforce the campaign's message that voting itself demonstrates compassion and care. Finally, I show how the account sometimes creatively combined TFY and CFC discourses to frame voting Yes in the referendum as an instantiation and expression of "care and compassion", which it defined in terms of respect for the individual moral decision making. The CTFY account was clearly familiar with the arguments that CFC used in support of a pro-choice Catholicism. From the time

the account was created in early April through the date of the referendum, it retweeted content from CFC (@Catholics4Choice) nine times. The content it retweeted included key CFC discourses, such as the importance of the individual conscience, respect for women's moral decision making, and state policies that allow for reproductive autonomy. For example, on May 21, just a few days before the referendum, the CTFY retweeted the following text from the Catholics for Choice Twitter account:

> **Catholics for Choice** @Catholic4Choice 21 May 2018
> Because we revere the primacy of individual conscience.
> Because we trust women to make ethical choices over their bodies.
> Because we believe the state must allow individuals to make free, informed choices over their lives.

The CTFY account "quote tweeted" the message, meaning that it re-posted the tweet from CFC and added its own commentary. It affirmed its strong support for what CFC had posted and went on to thank the organization for its work:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 21 May 2018
> This.
> A hundred times this.
> @Catholic4Choice Thank you for all that you've done and all you continue to do.
> True compassion #togetherforyes

The CTFY account did not merely support and circulate content from CFC's Twitter but it also appealed to others to use the organization as a resource. In this tweet from May 9, the CTFY specifically recommended that Catholics and supporters of repealing the Eighth Amendment ("repealers") look into CFC:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 9 May 2018
> To any Catholics, or any repealers with family struggling on how to vote because of their Catholic faith, Catholics for Choice are a wealth of information and a fantastic resource. #TogetherForYes @Catholic4Choice

Later, the CTFY account also retweeted a link to an op-ed the President of CFC, Jon

O'Brien, had published in the *Irish Times* (CFC, 23 May 2018). The article provided an abbreviated version of the arguments made in the CFC pamphlet discussed earlier this chapter, asserting that "many good Catholics support a women's right to choose because of their faith, not in spite of it," with a particular focus on the significance of the individual conscience within Catholicism and the importance of not imposing moral beliefs and teachings through state law (O'Brien, 2018).

From the range of arguments and discourses circulated by the CFC, the CTFY Twitter account centered its own messaging around the themes of individual autonomy and not using one's own beliefs and morals to restrict the autonomy of others. For example, in this tweet from April 26, the CTFY account asserted that it was "right" and "moral" to enable women in Ireland to make decisions for themselves:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 26 April 2018
> The right decision, the moral decision for women in our country is to let them decide for themselves. Vote yes. #togetherforyes #Together4Yes #RepealThe8th

The tweet suggests that there are two moral decisions at stake in the referendum: the decision a woman makes about whether or not to continue her pregnancy, and the decision voters make about whether or not to allow women to make a decision about her pregnancy. While not referencing CFC discourses on the primacy of the individual conscience, the tweet frames voting yes, and thereby enabling women to make decisions about their pregnancy, as the only "right" and "moral" option for voters.

Accordingly, the account also framed efforts to restrict others' ability to make decisions for themselves as immoral, as in the following tweet:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 30 April 2018
> As the ref comes closer and the gloves come off, we are reminding ourselves that voting yes is the right thing to do. We can't deny others a decision based on our own beliefs and morals. #togetherforyes #repealthe8th

As it warns there will be increasing criticism from the hierarchy and from other Catholics as the date of the "ref" approaches (see next section), the tweet affirms that "voting yes is the right thing to do" by setting up a contrast with with what voting "no" would entail. To vote no, the tweet suggests, would be to "deny others a decision based on our own beliefs and morals". Here, I should note that the pronoun referents seem to shift from the first sentence to the second. In the first, "we" seems to refer to CTFY members, Catholic supporters of repeal, or supporters of repeal more generally. Yet in the second sentence, the pronouns "we" and "our" do not seem to refer to CTFY; after all, its members' beliefs and morals lead them to take a pro-choice stance on abortion. Instead, the account seems to be taking a moral/ethical position either for Catholics (in general) or for all people, where "we can't deny others [their autonomy]" equates to "we should not deny others [their autonomy]".

A similar tweet, published just ten days later, associates "deny[ing] others a decision based on our own beliefs and morals" with the imposition of religious teachings:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 10 May 2018
> When we cast our vote we are voting for everyone. Those of all faiths and those with none. Our own morals and believes shouldn't govern what others do with their bodies. #togetherforyes

Here, the tweet seems to remind the reader that Ireland is religiously plural and to be mindful of that in voting; if one faith's set of beliefs and morals is incorporated into the state constitution - as occurred with the Eighth Amendment - those beliefs and morals will "govern" the lives of everyone, including those people who belong to other faiths or none. The tweet reflects CFC's claim that, according to the Second Vatican Council, Catholics have been called to "respect the position of people of other faiths" (CFC, 2011, p. 6), and arguably, this claim takes on additional meaning in the Irish context. While the tweet is not explicitly invoking

Ireland's history of incorporating Catholic teachings on sex, marriage, and reproduction into state law, the particular wording of the second sentence allows that connection to be made. The tweet is making a moral claim that is not solely about abortion: "our own morals and believes [sic] shouldn't govern *what others do with their bodies*" (emphasis added). Any reader with some knowledge of Irish history would understand that this moral claim sharply contrasts with the stance both the Irish hierarchy and the Irish state took for most of the 20th century, that Catholic moral teachings *ought* to be reflected by and reinforced in state law. Thus, the tweet reproduces a discourse circulated by CFC - that Catholics should not impose Church teachings on people of other faiths - while challenging the morality of both the Eighth Amendment and (somewhat indirectly) the historic entanglement of the hierarchy's moral teachings and Irish state law.

Taken together, the above tweets sketch out something of a campaign narrative: Catholics can distance themselves from a past in which the Irish Church imposed its "morals and beliefs" on others, women in particular, by voting "yes"; moreover, in voting "yes", they - as Catholics and as citizens - will demonstrate their respect for and commitment to individual autonomy. However, this is only one part of CTFY's narrative. As I show below, the account also draws on discourses and themes from the campaign narrative of TFY.

On many occasions, the CTFY account reproduced the TFY's key discourses of "care, compassion, and change" in ways that reflected the campaign's narrative. By this, I mean that the account suggested that voters would demonstrate "care and compassion" for women by voting yes, and if a majority voted yes, that would both signify that the nation's values had changed (with respect to abortion) and concretely change the nation's values as codified in the Constitution; moreover, these changes would facilitate further demonstrations of "care and

compassion" in the legal provision of abortion to women in Ireland. A CTFY tweet from May 14, 2018, distills that message to four short sentences:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 14 May 2018
> We are doing the right thing. The kind, caring and compassionate thing. We will look after our people. We will give them the healthcare they deserve.

The tweet leaves unstated what precisely the "thing" is, but since the organization is lobbying citizens, especially Catholic citizens, to vote yes in the referendum, it can be inferred that what is "right" and "kind, caring, and compassionate" is to vote for repeal. At the same time, the tweet makes clear that doing this "kind, caring and compassionate thing" - voting - will bring about other kinds of care "looking after our people" by providing them "healthcare they deserve" but don't currently have.

The account often reinforced the idea that care and compassion were *already* national values by invoking Irish cultural conventions around "looking after" and "minding" others. As I learned in the field, the idioms are used in a variety of contexts to refer to care - "Would you mind the children", "that car needs looking after", etc. - but as the words themselves suggest, observation of and attention to the needs and well-being of others is an element of that care. Another element, culturally, is the provision of tea and sometimes sandwiches. While also associated with cultural conventions around hospitality, the provision of tea in particular is often part of a demonstration of compassion and emotional support; typically, if an Irish person offers tea to someone in distress, they are not offering merely the tea but also companionship and a "listening ear" while the other drinks it. In this tweet from May 14, the CTFY account draws on these idioms and cultural conventions to frame voting yes as a practice of compassion and care:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 14 May 2018
> As a country we are good at minding each other. We look after each other. Call in on neighbours and watch out for friends.
> Switch on the kettle and make the sandwiches. It's what we do and we do it well.

> When we vote yes we'll be doing the same. We'll be looking after those who need it.
> Here at home.
> Without shame.
> #togetherforyes

Here, "we" refers to the people of Ireland, and the account asserts that compassion and caring for others is part of the national character - "it's what we do" - and a national strength - "we do it well". Voting yes, it suggests, is "doing the same". This assertion adds nuances to my above claim that, according to CTFY's campaign narrative, a majority Yes vote would signify that the nation's values had changed with respect to abortion. If compassion and care are - and have been - part of Irish national identity, then a majority Yes vote would not signify that the Irish people have changed their values; rather, the account suggests, it would signify that the majority of Irish people were acting in accordance with values they already had. In the next section, I will show how the account mobilized this argument - that a Yes vote does not signify a change in core values - as part of its critique of the Irish hierarchy.

The CTFY tweets show that the account not only reproduced discourses from CFC and TFY; sometimes it combined them. For example, in a tweet from April 24, the account contrasts "kindness, compassion and care" with the imposition of a particular set of morals:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 24 April 2018
> Let us show our women kindness, compassion and care. Not judgement or a lesson on what "morals" are. We need change.
> #togetherforyes

This contrast adds a new layer of meaning to the discourse "kindness, compassion, and care". From the perspective of the account, in addition to indexing voting yes, providing healthcare, and Irish conventions of caring for others, the discourse also encompasses not judging others negatively for their moral decisions and not imposing one's morals on others; or, in other words, the discourse encompasses respecting the moral decisions of others and enabling

people to make moral decisions for themselves. Further, the tweet's quotations around the word "morals" suggest that the account is skeptical that the morals of someone who would impose them on others are in fact morally good. Again, in the context of Ireland, this subtly calls into question the morality of the Irish hierarchy and conservative Catholics, who would prefer that the Constitution continue to reflect the Church's official teaching on abortion. At the same time, it should be noted that the CTFY account itself is in a sense giving a "lesson" on what is moral, though its moral commitment to individual autonomy means that it has a much more expansive understanding of what is moral when it comes to reproductive decisions.

The account also draws on TFY's framing of the Eighth Amendment as belonging to Ireland's "harsh, punitive past" to assert that the prohibition on abortion is not consistent with Catholic values:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 19 May 2018
> As Catholics we have no desire to endanger women's lifes. That's all the 8th is doing.
> That's all it ever did.
> You aren't a hypocrite if you see the reality of what's happening and want to keep people safe and looked after. #TogetherForYes

The tweet makes a statement with which most, if not all Catholics, would agree: that Catholics do not want to endanger women's lives. Most readers would be aware that conservative Catholics and the hierarchy had led the campaign to incorporate the Eighth Amendment into the Irish Constitution on the grounds of protecting the fetus's right to life, not to pose a risk to women. However, the CTFY account asserts that the Amendment has always endangered women's lives, and so, the account reasons, the Eighth has always been inconsistent with Catholic morality. A reader could infer that the account believes Catholics who vote to retain the Eighth Amendment will not be acting in accordance with Catholic values.

The CTFY Twitter account, in taking up and reproducing discourses from CFC and TFY, presents voters with its own campaign narrative, tailored to Catholic voters but compatible with the dominant narrative of the Yes campaign. This narrative centers on the referendum as a site of transformation for Irish Catholicism. In voting yes, the account suggests, Catholics can distance themselves - and their faith - from a punitive past in which the Irish hierarchy and the state imposed Catholic moral teachings on the Irish people and disciplined those who did not comply. Moreover, voting yes enables Catholics to redeem Irish Catholicism by expressing and demonstrating their compassion and care for women, which the account defines as not only support for expanding access to abortion but support for individual autonomy more broadly.

Reassuring Catholic "yes" voters

In addition to presenting a persuasive campaign narrative for Catholic voters, the CTFY account continually sought to reassure Catholics who supported repealing the Eighth Amendment that, although they would be defying the hierarchy's teachings on abortion, voting yes was the morally right thing to do and that many other Catholics would be voting yes, too.

The account's tweets of reassurance intensified in the final weeks of the campaign, as the Irish hierarchy began to appeal to massgoing Catholics to vote no in the referendum. As I detail in the next chapter, from the end of April through the day of the referendum, ten Irish bishops published pastoral letters discussing their reasons for voting to retain the Eighth Amendment; in some dioceses, priests were asked to read their bishop's letter aloud at each weekend mass. As the polling date approached, and the number of undecided Catholic voters remained high, representatives from the No side wrote to at least one bishop to ask that priests in his diocese speak to their parishioners about the vote. In this period, there were also reports of priests giving

Save the 8th and LoveBoth campaigners time during the mass (sometimes in place of a homily, sometimes during announcements) to address parishioners themselves.

The CTFY Twitter account expressed solidarity with those who had heard bishops, priests, and campaigners advocating a No vote while attending weekend mass. On the Monday preceding the referendum, the account tweeted:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 21 May 2018
> This past weekend was a hard one for us Catholic yes voters. Hard to hear untruths. Hard to be threatened that our church and our faith will no longer welcome us.
> But on Friday we will stand with our woman. We will be #Together4Yes
>
> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 21 May 2018
> And on Sunday we will go to mass and know we made the right decision.
> We voted to protect and look after our people.
> Here.
> At home.

The account did not specify what "untruths" Catholic Yes voters heard, and I could not locate a report of a homily, pastoral letter, or statement from a priest of bishop *before* the referendum that informed parishioners that they would not be welcome in the Church if they voted yes. However, *after* the referendum, at least two bishops strongly encouraged Catholic Yes voters to go to confession before seeking communion, describing their votes as a grave sin (Ryan, 1 June 2018); it therefore seems possible that some parishioners heard similar messages before the referendum. In any case, even if they weren't specifically told that voting yes was a grave sin, Catholics who supported repeal may have felt alienated and unwelcome at mass hearing homilies that suggested it was the duty of Catholics to vote, and to vote no.

Through the above tweets, CTFY communicated support for other Catholic Yes voters in multiple ways. First, the account indicated that the "hard" experience of attending the weekend

mass was shared; Catholics may have felt alienated from their priest, from their parish community, and from the hierarchy, but the first tweet establishes that there were others who felt similarly, a dispersed community of "us Catholic yes voters". Second, while not specifying what messages were conveyed at mass, the first tweet describes those messages as "untruths", thereby signaling that Catholic yes voters should not assign authority or credibility to what they heard. Third, across both tweets, the account asserts that in voting yes, Catholics will not be alone; they will be standing "with our woman [sic]" - the women of Ireland - and with each other, "#Together4Yes". Fourth, looking toward the day after the vote, the account suggests that they will take another stand together: attending Sunday mass in defiance of the threats they've heard, not ashamed but confident that they "made the right decision".

Strengthening its message that Catholic repeal supporters were not alone, the CTFY Twitter account often showed its followers evidence of Catholics who intended to vote yes in the referendum. For example, early in the campaign, it tweeted an image of a letter to the editor in *The Kerryman*, titled "Catholic teaching allows us to apply conscience to decisions on abortion", which argued (in line with CFC's messaging) that in a conflict between the individual's moral conscience and the teachings of the hierarchy on abortion, the individual should follow their conscience (Ní Charthaig, 2018; CTFY, 2018, April 15). On another occasion, the account linked to a blogpost on the Abortion Rights Campaign website titled "I'm a mother, I'm a Catholic, and I'm voting YES" (ARC, 2018, May 24; CTFY, 2018, May 24). And throughout the campaign, the account retweeted messages from individual Twitter users who had either spoken with Catholic repeal supporters or were Catholics who intended to vote yes themselves. For example, in early May, the account retweeted an individual's report of learning that an elderly woman "of very strong faith" was voting Yes:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 3 May 2018
> **Retweet of [redacted]**
> Today I heard a woman of very strong faith and in her 80s is voting yes to #repealthe8th as she says "who am I to stand in judgement" what a wonderful sentiment full of care and compassion ..don't judge or ponder just vote YES

The user's story not only showed evidence that there were Catholics who supported repeal but also evidence that faithful Catholics supported repeal for the same reasons that the CTFY account argued they should: as a demonstration of respect for others' autonomy, which the user - like CTFY - associated with "care and compassion". Respect for others' autonomy was also cited in a post the CTFY account retweeted from a Catholic woman who had decided to vote yes despite her belief that "life is precious from the moment of conception":

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 13 May 2018
> **Retweet of [redacted]**
> After lots of thought and careful consideration I'm voting Yes ……. personally I believe life is precious from the moment of conception but my Yes is for choice for those who for their reasons can't go through with a pregnancy #WhoNeedsYourYes #repealthe8th

The user seemed to concur with the CTFY account that she should not impose her beliefs on others; instead she recognized that others, for their personal reasons, could not continue with a pregnancy, and so she would advocate them to be able to legally make that choice.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to know to what extent the CTFY Twitter account reached and reassured Catholics who were feeling isolated and unwelcome in the Irish Church as the date of the referendum approached. However, their efforts to bolster Catholic Yes voters in the face of increased opposition from the hierarchy and to heighten the visibility of Irish pro-choice Catholics clearly helped some Catholics feel supported, as this exchange between the CTFY account and a Catholic Twitter user shows:

> **Catholics Together for Yes** @Catholics4yes 25 May 2018
> A thank you as tomorrow we're at the count. Thank you for all the support. We know we took a rather difficult but an honest view. One that was a struggle for

some. We hope that in some small way we were helpful.
Tomorrow we wake up and there will be a new Ireland. #Together4YES

[Redacted] 25 May 2018
Thank you for your posts making me feel less alone as a practicing Catholic when I was fielding off severe abuse

Catholics Together for Yes @Catholics4yes 25 May 2018
Oh **[Redacted]** we know that feeling all too well. Im glad we showed other that they weren't and aren't alone.

Even those who were not practicing Catholics expressed gratitude to the organization on both its Twitter and Facebook pages. "I love all tfy [sic] groups but your group has been inspirational in its capacity to [highlight] empathy, compassion, and humanity in the face of personal and ugly intimidation," one user wrote in a reply to CTFY on Twitter, "all faiths and none salute you" (CTFY, 2018, May 21). On Facebook, a user told the organization: "listen even just the name of your group was helpful and gave a little chink of light to us all" (CTFY, 2018, May 25).

CTFY's public Twitter and Facebook pages ensured that "Catholics" would be recognized as a group where support for repealing the Eighth Amendment could be found. Moreover, it established a virtual space where Catholics who intended to vote yes could find encouragement and reassurance in the face of opposition and criticism from their priests, Catholic friends and family, and the Irish hierarchy. In repeatedly asserting that respect for individual autonomy and respect for other faiths were Catholic values, CTFY reassured voters that neither their views nor voting yes would be sinful, nor would voting yes represent a change in their commitment to their religious morals. Further, CTFY communicated that there were other Catholics who would stand up for those values, both in voting yes and in continuing to identify as Catholic and to practice their faith, even when feeling "unwelcome" in the Irish Church. There had long been Catholics in Ireland who supported expanding access to abortion

(see Chapter 2), but CTFY's online presence encouraged those Catholics to see their views on abortion as consistent with their faith, to be confident that they belonged in the Church, and to know there were many others in the Church who shared their values.

Catholics, voting yes, and a "woman's right to choose"

There were other ways the Yes side signaled that being a faithful Catholic was consistent with voting to repeal the Eighth Amendment. Early on, Leo Varadkar, whose government had put forward the referendum bill, appointed his Catholic Arts Minister, Josepha Madigan, to lead Fine Gael's campaign for Yes, and in her first interview on her new role, Madigan emphasized her devotion to Catholicism. Her faith was "extremely important" to her, she told the interviewer, and she was a regular Mass-goer who delivered reading in her church in South Dublin, but stated, "my support for abortion is not at odds with my faith" (McQuinn, 2018, April 5). Another politician, Hazel Chu of the Green Party, produced an advertisement for the Yes side in which she described herself as a "practicing Catholic" who had become pro-choice after seeing how the Eighth Amendment limited doctors' ability to treat her mother, who became pregnant while suffering an illness (Green Party Ireland, 2018).

In addition to promoting the faith of supportive politicians, organizations on the Yes side sought to specifically include Catholics in their representations of people who needed access to abortion and people who supported greater access to abortion. TFY, for example, released a short advertisement in which women described the people in the viewer's community who might "need your Yes"; among descriptions like "she's in your book club", "she does the school run", and "she wears a navy jacket" was the line "she sings at Mass", clearly suggesting that regular Mass-goers, too, might need to access abortion (Together for Yes, 2018b). An advertisement from Parents Together for Yes featured a Catholic mother who explained why she and her family members would be voting yes. Looking straight at the camera, the woman stated: "My family are

a mass-going family. We know what it means to be compassionate neighbors, friends, and Catholics. We think ensuring women are safe is at the heart of that" (Parents Together for Yes, 2018). These interviews and advertisements promoted the message that faithful, practicing Catholics could be supporters - and beneficiaries - of repeal, and contributed to the Yes side's broader efforts to persuade middle ground Catholics to vote yes in the referendum.

Those broader efforts, as I have shown through this chapter, centered on popularizing and legitimizing more liberal ways of being Catholic while associating support for the Eighth Amendment with a more punitive, discipline-focused Catholicism. Through Siobhán Donohue's story of the priest who wanted to "be Jesus" to her after her abortion, Irish voters were introduced to a way of being Catholic that prioritized "compassion and care" over judgment - a way of being Catholic that Siobhán characterized as foreign to Ireland. The Catholics for Choice (CFC) pamphlets offered middle ground Catholics a religious justification not only for supporting access to abortion but also for questioning - and rejecting - the hierarchy's moral teachings. And Catholics Together for Yes (CTFY), through its social media presence, encouraged Catholics to recognize voting yes as both permissible and morally good, to see the Eighth Amendment as a symbol of a Catholicism that would wrongly impose its morals on others, and to be confident that they were part of a not insignificant number of liberal, pro-choice Catholics who belonged in the Irish Catholic Church.

At the heart of the more liberal Catholicism that the CFC pamphlets and the CTFY Twitter account promoted was respect for the individual's moral conscience, and consequently, both forms of media argued for expanding access to abortion on the grounds that it was morally right to enable pregnant women to make decisions in accordance with their own values about their bodies and lives. This emphasis on individual autonomy was a departure from the dominant

messaging of TFY.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, TFY sought to win over middle ground voters by discussing abortion as a medical decision to be made by a woman *and her doctor*, by focusing on the "hard cases", and by discouraging arguments centered on the right to autonomy and "trusting women". Many TFY volunteers were committed to (eventually) securing choice, autonomy, and abortion without restriction and found it difficult to accept the campaign's messaging strategies, which they viewed as potentially stigmatizing. Nonetheless, most felt they had reason to compromise, as Fiona de Londras (2020) reflected after the campaign, "The apprehension of a loss was weighty and sometimes overbearing; many of us did, wrote, and said what we thought would work to secure a 50.1% vote for 'yes' on the 25th of May" (p. 134). Yet, as it turned out, the Yes side's margin of victory was far greater than TFY campaigners had dared to anticipated: 66.4% Yes to 33.6% No, with a little over 64% voter turnout.

From the perspective of campaigners, the exit poll data was as surprising as the final result. Eighty-four percent of Yes voters had given "women's right to choose" as the primary reason for their vote (McShane, 2018, p. 127–130). That meant nearly all people who had voted yes claimed to have done so for a reason that TFY had never actively promoted in its messaging - for a reason that market research had shown to be off-putting to middle ground voters.

In the weeks and months after the referendum, many volunteers with TFY told me that they had found this piece of data infuriating. "Why did we allow ourselves to feel so insecure?" One volunteer, Liz, asked rhetorically in an interview. She explained that because they were convinced that the polling was wrong and that the results would be very tight, pro-choice volunteers like herself had "compromised so much" in their effort to secure the votes of middle ground voters. With their "Middle Ireland, Middle of the Road take", she said, TFY had

prioritized the “hard cases”, stigmatizing women who had abortions for other reasons. It had glossed over the fact that ethnic minorities - particularly migrants with immigration restrictions - were those most in need of legal access to abortion in Ireland, while “[using] a woman of color [Savita Halappanavar] as the rallying cry of why Irish women deserved abortions”. By refusing to argue for abortion on the basis of a women’s right to make a decision about her pregnancy, Liz said, the campaign had ceded ground to those who wanted to restrict abortion. “I think it was our job”, she said, to get those who wanted to restrict abortion to view women as responsible and to respect their autonomy.

However, while TFY actively avoided discourses of choice and autonomy in its main messaging, the Yes side’s efforts to persuade Catholics to vote yes on religious grounds made respect for women’s autonomy a central part of its messaging. The importance of the “right to choose”, framed in terms of Catholic respect for the individual’s moral conscience and for not imposing one’s own religious beliefs and morals on others, circulated through “Middle Ireland” via pamphlet and tweet. As I noted earlier, it’s impossible to determine to what extent the CFC pamphlets and CTFY social media influenced Catholic voters, but it’s clear that Catholic middle ground voters were ultimately persuaded to vote yes; not only did the Yes side take almost all previously undecided voters in its victory, but RTÉ exit polling revealed that 74% of Irish voters identified as Catholic (McShane, 2018, p. 22–25). Perhaps they voted yes believing that it was their religious obligation to give women the right to choose.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

Throughout this dissertation, we have seen Irish people at a variety of sites – in faith formation groups, abortion rights workshops, and the campaign to repeal Ireland's constitutional prohibition on abortion – strive to distance contemporary Irish Catholicism from its legacy of clericalism. While the people we have met at these sites disagree, often strongly, about the hierarchy's moral teachings, and while they have very different aspirations for the future of the Catholic Church in Ireland, they are endeavoring to transform Irish Catholicism in similar ways: by promoting the moral authority of the laity and by reconfiguring the traditional relationships the laity have had with the institutions of the Church and state.

Across these sites, we also have seen how laypeople, in their efforts to transform Irish Catholicism, are looking beyond Ireland for inspiration and resources. In Chapter 4, Catherine, endeavoring to improve on the Alpha course her parish promoted (itself an ecumenical program from Australia), draws on Catholic cultural materials she first encountered while living in Australia: the practices of prayerful writing she learned from the sisters of Verbum Dei, a religious order founded in Mallorca, Spain. The abortion rights activists we meet in Chapter 5 develop their program alongside leaders of Catholics for Choice (CFC), a lobby group based in the United States that promotes Catholic arguments for reproductive rights around the world, and particularly in places with majority Catholic populations like Ireland and Latin America. In Chapter 6, Siobhán identifies an English priest she met after having a termination as a model for the compassionate Catholicism she would like to see in Ireland. For these laypeople, transforming Irish Catholicism involves participating in the "translocal Catholic flows of symbols, images, ideas, people and power" that constitute trans-border Catholic communities (Napolitano and Norget, 2009, p. 252). Participation in these flows "[inculcates] in worshippers a

deeply felt, embodied sense of belonging and allegiance to a larger, global Catholic community and project" (Napolitano and Norget, 2009, p. 253).

The Vatican, Napolitano and Norget (2009) argue, has recognized the significance of translocalism to its own aims of establishing that the catholicism and unity of the Church. They suggest that the institutional Catholic Church encourages this "translocal Catholic imaginary" through the organization of significant public performances and events, such as beatifications and canonizations. Through these events, they (2009) write, the Church "affirms a transcendent symbolic and moral authority and global persona that is aimed at exerting a centralized, cohering pull on dispersed and culturally diverse Catholic believers and communities the world over" (p. 253).

Three months after the referendum on abortion, the Vatican held such an event in Ireland: the World Meeting of Families. The event, according to the brochures distributed within every parish in the country, intended to draw together families from across the world to "celebrate, pray, and reflect upon the central importance of marriage and the family as the cornerstone of [Catholic] lives, society, and the Church". In addition to concerts, performances, and a culminating mass delivered by Pope Francis himself, there was a three-day pastoral congress featuring keynote speakers, workshops, and personal testimonies. This was a recurring event, held every three years in a new location. Dublin did not ask to be the site of the ninth World Meeting of Families; it was selected by the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life in August of 2015, three months after Ireland voted to legalize same-sex marriage by a margin of two to one.

Since its inception, the World Meeting of Families had been an event for promoting the Church's teachings on the family in response to changing norms. It had been developed as the Church's response to the United Nation's International Year of the Family in 1994. A year

earlier, the UN had proclaimed that the theme of the year would be "Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world" and that its motto would be "Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society". Over the course of the campaign, the United Nations would promote their definition of the family as "diverse" in form and function and would encourage equality in the distribution of domestic responsibilities. The plan presented a challenge to the Vatican's participation, as the UN's messages were at odds with traditional Catholic teachings that the family is a hierarchical institution based in marriage between one man and one woman, for the purpose of producing children. Rather endorsing the International Year of the Family, then-Pope John Paul II announced that he would claim the initiative for the Church, encouraging families of all nations to "discover anew the many signs of the Church's love and concern for the family" and to follow the Church's model of family and conjugal life. He then instructed the Pontifical Council for the Family (now the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life) to plan an international gathering of Catholic families in Rome to learn, pray, and witness the "truth of family life" and so promote the "authentic family" around the world: the first World Meeting of Families.

The 2018 World Meeting of Families temporarily revived public displays of devotion to Catholic Church in Ireland. The city of Dublin, to herald Pope Francis's arrival, arranged for Vatican flags to be hoisted along the River Liffey that cut through the City Centre. Tens of thousands of Catholic pilgrims from across Ireland and around the world were to descend on the city for the gathering in late August, and local retailers seemed keen to welcome this new genre of tourist. Nearly every bookshop window prominently displayed a cardboard cutout of Pope Francis and stacks of his latest publication, *Amoris Laetitia*, alongside other books of interest to Catholic visitors. Other businesses developed their own merchandise for the occasion: yellow-

and-white umbrellas and hats, Pope-themed t-shirts and ponchos, and recyclable folding chairs for the outdoor mass that the Pope would deliver in Dublin's Phoenix Park on the last day of his visit. Many put signs featuring a waving Pope Francis in their shop windows: *Céad míle fáilte!* A hundred thousand welcomes!

However, despite the public display of support and considerable attention, the WMOF and the papal visit were not entirely unifying. Rather, this effort to bring people together also made visible significant divisions, both within Ireland and within the global Church.

Many Irish people protested Pope Francis's visit as an expression of their anger at the Catholic hierarchy's concealment of clerical abuse, the forced or coerced adoption of children born to unmarried women, and the cruel treatment of women in Magdalene laundries, and the neglect and maltreatment of infants and children in Mother and Baby Homes. A Facebook group entitled "Say Nope to the Pope" spearheaded a campaign for Irish people to obtain – and then not use – tickets to the Pope's Mass in Phoenix Park. The organizers argued that, as taxpayers, the Irish people were funding the Pope's visit and were entitled to tickets regardless of their faith or commitment to the Catholic Church; from their perspective, "actively and deliberately not using [their tickets]" was an appropriate means of silent protest that allowed them to, in their words, "stand in solidarity with the excessive number of victims from this atrocious organization" (Sherwood, 2018). There were also more visible demonstrations of anger. While the Pope gave a speech at Dublin Castle shortly after his arrival, adult survivors of childhood physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy and members of lay religious orders – many of them members of the global survivors network End Clergy Abuse – held banners and tied baby shoes around their necks as a sign of protest for the children who died in Ireland's Mother and Baby Homes (Towey, 2018). During the papal Mass in Phoenix Park, a rally and vigil entitled "Stand for

Truth" was held at the Garden of Remembrance "for everyone who has been harmed or abused by the institutional Roman Catholic Church, or who wishes to stand in solidarity with those harmed by its actions," according to organizers (Towey, 2018).

There were also several Catholic groups – both liberal and traditionalist – that used the WMOF and papal visit to challenge the Vatican's approach to questions of sex and sexuality, the gender and mandated celibacy of the clergy, and the role of the women within the Church. For example, We Are Church Ireland, which seeks "shared decision making [between the hierarchy and the laity], equality for women, and a welcome for all," carried rainbow flags and purple umbrellas to the Ha'Penny Bridge in Dublin's city center as a call for the institutional reform – specifically, for LGBTQI members of the Church to be made more welcome and for women to be allowed to become priests (We Are Church Ireland, 2020).

Two other organizations generally regarded as more progressive – the Association for Catholic Priests (ACP) and the Association of Catholics in Ireland (ACI – held a series of open forums for laity and clergy centered on the question: "What do we need to say to Pope Francis about the Irish Church?" At these forums, the ACP and ACI collected submissions from nearly 1400 participants concerning what reforms they would most like to see in the Church; at the top of participants' listed priorities was "an equal role for women in the Church" (ACP, 2018). At one of these forums, a participant expressed doubt that these forums could bring about change in the Church or that the views they shared could possibly make it through the bureaucracy of the Vatican to reach Pope Francis. As the organizers of the forum assured him that the report they compiled would be passed directly to influential members of the hierarchy close to Pope Francis, an elderly priest interrupted to address the participant's other concern: these forums *were* bringing about change in the Church, he argued; here they were, priests and laity, openly

discussing and arguing about how the Church should be reformed. He had never been a part of a discussion like this before.

While many Catholics desired to reform the Church in a more inclusive and egalitarian direction, there were others who felt that the Vatican – especially under Pope Francis – was already too inclusive and deferent to liberal Catholics, particularly when it came to issues related to marriage and the family. Two such Catholics, Anthony Murphy and John Lacken, organized an alternative conference to the WMOF that they called a "Conference on the Catholic Family". While Murphy opened the conference by assuring participants that their conference was not intended to be an alternative or to compete with the WMOF, his colleague revealed that offering an alternative conference had long been their intention. Reading from their email exchanges, Lacken quoted himself as proposing in February 2017 that they "[organize] an alternative conference on the problems facing families near the RDS [the WMOF venue] in Dublin the same weekend as the Dublin WMOF" (Lumen Fidei Institute, 2018). Their concern, he said, was "to make sure that the true teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage and family life would be spoken in Dublin this August 2018" (Lumen Fidei Institute, 2018). For Murphy, there was "only one version of the family" and the idea that other relationships "can coexist on the same level" as marriage was not only "nonsense" but "completely against God's plan for mankind."[1] While Murphy and Lacken would promote this understanding of the family over the course of the weekend, drawing on a variety of international speakers, they maintained that there was "no guarantee that these truths [would] be spoken" at the WMOF (Lumen Fidei Institute, 2018).

I joined members of Discerning Hearts at an ACP/ACI forum, the Conference on the Catholic Family, and the WMOF. In these spaces, they encountered ideas that resonated and

[1] A video of Murphy's opening comments is not publicly available. These quotations are excerpted from my field notes.

ideas they rejected, and their disagreements about what sources of authority were valid produced new tensions within the group. The most significant tensions centered on attending the Pope's Mass in Phoenix Park. After attending the Conference on the Catholic Family, which called into question the Pope's commitment to orthodox teachings on marriage, a couple of members who acquired tickets to the Mass decided that they no longer wished to hear him speak. Their decision was simultaneously an expression of confidence in the hierarchy's teachings and a rejection of the moral authority of the current head of the Church. Others in the group viewed that attitude as schismatic; they worried that it threatened the coherence of the Church by undermining the authority of the Pope.

Yet when Discerning Hearts next met, despite these tensions, all the usual members were in attendance. Some wanted women priests and priests to be able to marry; others viewed that as blasphemous. Some wanted the Church to be more welcoming to its LGBTQI members; others felt that the Church was sufficiently accommodating and any further efforts to be inclusive would undermine the Church's commitment to its teachings. Some had become convinced that Pope Francis should resign or be replaced; others found him inspiring and argued he was bringing disaffected and alienated Catholics back into the Church. As usual, they voiced these opinions, debating these issues over the course of hours. One member later told me that while these disagreements sometimes heightened her anxieties about the unity of the Church, she was reassured by the fact that the members of Discerning Hearts did not allow their own disagreements to drive them apart; instead, their mutual care for one another and the "political energy" (Schmitt, 1923) of their oppositions compelled them to return and to remain interested and engaged with their faith.

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