Cultivating Prophetic Ambivalence among Young Adult Catholic Women:
A Call to Critique, Conserve and Transform

Emily Paige Jendzejec

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Emily Paige Jendzejec

Advisor: Theresa A. O'Keefe, PhD.
Committee: Karen Arnold, PhD.,
Richard Lennan, Dr.Theol.

The landscape of religious belonging is rapidly changing in the United States. This dissertation contributes to conversations concerned with how to engage young adults in faith development in the rise of religious disaffiliation. This dissertation specifically engages the lived reality that while many young women struggle with belonging in the Catholic Church, they are negotiating ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. An experience of ambivalence often manifests from the dialectical nature of this negotiation. Drawing from the work of religious scholar Mary Bednarowski, I argue that ambivalence, cultivated as a virtue, can serve as a prophetic posture from which to participate in transforming the Church. I suggest a narrative pedagogical approach of *critique, conserve, and transform* to encourage prophetic participation. The articulation of ambivalent belonging towards institutional religion can serve as an access point for belonging and faith development for young adult women. This work is rooted in an ecclesiology that articulates the ambivalent nature of the pilgrim Church, grounded in the vision of Vatican II, that is open to how the Spirit is working through all the faithful, revealing God's hope-filled mission in the world.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents……..……iv
Acknowledgements……..vii
Introduction……1
1.0 Chapter One: *"I was Raised Catholic but..."*: The Changing Landscape of Religious Belonging……..7
1.1 Supporting Young Adult Catholic Women in Liminal Spaces of Belonging…..……..9
1.2 Defining the Scope and Terms……..…...11
1.2.1 Who: Young Adult Catholic Women…….…..…11
1.2.1.1 Young Adult……...11
1.2.1.2 Women……...14
1.2.1.3. Catholic…….16
1.2.2 Terminology of Belonging……. ……..17
1.2.2.1 Nones…….17
1.2.2.2 Disaffiliated……18
1.2.2.3 Deconversion……18
1.3 Landscape of Religious Belonging in the Twenty-first Century……...19
1.3.1 The Rise of the Nones……..….20
1.3.2 Catholic Trends ……....……...……22
1.3.3 What's at Stake……...……..…26
1.4 A Way Forward: Cultivating Ambivalent Belonging……....27
1.5 Conclusion……29
2.0 Chapter Two: A Pilgrim Church: Journeying Together as the People of God……....30
2.1 Getting Comfortable with Ambivalence……33
2.1.1 Bounded Openness……35
2.1.2 Slow Church Coming……37
2.1.3 Christian Hope……..38
2.2 A Pilgrim Church: Journeying together as the People of God……40
2.2.1 Vatican II: The both/and Approach of "*Ressourcement*" and "*Aggiornamento*"….40
2.2.2 A Renewed Mission……..41
2.2.3 A Shared Mission……..43
2.2.4 Inverting the Pyramid: Pilgrims Journeying Together in Faith…….……...44
2.3 Continuing on the Journey Together as a Listening Church……..47
2.3.1 Reception: Creative Fidelity to the Tradition……...48
2.3.2 Companions on the Journey: Celebrating the Diversity of Narratives…….49
2.3.3 Synodality: The Intersection of Narratives ……...……...50
2.4 Conclusion……53
3.0 Chapter Three: Inhabiting Middle-Space: Contributions of US Catholic Feminisms...55
3.1 Catholic Feminist Traditions in the United States……..……...56
3.1.1 Emergence of the Catholic Feminist Movements…….56
3.1.1.1 Catholic Feminist Activism……60

3.1.1.2 Catholic Latina/Mujerista Theologies…..……...……64
3.1.1.3 Catholic Womanism……65
3.1.2 Catholic Feminists and Traditions……67
3.1.2.1 Augustinian……70
3.1.2.2 Neo-Thomist……..73
3.1.2.3 Neo-Franciscan……..74
3.1.2.4 Junian……75
3.2 Insider/Outsider Phenomenon: Inhabiting a Middle-Space…….77
3.2.1 Nepantla……78
3.2.2 Politics of Piety……79
3.2.3 Defecting in Place……80
3.2.4 Cultivated Ambivalence……82
3.3 Struggling for the "Soul of Something": Cultivated Ambivalence in Action…….85
3.4 Conclusion……89
4.0 Chapter Four: Growth and Belonging: Engaging Faith Development and the Religious Imagination of Young Adult Women…….……91
4.1 Losing a Sense of a Spiritual Home: Interpreting the Dissonance……..93
4.1.1 Struggling with Belonging in the Context of Faith Development…….……...94
4.1.2 Developmental Shifts as a Time of Re-orienting……..95
4.1.3 At Home with Complexity: Developing an Ambivalent Relationship with One's Spiritual Home.……....102
4.2 Who Shares This Home with Me: The Importance of Exposure to Diverse and Networks of Belonging ……..…….……...102
4.2.1 The Role of the Religious Educator: Creating Dynamic Networks of Belonging..104
4.2.2 Better utilizing the Communion of Saints: The Need for Diverse Role Models…106
4.3 Sharing the Stories of Home*:* The Affirmative Power of Story-Sharing…….…….113
4.3.1 Narrative Pedagogy as a Tool for Faith Development…….113
4.3.2 Examples of Narrative Pedagogies in Religious Education……115
4.4 Conclusion……..120
5.0 Chapter Five: The Prophetic Call to Critique, Conserve and Transform: A Narrative Pedagogy……121
5.1 Contexts for Conversations……..……122
5.1.1 Hearth……123
5.1.2 Table……125
5.1.3 Commons……..128
5.2 Prophetic Possibilities of Cultivating Ambivalence through Praxis……..130
5.3 Narrative Tasks: Critique, Conserve and Transform……133
5.3.1 Critique……..134
5.3.2 Conserve……136
5.3.3 Transform……...138
5.4 The Framework……..139
5.4.1 Step One: Story Dwelling……..139
5.4.2 Step Two: Storytelling ……....143

5.4.3 Step Three: Story Movement……..145
5.4.4 Examples of the Framework in Contexts of Hearth, Table, Commons……147
5.4.4.1 Hearth……...147
5.4.4.2 Table……149
5.4.4.3 Commons……151
5.5 Conclusion: Cultivating Prophetic Ambivalence……152
Conclusion……..……154
Bibliography……...158

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Introduction

As a child, when considering what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would alternate between the Pope and a Broadway actress. When I found myself overlooked for a part in the middle school musical and encouraged to try out for the field hockey team, I quickly lost hope in my Broadway dream. This left me with the perplexing question of what a vocation in the church could be as a Catholic woman who felt called to marriage. It was not until I was an undergraduate at Boston College and I became involved in campus ministry that I discovered mentors among lay women in Catholic ministerial vocations. These supportive relationships led me to study theology and become a pastoral minister. The inspiration for pursuing my PhD in theology and education came from my pastoral experiences working with young adults in diverse ministry settings for over a decade. It was a privilege to accompany young adults as they asked big questions about life, meaning and purpose and I wanted to contribute to scholarship devoted to creating more effective pedagogies and contexts for faith formation in settings of higher education.

My interest in writing this dissertation is rooted in my desire to help prepare and support religious educators in the face of rapidly changing dynamics in the Church today. This dissertation is primarily directed toward religious educators who work in college student formation and young adult ministry settings. This dissertation is interested in the growing phenomenon of religious disaffiliation and contributes to conversations concerned with the challenge of how to engage young adults in faith development as the landscape of religious belonging and spiritual identity rapidly changes in the United States. I resist contributing to a viewpoint that perceives the growing phenomenon of religious disaffiliation as a crisis. Instead, I approach this phenomenon as an exciting opportunity to creatively respond to the contemporary

spiritual needs of young adults. There is an obligation and opportunity for faith communities to cultivate networks of belonging in more effective and supportive ways that creatively inform and nurture young adult identity formation.

This dissertation is interdisciplinary in nature and meets at the crossroads of religious education, theology, sociology of religion, and college student development. It specifically engages the reality that while many young adult women acknowledge frustration with the institutional Catholic Church, they are negotiating ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. An experience of ambivalence often manifests from the dialectical nature of this negotiation. Drawing from the work of religious scholar Mary Bednarowski, I argue that ambivalence, cultivated as a virtue, can serve as a prophetic posture from which to participate in transforming the Church. I suggest a three-movement narrative pedagogical approach of *critique, conserve, and transform* to encourage prophetic participation.

More broadly speaking, this dissertation hopes to advance conversations regarding how we encourage leadership among lay people to shape, lead and transform faith communities. It also aims to surface the spiritual, social, and theological implications of the rapid rise of disaffiliation in Catholic churches. Addressing the challenge of disaffiliation must extend beyond a goal to get more people in the pews but instead should be approached creatively from a place of curiosity of how the Holy Spirit is working in the world today, and in what ways the Church might be failing to embody a vision of hope and liberation that people want to participate in. Religious educators must seek ways to mine the rich resources of Christian traditions, sacred texts, and historical praxis to develop transformational, theologically based practices that respond to the changing demographics and needs of faith communities in the twenty-first century.

While the focus of this dissertation focuses on the lived experiences of young adult Catholic women, I believe my suggested framework can be used in diverse religious education settings with people of all genders and varied faith backgrounds. The hope is that anyone who is concerned with young adult spiritual and cognitive development and religious belonging in the twenty-first century will find it engaging and useful.

There is great opportunity for engaging young adult Catholic women who are questioning their relationship with the Church in order to accompany them in faith development. Religious educators must create better opportunities for young adult women who feel on the margins of the Church to participate and experience being part of God's mission. This must be articulated theologically and enacted practically. Young adult women must be able to see themselves reflected in the sacred, historical, and present-day narratives of the Church.[1] *Cultivated ambivalence,* expressed as a virtue, can serve as a pathway for engagement and belonging in the Church. Exposure to and engagement with narratives of *cultivated ambivalence* can serve as a theological access point for belonging and participation in church and healthy faith development for young adult Catholic women.[2]

The following paragraphs will give an overview of the chapter progressions throughout this dissertation. Most chapters will begin with poems or vignettes from my encounters with young adult women in chaplaincy and ministry. These stories are an amalgamation of conversations I have had over the years as a college chaplain and parish-based young adult

[1] I am writing from my context as a white Catholic feminist in the United States. While all of my research will be done in the context of the US, it is of utmost concern to me that I take care not to be writing falsely constructed meta-narratives of "US Catholic women's experiences" and I want to give voice to intersectionality that informs individuals' experiences of church, self, and community.

[2] *Cultivated Ambivalence* is a term coined by Mary Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

minister. The names and specific details have been intentionally altered in order to respect the confidentiality of the students' experiences. It is important to note that sharing these stories is an act of being church and embodying the ecclesiology for which I seek to advocate. Listening and affirming these stories is an enactment of the synodal Church that is journeying together. The voices and experiences of young women in the Church should transform and inform the entire body of Christ.

Chapter One: *"I was Raised Catholic but...": The Changing Landscape of Religious Belonging*, serves as an introduction to the context for the dissertation. It explores the landscape of research on religious belief and belonging among young adult women in the United States. I argue that religious educators must respond to increasing disaffiliation by acknowledging reality and not treating it as a crisis, but as an opportunity to engage and accompany young adult women in their faith development. Helping move young adult women beyond dualistic thinking - to belong or not belong - is not only in service towards faith development but into developing capacity for living with paradox and nuance, which is so crucially needed in our world of increasing polarization today.

Chapter Two: *A Pilgrim Church: Journeying Together as the People of God* defines what it is I mean when I speak of the Church and who it is I mean when I speak of the Church throughout the dissertation. I argue for an ecclesiology that highlights the ambivalent nature of the pilgrim Church, grounded in the vision of Vatican II, that is open to how the Spirit is working through all the faithful, revealing God's work in the world. This chapter identifies a dialogical and participatory model of Church that not only honors the embodied experiences of women as Church but allows their presence and their stories to transform the Church.

Chapter Three: *Inhabiting Middle-Space: Contributions of US Catholic Feminisms,*

engages the reality that while many women acknowledge gender inequality in the Catholic Church, they are negotiating ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. This chapter illustrates that an experience of ambivalence often manifests within the dialectical nature of this negotiation. The chapter begins with an overview of the contributions of the Catholic feminist movement articulating and creating space for women to negotiate and define their own Church membership. Then, drawing from the work of Mary Bednarowski, this chapter argues that ambivalence, cultivated as a virtue, serves as a prophetic posture from which to participate in transforming the Church. Finally, the last section offers examples of personal narratives of *cultivated ambivalence*.

Chapter Four: *Growth and Belonging: Engaging Faith Development and the Religious Imagination of Young Adult Women*, engages how from the theoretical tools of college student development and constructivist developmental theories and is primarily in conversation with theorists Robert Kegan, Marcia Baxter Magolda and Sharon Daloz Parks. I argue for the importance for young adults to feel affirmed and a sense of belonging within an expansive spiritual home where there is room to question, doubt, and grow in their faith. The chapter then turns to resources in religious education to argue that story-sharing can be an effective pedagogical tool to support young adult women in cultivating belonging and shaping spiritual identity by helping them understand and affirm that their own story is a sacred part of the larger, dynamic, and diverse story of the body of Christ. This section primarily draws from the work of religious educators Thomas Groome, Anne Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn Parker.

Chapter Five: *The Prophetic Call to Critique, Conserve, and Transform: A Narrative Pedagogy,* introduces a narrative pedagogy that can support faith development of Catholic young adult women who are struggling with the institutional Church and discerning whether they

should stay or leave. I offer examples and opportunities to engage stories of Catholic women role models who embody *cultivated ambivalence*. I offer concluding principles of context that serve to create effective mentoring environments in which faith development can occur. My primary points are that 1) this pedagogical tool contains movements inspired by *cultivated ambivalence* of critique, conserve, and transform 2) this tool can be used in the diverse contexts of Sharon Daloz Parks' articulation of hearth, table, commons as effective mentoring communities 3) women's experiences shared throughout this dissertation and those prompted to be shared through this pedagogical tool, are the embodied lived realities of the Church in the twenty-first century.

Chapter One:
"I was Raised Catholic but...": The Changing Landscape of Religious Belonging

BELONGING

Is there any place in church for me?
In a church that does not see me? Or recognise my different gifts.
A church that does not care for me.
How do I grow when no-one hears me?
Who helps me grow?
We should BE the church, but we are not allowed.
Only men are allowed. We just attend and serve.
I am allowed to contribute by serving tea and cake.
The Martha who arranges flowers, polishes the pews, and sings in the choir.
I mind the children.
All important, but not a position from which we can discuss change.
I am not able or encouraged to engage with power.
Even the language excludes me.
That's not only sad, but foolish.
You can't build the future of church with only half the people.
A death spiral of ever decreasing involvement just won't do it.
Being the church has something to do with living your life for Christ.
Doesn't it?
Sharing your faith with others.
But I am a consumer of, not a contributor to my faith.
Jesus said 'Follow me', 'Who do you say that I am.?'
There is plenty there to explore.
But in a living church that includes the voices of women as well as men[3]

[3] Christine Halfpenny, *Belonging*, Posted on January 30, 2020 at 10:51 am in comment sections of article "Women Walking Away Together" September 23, 2019 at https://catholicwomenspeak.com/women-walking-together-away-from-the-church/ Accessed October 10, 2021.

I found this meaningful poem, *Belonging*, posted in the comment sections of a blog post on the Catholic Women Speak website.[4] It was embedded in a comment under an essay entitled "Women walking away together."[5] The poem reads as a goodbye message to the Church. There is no feedback, no additional comments, and only a name associated with it: Christine Halfpenny. It is just left there, as if a telling symbol of the struggles many women have with the Church but have no place to air them or discuss them, located in a liminal space between feeling fully comfortable in the Church and having not fully rejected their faith. The author's unanswered questions are the type of questions that inspired this dissertation. How can religious educators help individuals wrestle with the challenges the author names, acknowledge the pain felt in her prose, and make space for conversation for the types of powerful observations and problematic theological noticing she is poetically illustrating? The sentiment in each line of this poem resonates greatly with the experiences shared with me by many young women I have worked with in ministry settings as a college chaplain and parish young adult minister.

This chapter situates the experiences of young adult Catholic women in the rapidly changing landscape of religious belief and belonging in the contemporary United States of America (US). The first section advocates for the need to support young adult Catholic women in liminal spaces of belonging. The second section clarifies the terminology that I use throughout the dissertation of who I am speaking of when I refer to Catholic young adult women; and what I mean by various terminology associated with religious belief and belonging. The third section is an overview of contemporary research concerning religious belonging in the United States. Specific attention is noted on the experiences of Catholic young adult women. The fourth section argues that religious educators should not treat the phenomenon of disaffiliation as a crisis but as

[4] Catholic Women Speak Website https://catholicwomenspeak.com, accessed October 10, 2021.
[5] Halfpenny, "Belonging."

an opportunity to creatively support young adults in their faith development. It offers a way forward of focusing on cultivating and affirming ambivalent belonging.

1.1 Supporting young adult Catholic women in liminal spaces of belonging

This dissertation focuses on the experiences of Catholic women, like Christine, who are struggling with their faith and their relationship with the Church but have not yet intentionally disaffiliated. I liken the experience of feeling on the peripheries of the Church to the concept of occupying a liminal space. Liminal space can be uncomfortable because there is a sense of unsettledness, one is on the threshold of something but has not yet reached a decision or destination. In order to understand the reality of young adult Catholic women in these liminal spaces, religious educators should pay attention to the experiences of young adult women who are wrestling with marginalization *in* the Church, feeling both that they belong and that they are outsiders, teetering on a decision of whether they should stay or go. Theologian Cecilia González-Andrieu in her 2019 article "With a church in crisis, why do Catholic women stay?" reflects on the stories she solicited from Catholic women across the United States. Many women confided in her that they were asking themselves why they stayed Catholic, and many were vacillating about whether to leave the Church. These were stories of women involved in church to different degrees "who teach, run ministries, parent and study."[6] She also explains that many of her younger female students were experiencing frustration in this vacillation of whether to stay or leave the Church. She explains that a student recently introduced her to a new term: the "dones." She describes the moment,

> Thinking I had misheard her, I asked, "Do you mean the 'nones,' people who don't identify as belonging to any religious tradition?" "No, I mean the 'dones,'" she said, "Like, in, 'I'm totally done with the Catholic Church.'" There was pain in her voice,

[6] Cecilia González-Andrieu, "With a church in crisis, why do Catholic women stay?" *America Magazine,* April 19, 2019, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/04/19/church-crisis-why-do-catholic-women-stay.

> which soon gave way to tears. Saying "none" could be about disaffection, boredom or the perception of a faith tradition's irrelevance, but "done" was about betrayal and disillusionment. It was about love and loss.[7]

If religious educators are to successfully accompany young adult women who are struggling and frustrated with aspects of organized religion, it is crucial to be able to acknowledge the doubt and pain before there is the moment where one feels they are "done" with the tradition.[8] This pain González-Andrieu describes is similar to the pain that fuels the words and images of Christine Halfpenny's poem, *Belonging.* It is a pain that encompasses grief, exhaustion, and frustration. Religious educators should be equipped to support young adult women who bring questions and doubts based in frustration, sadness or even anger. Prepared, not with specific answers to questions, but with a posture of openness and support for such questions and struggles to be aired, processed, and interrogated.

The goal of supporting women like Christine and the student from González-Andrieu's story who occupy liminal space is not to convince them to stay within the Church, but to accompany them on their faith journeys, affirm them in their often-frustrating experience of liminal belonging, and help them see that the Church as much greater and expansive than a narrow definition of who is in or who is out. Derek Rishmawy, a theologian and young adult minister, calls this the need to "Make Space for Thomas."[9] He argues that if religious educators don't "make space for Thomas" in young adult faith formation, then they will lose most young adults right off the bat. If doubting is acknowledged and there is room for questioning, then there

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[7] González-Andrieu, "With a church in crisis, why do Catholic women stay?"
[8] In Chapter Four, I will delve more into the process of faith development and the necessity of doubt and questioning for developmental growth to occur.
[9] Derek Rishmawy, "Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age," *Gospel Coalition*, January 23, 2018, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ministering-to-millennials-in-a-secular-age/.

is the possibility that young adults can emerge with a deeper, more committed faith and sense of belonging. Rishmawy argues,

> Whatever the issue, though, the existential and cognitive dissonance in the face of these cross-pressured and fragilizing conditions becomes too much for their former faith. The [young adults] emerge into a new phase of faith—maybe broken and bruised, a bit uncertain, but more authentic, risky, and in possession of a faith truly their own. Baptized in the fires of doubt, they have left behind the simpler, naive beliefs of their shallow, therapeutic youth group (and their parents). They have dared to know.[10]

This daring to know, is a powerful call to action for religious educators to support young adult women in their development. The goal of faith development is not about becoming a more obedient and unquestioning follower. It is about growing into one's own spiritual authority by daring to know and living into a more authentic faith and relationship with God.

1.2 Defining the Scope and Terms

This dissertation focuses on experiences of young adult women from the ages of 18-25 that identify as Catholic. In order to move forward with clarity, this section defines the scope and key terms within this project.

1.2.1 Young Adult Catholic Women

This first section will define who I am speaking about in the dissertation. It will look at the concepts of *young adults* and *women* and then what it means to identify as *Catholic*.

1.2.1.1 Young Adult

The concept of young adulthood, as a distinct life stage between adolescence and adulthood, is a relatively new phenomenon and often seen as a unique experience to young people living in industrialized societies. There are varied and contested positions on the age range, purpose and even terminology of this life stage, as found in sociological research,

[10] Rishmawy, "Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age."

developmental theories or in societal definitions. A good example of this is my own experience. When I was interviewing to become a "young adult minister" at a Catholic parish, I asked the obvious question of who falls in the category of young adult. The parish director said they followed the United States Catholic Bishops' understanding of young adulthood as anyone between the ages of 18-39.[11] I laughed to myself as this was a wide age range. When I entered the position, I witnessed the diverse life experiences within this intended focus group. Some were 18-year-olds, first years in college, who still lived at home with their parents or in dormitories, others were parents of middle-school aged children in their late thirties, many were singles in their late twenties, some came as young couples who were discerning marriage, career and family together. While this list is not fully representative of all young adults, it is a snapshot into who was showing up and identifying as a young adult within a parish church setting in downtown Boston and who the Church identifies as young adults.

When looking at the life-stage of young adulthood, the contested age-range and changing terminology can be seen in the trajectory of the work of developmental theorist Sharon Daloz Parks. In her seminal book, *Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (2001), she simply defines young adulthood as "typically between seventeen and thirty-'the twenty-somethings.'"[12] In her updated 2011 edition she uses the term, *emerging adults* instead of young adults in her title to refer to the age range of eighteen and thirty-two years of age.[13] This shift in terminology follows the trend initiated by Jeffery Arnett, whom I will speak

[11] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (November 12, 1996), https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/young-adults/sons-and-daughters-of-light-part-one Accessed December 17, 2021.
[12] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass Press, 2000), 3.
[13] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith,* (San Francisco, CA: Wiley, 2011), ix.

of in the following paragraph. While Parks' age range and terminology shifts, she is consistent in her work in rejecting definitions that say young adulthood is just a transitional time between youth and adulthood and instead argues there is important work to be one in this distinct life stage. She argues that the work of young adulthood is to develop a critical consciousness and to be able respond out of this consciousness in ways that are "satisfying and just."[14]

Jeffrey Arnett, professor in the Department of Psychology at Clark University, coined the phrase *emerging adulthood* to refer to the age range of 18-25, distinct from both adolescence and young adulthood. Arnett argues that this life stage is "distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations."[15] Unlike Parks, Arnett sees emerging adulthood as a transitional period leading to adulthood. Arnett believes that a key feature of emerging adulthood is that it is a time for identity explorations in the areas of love, work, and worldviews.[16] Arnett argues that the two top criteria for the transition to adulthood is accepting responsibility for oneself and making independent decisions.[17]

James Cote is a critic of Arnett's focus on emerging adulthood as a time of exploration of worldview, work, and love. He also finds little evidence supporting claims like that of Parks that, "college students graduate with a strong sense of themselves and where they are going in the world, especially occupationally."[18] He instead points to studies that show the majority of emerging adults don't put in the time and energy to explore their identities, and that this is a

[14] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith ,*6.
[15] J. J. Arnett, "Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties," *American Psychologist*, 55(5), (2000): 469.
[16] Arnett, "Emerging adulthood," 473.
[17] Arnett, "Emerging adulthood," 473.
[18] J. E. Cote, "Emerging adulthood as an institutionalized moratorium: Risks and benefits to identity formation," in *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century,* eds J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 85–116, 96.

privileged position for a select few. He warns that focusing on identity exploration in the early twenties may be too early and instead argues that the concept of emerging adulthood should expand from 18-30 years old.[19] Cote also adds that within this post-modern period, people are embracing more fluid identities and might not be as susceptible to identity crises that Arnett and Parks focus on in their work.[20]

I argue that young adulthood is a time of unique exploration and growth. This dissertation is dedicated to examining the experiences of young adult women (18-22) enrolled in four-year institutions of higher education. The average age for students enrolled full-time in undergraduate programs is 21.8 years old.[21] The Cote/Arnett debate is helpful in being mindful not to make sweeping claims about young adulthood. My own work, like Parks, is located in the university setting which is a smaller subset of the larger population that falls within this young adult age range. The overall college enrollment rate of 18- to 24-year-olds was 41 percent in 2019.[22] Therefore, this work presupposes a privilege of access to higher education. While not all of the students that I worked with came from middle to upper class backgrounds, the privilege of being at an institution of higher education was a reality for all.

1.2.1.2 Women

In this dissertation when I speak about "women" I am referring to all people who self-identify as woman in terms of their "gender identity," whether or not that identity or expression is different from that traditionally associated with the person's sex assigned at birth.[23]

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[19] Arnett, "Emerging adulthood," 108.
[20] Cote, "Emerging adulthood as an institutionalized moratorium," 109.
[21] Hanson, "College Enrollment & Student Demographic Statistics."
[22] "College Enrollment Rates," *National Center for Educational Statistics*, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpb, accessed February 5, 2022.
[23] It is important to note the ongoing complex scientific and theological conversations concerning the intersections of gender and sex. The official Church teaching still operates, both in theology and in practice in a very clear and distinct gender binary that conflates gender with sex. The Catholic

It is of utmost concern to me that I take care not to be writing meta-narratives of "Catholic women's experiences." I write in a spirit of humility with full awareness of the reality that all women experiences are unique and based on varying factors besides gender. I approach this work with a commitment to ongoing learning and unlearning as a pastoral minister and religious educator as to how to best minister to individuals in college settings aware of the dynamism and complexity of intersectional identities and realities. The ultimate hope of this project is to shed light on the necessity to empower and affirm all members of the body of Christ due to their contextualized embodied realities, not in spite of them.

It is crucial that this work is done with an attention to intersectionality, a concept introduced in the 1980s by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw.[24] Intersectionality, expresses how gender, race, class, and other individual characteristics intersect with one another and overlap, impacting the lived experiences of individuals. Intersectionality informs individuals' experiences of church, self, and community. The women's stories I share and the scholars I engage with are for the most part all within the context of the United States. Within these stories and sources, there is a diversity in terms of demographics related to sexuality, race, and ethnicity, yet remains limited in scope based on class and geographic location.

Congregation for Education released a document in 2019 clearly defining the Congregation's belief about gender/sex entitled, *"'Male and Female, He Created them' Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory."* The document is a response to what the Congregation sees as a growing disorientation regarding anthropology that is destabilizing the family as an institution and bringing with it a tendency to cancel out the differences between men and women. The document insists that children are born distinctly female *or* male. This distinction is based solely on visible genitalia and ignores scientific evidence that there is diversity in the presentation of the x and y chromosomes among humans beyond this strict binary. The document does acknowledge that gender and sex are different, but then asserts that to separate them within an individual is problematic.

[24] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1(8), (1989), https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf.

1.2.1.3 Catholic

In this dissertation, I seek to recognize and speak to the diverse reality of people who identify as Catholic. While there is diversity in how people express their faith, all are rooted in a shared belief of the Profession of Faith, joined together in one Baptism. Throughout this dissertation I refer to the Roman Catholic Church as the Church. Chapter Two will go into detail on what I mean by the Church. Members of the Church have various understandings of what makes them Catholic or why they are Catholic. A general definition of what it means to be a member of the Catholic Church can be found in the Nicene Creed, otherwise known as the Profession of Faith.[25] The Nicene Creed was first adopted at the First Council of Nicaea in 325. In 381 it was amended at the First Council of Constantinople. This Creed is professed by many other Christian denominations as well. It professes that all members are united as the Body of Christ, given life by the one Spirit and acknowledges one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. The Nicene Creed, the formal summary of Christian beliefs, binds Catholics together, but it is important to note that there is freedom beyond this to define what it means to belong to the Catholic Church. What is meant by Catholic and who belongs, is a big question and I will go into greater depth with this conversation in Chapter Two.

This subsection provided a brief overview of the key concepts I will use throughout the dissertation based on who I am referring to when I speak of young adult Catholic women. This is not to generalize or to try to create a metanarrative for this specific population. Instead, it is to define the scope of my conversation to make it grounded in lived experiences of the women I have worked with as a college chaplain.

[25] "The Nicene Creed," *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Website*, https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe, accessed February 18, 2022.

1.2.2 Terminology of Belonging

What does it mean to belong or not belong to the Church? The answer to this question varies depending on who is asked. Within the field of sociology of religion, clear definitions and demarcations contribute to the collection and interpretation of data. Theologians and religious leaders may use and interpret these realities differently. The answers to these questions are often as diverse as the reasons people give in whether they stay or leave a tradition. Regardless there has been an attempt to capture the phenomenon of people moving away from association with organized religion, particularly Christianity. In the literature around belief and belonging there are terms that are often used some time together and at other times in contrast. It is important to understand these terms as I progress in this dissertation and as we read the research in the next section. I will define the terms/phrases: nones, disaffiliated and deconversion.

1.2.2.1 Nones

The "nones," refers to those who answer "none of the above" on religious identification surveys. A 2015 Gallup Poll concluded that in the U.S., "nones" were the only "religious" group that was growing as a percentage of the population.[26] It has become a catch all phrase for people who don't belong to any religious organization or have any specific affiliation. They can be people who used to affiliate and now don't, people who have never had a tradition, or people who simply don't feel their faith association is adequately represented on the survey. It also does not mean they do not identify as spiritual. The term has gained popularity in sociological research on the growing trend of disaffiliation. It points to the ambiguous and more nuanced nature of what it means to be unaffiliated.

[26] Frank Newport, "Percentage of Christians in U.S. Drifting Down, but Still High," *Gallup.com*, December 24, 2015, https://news.gallup.com/poll/187955/percentage-christians-drifting-down-high.aspx.

1.2.2.2 Disaffiliated

The term disaffiliated refers to those who were raised within a faith community (i.e., baptized), but who are no longer connected with the institutional church nor are actively engaged. In research on Catholic disaffiliation, the term "disaffiliated" is used to describe people who once self-identified as Catholic and no longer self-identify as Catholic for various reasons. Researchers of Catholic disaffiliation, Robert McCarty and John Vitek argue that "Disaffiliation from the Church is largely a thoughtful, conscious, intentional choice made by young people in a secularized society where faith and religious practice are seen as one option among many. It is a dynamic process that unfolds over time and after a series of experiences or considerable thought."[27]

1.2.2.3 Deconversion

Deconversion was coined by sociologist Norman Skonovd in 1981 as a process that led an individual to decide to sever ties with a religious tradition.[28] It consists of an acceptance of life's ambiguity. It reflects an emerging consensus among scholars that terms like lapsed, drop out, and defectors "failed to capture the complex reality of the process by which a person chooses to leave a religious group."[29]

Advocates of this term argue that it is a more complete process than disaffiliation. Theologian Tom Beaudoin argues that the term deconversion provides a broader and more effective way to understand forms of religious change that are occurring in the contemporary United States. Beaudoin argues that deconversion is the "process by which baptized Catholics

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[27] Robert McCarty and John Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholic,* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2018), 11.
[28] J Patrick Hornbeck II, "Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism," *Horizons* 40(2), (2013): 262- 274, 266.
[29] J. Patrick Hornbeck II, "Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism," 266.

change their ways of affiliating with the Church or the faith—revising and/or rejecting beliefs and practices—away from what are taken to be official expectations."[30] Likewise, Patrick Hornbeck argues that deconversion leads to "a new path that a person embarks on in order to reach an envisioned destination such as spiritual integration, flourishing, or wholeness."[31] Advocates for the term deconversion as opposed to disaffiliation believe it better describes a more intentional process that gives agency to the individual.

This subsection provided a brief overview of terminology that is being used in current research on religious belief and belonging with concern for people intentionally leaving organized religion. While the terms may differ, they all seek to address the growing phenomenon of changing religious landscape and the realities of how people affiliate (or not) with organized religion. Throughout this dissertation I use the concept of disaffiliation and refer to the phenomenon of the rise of the "nones." Furthermore, in section 1.4, I will suggest that there is room to add nuance to the current terminology through addressing and naming a subgroup of people who have not disaffiliated but articulate feeling on the periphery of religious institutions, struggling with whether to stay or intentionally disaffiliate.

1.3 Landscape of Religious Belonging the Twenty-first Century

The purpose of this section is to briefly look at some of the contemporary research exploring religious belief and belonging and the recent phenomenon of disaffiliation and the rise of the nones in the United States in order to synthesize what is happening.

[30] Tom Beaudoin, "Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism," *Horizons* 40(2), (2013): 255-262, 256.
[31] Hornbeck, "Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism," 267.

1.3.1 The Rise of the Nones

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2012 catapulted the conversation in American public life around the growing trend of religious disaffiliation. The summary of the survey was published by Cary Funk and Greg Smith in their article *"Nones" on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation* (2012). According to the survey, one-fifth of the U.S. population, and a third of adults under thirty, were religiously unaffiliated.[32] The survey revealed that this phenomenon of disaffiliation was taking place across a wide variety of demographic groups in the United States, particularly in regard to education and class, negating previous statistics that disaffiliation was an upper-class phenomenon. The findings did reveal that this trend of disaffiliation was mainly a Euro-American phenomenon. The study pointed out that one-fifth of (non-Hispanic) white Americans are religiously unaffiliated, up five percentage points since 2007, while Black Americans and Hispanic Americans who are religiously unaffiliated have not changed by a statistically significant margin in recent years.[33]

Over the past ten years, substantial research and both qualitative and quantitative studies are continuing to explore the phenomenon of religious disaffiliation in the United States.[34] These

[32] "Nones on the Rise," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, October 9, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/.
[33] "Nones on the Rise."
[34] Chan, Melissa, Kim M. Tsai, and Andrew J. Fuligni, "Changes in Religiosity across the Transition to Young Adulthood," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 44, 2015: 1555–66; Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Streib, Heinz, Ralph W. Hood Jr., Barbara Keller,Christopher Silver, Martha Csoeff Rosina, and T. Richardson James. *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009); Funk, Cary, and Smith, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," *Pew Research Center*, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/; Thurston, Angie, and Casper ter Kuile, *How We Gather*, (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School, 2012), https://www.howwegather.org/reports; Kosmin, Barry A., and Ariela Keysar, *Religious, Spiritual, and Secular: The Emergence of Three Distinct Worldviews among American College Students. A Report*

studies on religious belonging and disaffiliation reveal that there are many significant factors that contribute to the decline in membership in religious institutions and not a single one is dominant. For example, many of the studies point to the contemporary pluralistic society we live in that makes religious involvement more voluntary. This trend of disaffiliation is not unique to religious organizations as there has been a significant trend of decline in all voluntary types of organizations post-World War II.[35] Another recurring factor in the research is that a growing portion of young adults disagree with church teachings on issues such as birth control, women's roles in leadership, and sexuality. Young adults (age 18 to 29) who left their childhood religion are about three times more likely than seniors (age 65 and older) to say negative religious teachings about and treatment of the gay and lesbian community was a primary reason for leaving their childhood faith (39 percent vs 12 percent respectively).[36]

These studies also reveal that people in "the nones" category are vastly diverse in their concepts of belief and belonging, but that that majority continue to believe in a higher power and maintain a semblance of spiritual identity and practice. Atheists and agnostics account for a

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Based on the ARIS 2013 National College Student Survey, (Hartford: Trinity College, 2013); Beaudoin, Tom, and J. Patrick Hornbeck II, "Deconversion and Ordinary Theology: A Catholic Study," *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*. Editors Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); Packard, Josh, and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE with Church but not Their Faith*, (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2015); Cox, Kiana "Nine-in-ten Black 'nones' believe in God, but fewer pray or attend services," *Pew Research Center*, March 17, 2021, https://pewrsr.ch/3cJpgGg.

Initial Literature Review previously appeared in: O'Keefe TA, E. Jendzejec, "A New Lens for Seeing: A Suggestion for Analyzing Religious Belief and Belonging among Emerging Adults through a Constructive-Developmental Lens," *Religions*, 11(11), 2020: 573.

[35] "None on the Rise"; Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life: Updated Edition with a New Introduction,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[36] Robert P Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, "Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion – and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back." *Public Religion Research Institute,* 2016. http://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/.

minority of all religiously unaffiliated.[37] The ARIS 2013 National College Student Survey compiled by Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar nuanced the understanding of who are "the nones" among young adults. Many of the previous studies, like the 2012 Pew Research report, concluded that "the nones" are composed of religious searchers or solely the religiously unaffiliated. The ARIS study concluded there are not two but three distinct worldviews: Religious, Secular, and Spiritual.[38] The results of this 2013 survey show that the majority of "nones" rejected a Religious worldview. This data further complicated the narrative that all "nones" are still searching for a spiritual home or are just religiously unaffiliated.

1.3.2 Catholic Trends

In this section I look at the trends in the research relevant to Catholicism and specific studies that look at self-identified Catholics. The 2016 PRRI study observed two significant trends in relation to Catholicism- the first is that the US Catholic Church is experiencing an ethnic transformation. Twenty-five years ago, nearly nine in ten (87 percent) Catholics were white, non-Hispanic, compared to 55 percent today. Fewer than four in ten (36 percent) Catholics under the age of 30 are white, non-Hispanic; 52 percent are Hispanic.[39] The second trend, in relation to the ethnic transformation, is that the epicenter of Catholicism in the United States is shifting from the Northeast to the Southwest. This shift also reveals a regional age difference in what the makeup of Catholics are in certain regions. US Catholics in the Northeast and Midwest are older than Catholics in the US Southwest. Fewer than half of Catholics in the

[37] Jones et al.
[38] Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, "Religious, Spiritual, and Secular: The emergence of three distinct worldviews among American college students." *A Report based on the ARIS 2013 National College Student Survey*, (Hartford: Trinity College, 2013).
[39] Robert P. Jones, "America's Changing Religious Identity," *Public Religion Research Institute,* 2017, https://www.prri.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/.

Northeast (47 percent) and Midwest (44 percent) are less than 50 years of age. While a majority (58 percent) of Catholics living in the Western U.S. are under the age of 50.[40] These statistics are crucial for religious educators to pay attention to, and many of us are already noticing how this transformation is impacting college ministries depending on the location of the university. The most important thing to take away is to notice, support, and nurture multicultural aspects and the diversity of lived experiences of Catholicism on campuses.

Most relevant to this specific dissertation is research on disaffiliation among Catholic young adults.[41] By the numbers, Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses of any major US religious tradition in this current trend of disaffiliation. Nearly one in three Americans were raised Catholics yet fewer than one in four described themselves as currently Catholic.[42] The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) has conducted several studies in recent years on the trend of the "Rise of the Nones" in Catholicism. In 2015, CARA was commissioned to conduct a survey on young adults who have left the Catholic Church. In 2016 St. Mary's Press conducted a qualitative analysis on the quantitative data compiled by CARA.[43] They named it the "Going, Going, Gone" report. It was a sample of the estimated 5.4 million individuals in the

[40] Jones, "America's Changing Religious Identity."
[41] Dawn Overstreet, "Spiritual vs. Religious: Perspectives from Today's Undergraduate Catholics," *Catholic Education: Journal of Inquiry and Practice,* 14, 2010: 238–63; Cristen Dalessandro, "'I don't advertise the fact that I'm a Catholic': College students, religion, and ambivalence," *Sociological Spectrum,* 36, 2016: 1–12; William J. Byron and Charles Zech, "Why They Left," *America Magazine*, April 30, 2012, http://americamagazine.org/issue/5138/article/why-they-left; Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen, *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Robert McCarty and John Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholic*, (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 2018). This Literature Review previously appeared in: TA O'Keefe and E. Jendzejec, "A New Lens for Seeing: A Suggestion for Analyzing Religious Belief and Belonging among Emerging Adults through a Constructive-Developmental Lens," *Religions*, 11(11), 2020 :573.
[42] Beaudoin, "Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism," 263. Again, like in the Pew Research surveys, this is primarily a Euro-American trend, and due mainly to the influx of Catholic Hispanic immigrants to the US in recent decades, the numbers of those disaffiliating has not completely skewed Mass attendance numbers nor overall engagement statistics with the Catholic Church.
[43] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone,* 5.

United States who are former Catholics between the ages of 15 to 25. After a screening process, 204 respondents, 184 young adults and 20 teens, were interviewed. From these interviews they found that for these young adults who had left the Catholic Church, disaffiliation had been a largely thoughtful and conscious choice.[44] There was no single reason for disaffiliation, but researchers generally saw three categories that young adults interviewed could be placed within: the Injured, the Drifters, and the Dissenters.[45] For the "Injured," they often felt they were not welcomed in the Church, for example because of their sexual orientation. For "Drifters," a common reason they left was that they lacked companions on their spiritual journey.[46] For "Dissenters," they were in an active state of resistance against the Church mostly on the Church's stance on social issues.[47] Robert J. McCarty, one of the authors of the report, suggests that about a third of respondents left over church teaching, most often teachings on same-sex marriage and homosexuality. In a panel discussion on the findings the authors expressed that what they heard most from young people during the interviews is a fear of being judged keeps them from joining a church, yet they desire a spiritual connection just the same.[48]

While there is some insight into gendered differences in responses from the previous studies, I want to mention one recent significant study that sheds light on women's experiences in the Catholic Church. In 2017, *America Magazine* conducted a qualitative study looking at women in the church. Commissioned by America Media and also conducted by CARA in partnership with GfK, a survey firm. It is the most comprehensive survey of American Catholic

[44] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone,*11.
[45] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone,* 3.
[46] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone,* 18.
[47] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone,* 21.
[48] Julie Bourbon, "Study asks: Why are young Catholics going, going, gone?" *National Catholic Reporter Online*, January 22, 2018, https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/study-asks-why-are-young-catholics-going-going-gone.

women ever conducted. A total of 1,508 women self-identifying as Catholic in the United States completed the survey (in English or Spanish). This survey looked at why women stayed Catholic and what their reasons for staying were. Of the survey 18–29-year-olds made up 16.6 percent of the participants.[49] In their findings *helping the poo*r and *receiving Communion* were the most common reasons (45 percent "very much") respondents' said gave them a "sense of what it means to be Catholic."[50] When respondents asked if they ever considered leaving Catholicism, 82 percent surveyed had not considered this, twelve percent had considered it but never left, and six percent considered this and for a time no longer considered themselves Catholic.[51] It is important to note that all respondents to the survey currently self-identified as Catholic. An open-ended question about the reasons why those who had left for a time, however, revealed that some consider themselves Catholic again, but do not feel that they have "come back to the church."[52] When asked to "briefly indicate why you left," respondents who had considered leaving the Church were able to describe their reasons in their own words. The most common reasons were related to some disagreement with the Catholic Church's stance on a particular issue (39 percent) followed by being attracted to another faith or religion (23 percent).[53] Fifteen percent cited an issue with their local parish; nine percent cited "hypocrisy" of the church or its members; and seven percent cited the clergy sex abuse scandal.[54] Those who had noted that they left the faith for a time were asked to explain why they returned. Thirty-five percent indicated they had not returned to the Church—even though they continued to self-identify as Catholic.

[49] Mark M. Gray and Mary L. Gautier, "Catholic Women in the United States: Beliefs, Practices and Attitudes," *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate,* 2017, https://cara.georgetown.edu/CatholicWomenStudy.pdf, 50.
[50] Gray and Gautier, "Catholic Women in the United States," 7.
[51] Gray and Gautier, "Catholic Women in the United States," 10.
[52] Gray and Gautier, "Catholic Women in the United States," 13.
[53] Gray and Gautier, "Catholic Women in the United States," 18.
[54] Gray and Gautier, "Catholic Women in the United States," 18.

This result represents the gap between self-identifying with a religion and feeling that one is an active and appreciated member of that religion (i.e., in the broader church or in a parish).

1.3.3 What's at Stake

There are three important takeaways from looking at this data for the purposes of this dissertation. The first is that religious educators must acknowledge that it is not a given anymore that even if one is baptized into a faith community, that they will remain committed to and affiliated with that community for their life. Religious identity and belonging continue to rapidly change in the US and the trends continue to show less people being affiliated with organized religion. This will continue to impact future generations, as fewer children will be brought up in faith communities. The second is in reading the data, particularly among young adult women, it is evident that many people are leaving because they perceive themselves to be at odds with the Church on a few issues of belief and practice. Finally, disaffiliation leaves young adult women without a clear centralized community or specific navigation toolkit for discerning faith identity and associated core values, meaning and purpose.

As young adults disaffiliate, they are largely left on their own as they begin to have mature questions of belief and belonging. Journalist Kaya Oakes observes in her book, *The Nones are Alright: A New Generation of Believers, Seekers, and Those in Between (2005)* that "Young Catholics, like their seeker peers, are often left to their own devices when it comes to carving out a life of faith in an increasingly secular society."[55] When left to their own devices, young adults continue to look for guidance as to how to live meaningful lives. The void of approachable, accessible faith communities and role models leaves an expansive gap. As

[55] Kaya Oakes, *The Nones Are Alright: A New Generation of Believers, Seekers, and Those in Between,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 180.

Christian religious identity becomes less tied to family, cultural background, or community, there is a need to create new ways of inviting opportunities for young adult women to learn about, question and engage with faith communities. Faith communities need to be spaces of inclusive welcome and support in order for young adult women to view the communities as viable networks of belonging. What is ultimately at stake as young women disaffiliate from the Church is missed opportunities for young women to develop in their faith and missed opportunities for the Church to be enriched and transformed by the voices and participation of young women.

1.4 A Way Forward: Cultivating Ambivalent Belonging

This dissertation looks specifically at how religious educators can accompany young adult women in spaces of liminality, to find ways to empower them to grow into a more authentic and mature faith. As they navigate belonging in this in-between space it is crucial to affirm it as a valid space to occupy. Helping young adult women move beyond dualistic thinking is not only in service towards faith development but in service of developing a capacity for living with paradox and nuance, which is so crucially needed in the church and world of increasing polarization today. In much of the research on religious belonging, the statistics read as one is either in or out of the Church. The conversation on the rise of the nones has allowed for some nuance and affirmation of many who remain in spaces of liminality, whose religious affiliation does not fit in a specific check the box litmus test. Yet, the young women I am focused on in this dissertation do not fall neatly into the categories of nones, the disaffiliated, nor the deconverted. They still peripherally associate with their roots in the Catholic tradition, still hunger for spirituality and ritual, and often have not yet made an intentional choice to leave or join another tradition. They affiliate with the institution but often feel marginalized from it. They peripherally

identify with Catholicism in a liminal space that is both an insider/outsider position. I suggest that this is an experience more aptly described as *ambivalent belonging*.

Oakes discovered similar experiences among the young adult Catholics that she observed in her research on the phenomenon of the rise of the nones. She called them cultural Catholics, with "Catholic roots, but broken branches."[56] She describes them as,

> Wearing their Catholicism loosely, or in some cases, it follows them through life like a ghost. They form intentional Catholic communities but don't participate in Mass. They go to seminaries doubting that there is even a God. They like Pope Francis but struggle with the bishops...they attempt to return to the church but bring with them all the doubts and questions that had driven them out in the first place.[57]

These mixed experiences often manifest as an ambivalent relationship with the institutional Church. Oakes argues that perceived institutionalized sexism and the Church's official stances surrounding birth control and sexuality often negatively impact the relationship many young adults have with the institutional Church. The ongoing revelations about the depth and horror of the sex abuse scandals have only exacerbated the problem. When asked about their religious identity they share phrases such as: *I was raised Catholic but..; My grandmother was a devout Catholic but….; I'm Catholic, but don't go to Church.* While naming that they feel on the margins and peripherals of the Church, in research they often end up in the nones category since they don't feel completely comfortable enthusiastically checking the box for Catholicism. But Oakes' point is that the stories, affiliations, and roots are deeper than what can be depicted and categorized as simply, "none of the above." *Ambivalent belonging* can express nuanced belonging within the constructs of a Catholic identity. In each chapter of this dissertation, I will build on the concept of ambivalence and argue that affirming and curating narratives of young adult women's ambivalent experiences of marginalization *in* the Church is one way forward in

[56] Oakes, *The Nones Are Alright*, 141.
[57] Oakes, *The Nones Are Alright*, 97.

addressing the phenomenon of disaffiliation. Chapter Two will ground the conversation by asserting that ambivalence is firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided context for the dissertation by exploring the current landscape of research on religious belief and belonging in the United States and defining the scope of the young adult Catholic women I am engaging with in this work. Religious educators must creatively and proactively cultivate their ministry in the face of the contemporary phenomenon of increasing disaffiliation. They must respond to increasing disaffiliation by acknowledging reality and not treating it as a crisis, but as an opportunity. I argued in this chapter that nuancing the conversation of religious belonging by naming and surfacing stories of liminality helps to better capture the breadth of experience of religious belief and belonging in the twenty-first century. I have argued that one specific way to do this is to affirm varied experiences of young women that don't fit neatly into many of the categories offered in religious research, nor fit neatly into an understanding of belonging as either in or out of an organization. Throughout this dissertation I will argue that ambivalent belonging is a valid and prophetic stance to be cultivated among young adult women.

Chapter Two:
A Pilgrim Church: Journeying Together as the People of God

Vignette 1: Jade was a junior, and a resident assistant excited to be welcoming new students to campus during orientation. We were setting up in the student lounge during student orientation, when she shared with me, she had grown up Catholic but didn't feel like going to Church anymore, since she had come to college. I affirmed that it was ok but was curious to know more. She shared that growing up she thought the homilies were never relatable and often judgmental, and she giggled then as she shared in a light-hearted way she loved to sleep in on Sundays. She shared that her parents were heartbroken that she hadn't gotten involved in the Catholic group on campus, and she felt sad that they didn't celebrate her involvement in the many leadership and volunteer service groups she was a part of on campus. She expressed this made her even less interested in going to Church. She said she went to Mass once on campus, to make her father happy on his birthday, but she just quietly sat in the back and left right after communion. She still believed in God but shrugged as she guessed she had chosen not to be Catholic anymore since she didn't find meaning in going to Church on Sundays. "I mean, like why bother?" she asked rhetorically, "Church is just not for me."[58]

Vignette 2: Sienna was present at my session on Centering Prayer at the multi-faith center at a local college I was invited to present at. She came to me after the gathering and shared that she was surprised "Catholic meditation was even a thing." She was raised Catholic but didn't identify that way anymore because she worked on Sundays so couldn't go to Mass and had found going to a Wednesday night meditation group as a way to be "spiritual." No one had ever introduced her to Centering Prayer, and she thought being Catholic was all about going to Mass. She then sadly shared that after signing up for the Catholic group on campus, no one had ever reached out to her, and she just figured that since she didn't come to Mass, she wasn't welcomed. She left thanking me, taking a handout on Centering Prayer.

Vignette 3: Antonia felt deeply called to the ordained priesthood and was very committed to her Catholic faith. She loved learning about female saints, and early deaconesses in the Church. Her favorite saint was Mary Magdalene. She took all of the theology courses she could at the university she attended and was eager to offer lay reflections at Mass when the opportunity arose. She became active in nation-wide Church reform groups. She lamented that whenever she participated in these organization's gatherings or events, she was the youngest "by 30 years" and the organizers always thanked her for being there. "Does no one else my age care about ending patriarchy in the Church!?" she would often question in frustration out loud. She is

[58] These stories are an amalgamation of encounters I have had over the years as a college chaplain and parish-based young adult minister. The names and specific details have been intentionally altered to respect the confidentiality of the students' experiences.

currently pursuing ordination in the Lutheran Church and is a gifted pastoral minister and faith leader. She still feels grief that she could not pursue her vocation as a Roman Catholic.

These vignettes are examples of how many of the young women I worked with in chaplaincy experience the Church. Their experiences are far narrower than the full scope of the Church, yet the challenge is their experiences impact and skew their view of what the Church is. These distinctions between the experiences they name as Church and the actual diversity and breadth of the Church is the centerpiece of this chapter. Father Michael Himes, a beloved theology professor at Boston College, often tells a story to illustrate how he responds to a similar discord. He shares that when students come to him explaining why they don't believe in God, he asks what the God they don't believe in is like. They respond with descriptions such as judgmental, a Man in the Sky, someone who causes bad things to happen, etc. Himes would then say he didn't believe in that God either! His answer would take the students aback but help reframe the conversation. In the same way, religious educators must interrogate first what young adults perceive the Church to be and then be able to reflect back what the Church actually is. Many young adults who are disaffiliating are asking good questions, and intentionally leaving organized religion for valid reasons. In conversations of disaffiliation, it is important to not try and focus first on "winning" back young adults, but instead think about what congregations are inviting them back into and how to support young adults in cultivating a faith that brings them closer to God. If religious communities are hoping that young adults come back to Church, or to Church for the first time, then they must take a long, hard, and honest look at what type of community they are inviting them back to. How can it manifest a community of breadth and diversity, large enough to hold the questions and doubts young adults are bringing? What does the faith community stand for and how does it communicate this through actions? This chapter

engages with these ecclesiological questions in order to define what it is I mean when I speak of Church.

The three vignettes at the beginning of this chapter are representative of distinct ways that young women's experiences of the Church lead many to feel disempowered and ambivalent. Many, like Jade and Sienna, feel it doesn't matter if they show up to church or not. They did not understand themselves as part of the body of Christ because of their baptism but understood through the lens of whether they showed up to a certain place, at a certain time of the week. Other young women like Antonia who do show up, feel frustrated that there is not a space for their experiences to be heard or validated. Young women like Antonia who want to be involved, are intentionally leaving for faith communities that validate their vocational call. Theologian Bradford Hinze confirms this in his observations of young adults in relation to the Church in stating,

> In the midst of the particular historical constellation of controversies and conflicts in the church that marks this age, there are many people, frequently young people, who find themselves at the margins of the Catholic Church. Some are at the margins within the church, conflicted, dissatisfied, yet still participating in the sacraments and church activities to some degree. Others are at the margins on the outside of the church, disaffiliated and disengaged from the life and mission of the church. We can't blame modern forms of secularism or individualism entirely for this marginal existence, what some associate with a post-secular world. This marginal existence is to a large degree the result of the difficulties taking place in the church.[59]

This chapter offers a distinction between the lived experience among the young women like those I have worked with, which is one of a perceived strict binary and dualistic definitions of who is in or out and seemingly unchanging rules and traditions, with the vision of the Church as

[59] Bradford Hinze, "Can We Find A Way Together? The Challenge of Synodality in a Wounded and Wounding Church," *Irish Theological Quarterly,* 85(3), (2020): 215–229, 226.

expansive with depth and breadth, comfortable with ambiguity and constantly called to conversion. In service of this dissertation's goal of aiding religious educators in supporting young adult women navigate ambivalent belonging, this chapter affirms the concept of ambivalence as intrinsic to understanding the complexity of the Church. I argue that belonging amid ambivalence and messiness flows from Catholic tradition. Furthermore, this chapter describes a pilgrim and synodal Church that honors the embodied experiences of all the faithful while allowing their presence and their narratives to continually transform the Church.

This chapter has three sections. The first section asserts that ambivalence is firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition. This section describes three characteristics of the ambivalent nature of the Church: *bounded openness, slow church coming* and *Christian hope.* The second section, the longest, looks at doctrinal and theological underpinnings that define the Church as a pilgrim church, journeying together as the body of Christ through a renewed and shared mission. It will discuss how the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), empowered all the baptized to be active participants and prophetic voices in a dialogical Church. The third section argues that continuing on the journey together as a listening church, requires creative fidelity to the tradition through reception, celebrating and honoring the diversity of narratives and living into its call to be a synodal Church.

2.1 Getting Comfortable with Ambivalence

Approaching the fundamental ecclesiological question of *what is church* with ambivalence is firmly rooted in Catholic tradition. This may seem a strange assertion, but it is crucial in understanding the Church's mission, doctrines, histories, and realities. The concept of ambivalence often has negative connotations, but its linguistic roots reveal a neutrality towards simultaneous conflicting concepts and feelings (*ambi* = both, *valeo* = feel strongly) therefore, it

means strong feelings for "both." Ambivalence is the existence of mutually conflicting concepts or feelings. The Church has always been full of ambivalent *"both/and"* theological claims and seemingly paradoxical concepts: Jesus Christ is human/divine; the Kingdom of God is here/not yet; Mary, is Virgin/ Mother of God. Ambivalence permeates ecclesiology as humans have attempted to explain and understand God's relationship with humanity.[60] This acknowledgement is crucial in comprehending and maintaining the spiritual strength to participate.

Approaching ecclesiology with a stance of ambivalence addresses the messiness, complexity, and myriad of seeming paradoxes within the Church. It is not a detached stance but a call to active participation in defying dualistic thinking. Theologian Natalie Watson explains that this spiritual work of ambivalence, "is essentially a breaking of unhealthy dualisms."[61] Ecclesiology from a stance of ambivalence encapsulates the sacredness and prophetic nature of a *both/and* Church. What I mean by this is that the *both/and* reality of the Church challenges a dualistic understanding of the Church's role in the world as well as the understanding of the Church itself. The Church is a constant work in progress, filled with challenge *and* hope, brokenness *and* promise. With this reality it is only fair that many people express ambivalent feelings in regard to their relationship with the Church. Many of the young women I have worked with love *and* are frustrated by the Church, feel welcomed *and* excluded, feel they are an insider *and* an outsider. Ambivalence can be uncomfortable and often young adults are dualistic thinkers so to hold paradox is challenging. As one develops in their cognitive capacity, one can better express conflicting feelings simultaneously and embrace paradox.[62]

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[60] Ormond Rush, "Roman Catholic Ecclesiology from the Council of Trent to Vatican II and Beyond," *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Avis, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 24.
[61] Natalie Watson, *Introduction to Feminist Ecclesiology,* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 5.
[62] This necessary developmental leap will be the focus of Chapter Four.

In this section I offer three rich characteristics of the ambivalent Church. I suggest that each characteristic frames ambivalence as a gift of the spirit alive in the Church, rather than a problem that needs to be solved. The first is the understanding of the Church as a community of *bounded openness*. The second is the concept of a *slow Church coming*. The third is the importance of comprehending and sustaining *Christian hope*.

2.1.1 Bounded Openness

One specific way to comprehend the ambivalent nature of the Church is articulated within Serene Jones' concept of Church as *bounded openness.* The Church is not just drifting in space, but it is in fact *bounded* in specific ways that help to define and articulate how the people of God can tangibly access Christ. Jones defines *bounded* as "the specificity of its adorning practice and disciplines."[63] Yet there is a danger in equating the institutional Church with Christ and creating rigid structures that don't leave room for the Spirit. Jones counters the idea of boundedness with the concept of a church that is called to an *openness* that is both aware of its own sinfulness and grace allowing for "boundaries that are porous to both grace and sin alike."[64] The Church is a community whose openness is embodied in bounded structures and practices. Inevitably the Church is a human institution, sinful and imperfect, in need of openness to allow for constant conversion. Therefore, boundaries exist to facilitate openness. *Bounded openness* names the "tension between the inevitably rule-bound and yet necessarily open and fluid character of communal life."[65] It is a relationship marked by two simultaneous moments of "embracing the gifts of critique and radical openness and, second, celebrating the gifts of

[63] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of* Grace, (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2000), 171.
[64] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 173.
[65] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 170.

normative structure and emancipatory vision."[66] This allows for confidence in the ongoing conversion work of the Spirit.

The Church, as *bounded openness*, is a community of constant conversion, recognizing its sinfulness and need for forgiveness. This necessitates a differentiation of the Church as it is called to be and the Church as it is realized in the present. Jones is again helpful in parsing out the two when she reflects that "The normative church is the community we are called to be-church as it should be. The empirical church is the one in which we actually live, the church we presently see, touch and taste."[67] The normative Church is the historical and present promise of the work of the Spirit while the empirical Church is the concrete realities of the body of Christ today.

The Holy Spirit enables ongoing conversion in a church of *bounded openness* through manifesting Christ's presence and God's love in the world. Boundaries are not meant to exclude but to further clarify an attentiveness to a call to be the body of Christ. Stephen Pickard exclaims that "The boundaries of being the Church are necessarily more porous, elusive and open than we might have believed. This is good news for all!"[68] *Bounded openness* calls for continual conversion in an already/not yet, ambivalent understanding of Church. The faithful, through belonging in a bounded/open Church, are continually called to participate with creative fidelity to God's mission in the world. The Church as *bounded openness* is aware that God is continually unfolding in something new.

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[66] Serene Jones, "Bounded Openness: Postmodernism, Feminism, and the Church Today," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 55(1), (January 2001): 49-59.
[67] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 159.
[68] Stephen Pickard*, Seeking the Church: An Introduction to Ecclesiology,* (London: SCM, 2012), 229.

2.1.2 Slow Church Coming

The reality is that God is continually unfolding into something new does not mean that it is happening at a pace that is comprehensible. Stephen Pickard argues, "the Church is always coming; that it remains incomplete and contingent."[69] This incompleteness leads Pickard to assert that "There is no unambiguous ecclesial presence."[70] Pickard introduces the concept of a *slow church coming* to capture the ambiguous ecclesial presence and explains that it is different from "(a) a fast-asleep Church that remains locked in idealizations of permanence and (b) the anxiety driven frenetic Church associated with a competitive, constantly innovating, success-oriented consumer society."[71] Instead it is a church filled with humility and moving at a pace that does not react to cultural expectations. *Slow church coming* does not praise the literal slowness of transformation but instead advocates for a pace that is not reactionary nor conforms to modern pressures. Pickard explains, "We are in a state of radical transition, during which we wait with eager longing fully awake to the present realities and hopeful that the coming Church will prove to be a sign and embodiment of the character of the kingdom of God."[72] Pickard argues that in order to wait, one must cultivate waiting for "holy patience as the new life emerges from the old. But it is not an easy, comfortable waiting, how can it be amidst the endless round of pain and violence in the world?"[73]

It is important to name, as Pickard does, that the institutional Church is filled with at times harmful practices and that violence has happened and will continue to happen in the name of the Church. Understanding the work of a *slow church coming* does not excuse violence and

[69] Pickard*, Seeking the Church,* 228.
[70] Pickard, *Seeking the Church,* 227.
[71] Pickard*, Seeking the Church,* 223.
[72] Pickard, *Seeking the Church,* 212.
[73] Pickard, *Seeking the Church,* 220.

corruption, and instead it should inspire a response that does not romanticize the Church and calls for accountability from corrupt humans and broken structures. Slowness is a posture of continual conversion. A *slow church coming* reflects a faithfulness to the hope that God's promise is continually being revealed to us, emerging at a pace that is beyond our comprehension and does not fit into our understanding of linear progress.

2.1.3 Christian Hope

As God's promise is continually being revealed to us, emerging at a pace that is beyond our comprehension, one must have steadfast hope. Hope is what allows one to remain faithful in the gap of the normative and empirical realities of the Church. If the promise and possibility of the Church is not adequately expressed, then how can anyone be blamed for not wanting to participate? Particularly in this moment of time of the continued unearthing of the tremendous trauma and impact of the brokenness within the Church from the international sexual abuse crisis, admissions of slaveholding by religious communities, and the discovery of indigenous abuse in Church sponsored boarding schools. Hope is at the core of a Christian identity. Theologian Richard Lennan helpfully differentiates Christian hope from optimism by explaining that Christian hope is sustained through the revelation of Jesus Christ. This hope rests in the both/and understanding of Christ that Jesus was both man *and* God, suffered, died, *and* was risen. Lennan explains, "Accordingly, the church's hope, shaped by its discipleship of the crucified and risen Jesus, is what enables it to be faithful to the realities of the present, to see those realities without denying either suffering or possibility. This hope includes being faithful to the forms of "death-like birth" to which the church is summoned in its own history."[74] Hope

[74] Richard Lennan, "Church as a Sacrament of Hope," *Theological Studies.* 72, (2011): 247-274, 270.

rests in the possibility of the Church's continual conversion through a death-like birth to participate in Christ's mission more fully. Lennan asserts that Christian hope rests in trust in,

> God's commitment to us revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ frees us to risk involvement with the world we cannot control. In short, hope, far from being escapist, is an invitation to participate more fully in the 'risk-laden journey' of life.[75]

This invitation can and should bring both comfort and challenge. Lennan continues, "since in knowing ourselves as loved unconditionally in Christ, we also know that we are called to conversion, to the transformation by the Spirit of Christ that expresses itself in discipleship."[76] The faithful are instilled with hope *because* of this truth of God's love and *called* to discipleship, enabling Christ's love and liberation to be present and fully realized in our world. Hope makes room for embracing the ambivalent nature of church, that church is, always has been, and always will be, filled with human brokenness *and* God's promise. This *both/and* reality calls the Church to constantly move forward with imagination and structures and processes of accountability.[77] Attentiveness to the brokenness does not equate to God's lack of presence but reveals that God's promise is not yet fulfilled. It is a Church that is bounded and open, attentive to the realities of brokenness yet filled with hope and possibility. The three characteristics of *bounded openness, a slow church coming, and Christian hope,* reveal the pilgrim nature of the Church providing a counter-narrative to the lived experience of many of the young women who experience a dualistic and unchanging version of the Church.

[75] Lennan, "Church as a Sacrament of Hope," 253.
[76] Lennan, "Church as a Sacrament of Hope," 253.
[77] Lennan. "Church as a Sacrament of Hope," 270.

2.2 A Pilgrim Church: Journeying together as the People of God

In this section I highlight how pertinent contributions of Vatican II articulate the nature of the pilgrim Church as the ongoing journey of the People of God. This section has four parts, the first gives a brief overview of Vatican II and argues that Vatican II was itself a rich example of a *both/and* approach of creative fidelity to the tradition. The second section highlights Vatican II's articulation of the renewed mission of the Church, while the third section highlights Vatican II's emphasis on the centrality of baptism in both membership and shared mission. The fourth section discusses how Vatican II changed how membership carries out and expresses the shared mission.

2.2.1 Vatican II: The Both/and Approach of "Ressourcement" and "Aggiornamento"

The Second Vatican Council was first convened in 1962 by Pope John XXIII and met three more times before its closing in December 1965 under Pope Paul VI. This Council led to the creation of massive reforms within the Catholic Church worldwide. Sixteen documents that came out of the Council radically altered the way the Church interacted with the modern world and its faithful members.[78] This event in the Church's life marked large and sweeping changes for how the Church saw itself in relation to the outside world, and how the Church should function internally as an institution as well as a community of believers.[79]

The approach of the Council was a display of the *both/and* nature of the Church in which both *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* were integral to the reforms considered and eventually made. *Ressourcement* refers to the return to the sources (e.g., biblical texts, writings of the early

[78] For complete text of documents see: Vatican Council (2nd: 1962-1965: Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano). *The documents of Vatican II.* Ed. Walter M Abbott, (United States: America Press: Association Press. 1966).

[79] For a fuller understanding of the Council in the life of the Church, see Ormond Rush, *Vision of Vatican II: It's Fundamental Principles,* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019) and *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Rick Gaillardetz, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

church) for the purpose of revitalizing the tradition and rediscovering how the tradition can meet the challenges of the times. *Aggiornamento* is the effort of updating and contextualizing the Gospel. Vatican II was much more than just adapting to or accommodating the modern world. In his opening speech to the Council on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII affirmed this *both/and* position in stating that, "It is absolutely vital that the Church shall never for an instant lose sight of that sacred patrimony of truth inherited from the Fathers. But it is equally necessary for her to keep up to date with the changing conditions of this modem world, and of modem living, for these have opened up entirely new avenues for the Catholic apostolate."[80] With the *both/and* approach of "ressourcement" and "aggiornamento," Vatican II set out to realize the Church's mission more fully in the world.[81]

2.2.2 A Renewed Mission

Vatican II renewed the mission of the Church by emphasizing its pilgrim nature and engagement with and in the world. The Vatican II document, *Ad Gentes*, emphasizes the missionary nature of the pilgrim Church in stating that the, "Pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father."[82] This mission is based on a sacramental notion of the Church as a sign of grace in the world and for the world. The Church,

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[80] John XXIII, "Opening Address to the Council-An Address of Pope John XXIII," in *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII,* (TPS Press, 1964), 423-435, 429.

[81]For more information on *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* in Vatican II see work by Vatican II scholar Massimo Faggioli. Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium,* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012). Previous to the quoted publication, Faggioli also wrote *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning,* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2012).

[82] Vatican Council II. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Ad Gentes.* (7 December 1965), at The Holy See. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

as sacrament, is a sign of God's love as well as simultaneously an instrument that enables communion between Christ and God's people, as the fundamental sacrament; one of liberation, seeking fullness and freedom in God.[83] Vatican II reiterated that the Church, as the body of Christ, is guided by the Holy Spirit.[84]

Vatican II's document *Lumen Gentium* locates the mission in the body of Christ. It proclaims that "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple."[85] The image of the Church as the body of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, conceptually articulates how to understand the Church in relation to God. Theologian Susan Wood explains that Church as sacrament is closely related to the image of the body of Christ. Drawing from theologians Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner, Wood explains that, "the church as the body of Christ is the sacramental presence of Christ in the World analogously to how Christ is the sacrament of the Father."[86] The Church, as the body of Christ, is a sacrament, which is a sign of God's love as well as simultaneously an instrument that enables communion between Christ and God's people.[87] In *Lumen Gentium,* the Council Fathers assert that the Church is called to continue Christ's mission in the world through the workings of the Holy Spirit.[88] The Holy Spirit enables Christ's presence and God's love to be actualized in the world now. This is a crucial component for the Church so that it does not become a mere human institution, nor does it ignore

[83] Ormond Rush's *Vision of Vatican II* and *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, edited by Rick Gaillardetz are two of the most recent studies of the Council.
[84] Vatican Council II. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium.* (21 November 1964), at The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html. Moving forward noted as LG.
[85] LG, 4.
[86] Susan Wood, "Continuity and Development in Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology,* 7 (2011), 156.
[87] Wood, "Continuity and Development in Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," 156.
[88] LG, 12.

the Church's responsibility to witness to Christ's mission. Reliance on the Spirit is what continues to enable the Church to live out its sacramentality.

2.2.3 A Shared Mission

All the baptized are called to be part of the mission of the Church and therefore the mission of God. Baptism is a sacramental symbol of equality in the shared mission of the Church. Each baptized person is empowered in her own way to participate in the "threefold": priest, prophet, and shepherd, functions of the Church.[89] The revelation of God in Christ has been communicated to the whole Church and every baptized person has the responsibility to be witness to this truth in both word and deed. *Lumen Gentium* confirms the responsibility of all the faithful to discern matters of faith through explaining the importance of the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful. It proclaims,

> The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.[90]

Sensus fidelium calls for all the baptized to not only discern how the Spirit is working through the signs of the times but also to be part of the response. While *sensus fidelium* was not a new concept that emerged from Vatican II, it was received in the Church with newfound appreciation and emphasis. It emphasized that *sensus fidelium* is comprised of the *sensus laicorum* (sense of

[89] LG, 12.
[90] LG, 12.

the laity) *sensus theologorum* (sense of the faith of theologians) and *sensus episcoporum* (sense of the faith of the bishops- the magisterium).[91] The dialogue among this triad puts forth a vision of a pilgrim Church that journeying together does not just mean in practicing the faith, but in discerning matters of faith as well.

The pilgrim Church is not just dialoguing with those physically present, but participating in the shared mission with the ancestors, martyrs, followers before and faithful in the future. Chapter Seven of *Lumen Gentium* defines three characteristics of the eschatological nature of the pilgrim Church: veneration of ancestors and martyrs, commitment to charity, and shared liturgy.[92] It is a pilgrimage that surpasses time and space, "for all of us, who are sons of God and constitute one family in Christ, as long as we remain in communion with one another in mutual charity and in one praise of the most holy Trinity, are corresponding with the intimate vocation of the Church and partaking in foretaste the liturgy of consummate glory."[93] The Church has and will continue to be on an imperfect pilgrimage, constantly called to be in dialogue and discernment with the past, present and future.

2.2.4 Inverting the Pyramid: Pilgrims Journeying Together in Faith

Vatican II changed the emphasis on how the people of God carry out the mission of the Church by explicitly empowering all of the baptized to be active in discerning matters of faith. According to theologian Ormond Rush two specific reversals at Vatican II highlighted a shift in the Church becoming more participative and dialogical. In Rush's 2017 article, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church," he describes how two specific reversals by

[91] Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation,* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 251.
[92] LG, 7.
[93] LG, 7.

the Council contributed to inverting the hierarchical structure of the Church that privileged the hierarchy to instead focus on the primacy of baptism in its orientation.[94] The first reversal was in the emphasis on the equality of all the baptized in the Church.[95] To illustrate this point, Rush offers the example of how the Council re-wrote *Lumen Gentium*. He explains that the first draft began with highlighting the hierarchy and holy orders. After much debate and editing, the bishops' finalized edition of *Lumen Gentium* included a whole chapter on the people of God, emphasizing that the people of God includes all of the baptized. This chapter precedes the chapters on holy orders and the hierarchy. Rush argues that "When compared with the dominant self-understanding characterizing the Church across the whole of the second millennium, the change constitutes nothing less than a reconfiguration of the Catholic imagination regarding the nature of the church."[96] Through this restructuring the Council affirmed the shared dignity and consequent equality of all the baptized in the Church, despite differences in charisms and ministries.

The second reversal at Vatican II that Rush points to is an implicit change in how relationships function within a c*ommunio ecclesiology.* The term *communio* is a Latin term meaning sharing in common. The similar Greek term *koinonia*: meaning participation or fellowship, is present throughout the New Testament relating to the relationships between the followers of Christ.[97] *Communio* reflects an instance of "ressourcement." Communion (communio, koinonia) is not only related to the participatory relationships between the followers

[94] Rush, Ormond, "Inverting the Pyramid: The Sensus Fidelium in a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies,* 78(2), (2017): 299 – 325, 305.
[95] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 305.
[96] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 307.
[97] The word *koinonia* is found 19 times in the New Testament. An example is in Acts 2:42 when "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

of Christ, it also encompasses the relationship (both communal and individual) between the followers of Christ and God. This articulation of the renewed institutional structure had three parts: communion within the college of bishops, communion between the local churches, communion among all the faithful.[98] Rush argues that the Council had an "implicit vision of a synodal, listening church" through its explicit emphasis on the importance of *sensus fidelium* and communion among all the faithful.[99]

A c*ommunio ecclesiology* is rooted in journeying together and shared authority. Rush argues that Vatican II emphasized that authority is in service to the community, rooted in relationship and dialogue.[100] Furthermore, Rush asserts that authority of the Church's teaching, enacted as synodality, is centered on a culture of constant dialogue between the three teaching offices of the Church (sensus fidelium, theology and the magisterium) which in turn leads to *consensus fidelium*. This consensus does not imply that everyone has the same roles nor has to agree on everything, in fact quite the opposite, consensus derives from the unity which is grounded in diversity and not homogeneity. He explains,

> At a communal level, the corporate organon operates through the Spirit's "normal" process of working throughout history: conciliatory or synodality, and its mode of operation through reception of "the other" in dialogue. It is the Spirit's communal organon of *sensus fidelium* that grounds the interrelationship and dialogic mode of operation among the three authorities of the church's teaching office: the *sensus fidelium*, theology, and the magisterium.[101]

Rush's description of this process of the Spirit working throughout history is a reminder that this dialogue extends beyond the present moment. It is a dialogue with the entire Christian witness of

[98] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 313.
[99] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 325.
[100] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 320.
[101] Rush*, The Eyes of Faith*, 243.

faith from the beginning and into the future. Authority viewed as a *consensus fidelium* is not supposed to be top down or coercive but is instead focused on journeying together.[102]

The Church is not a perfect reality but embodies an eschatological hope of continually being called to move toward Christ, through mission. It is bounded yet open, always changing at a pace not always comprehensible. This section relied on the observations of Ormond Rush to reveal Vatican II's implicit and explicit reforms to become more dialogical, both internally and externally so that the Church can best discern the workings of the Holy Spirit through all of the people of God. The next section will look at how dialogue looks practically in the Church.

2.3 Continuing on the Journey Together as a Listening Church

In this section I discuss how the pilgrim Church centers the reality of the body of Christ, by listening to and discerning the movement of the Spirit in the lives of the faithful. The pilgrim Church discerns the work of the Spirit through all of the faithful, meaning it must be attentive to the Church's diverse and rich traditions, cultures, experiences, and theologies from throughout the world and throughout the Church's history. A listening Church receives the tradition from the past, is attentive to the current diverse realities of the body of Christ, and functions in a synodal way to be responsive to these realities.

[102] It is important to note for the sake of this dissertation that while Vatican II placed a strong emphasis on the prophetic office of all the baptized and in equating authority with dialogue and service, it maintained and perpetuated a gendered system. While the language is clear that there is a professed equality, distinct roles within the hierarchy are also equated to ordination status. It creates a problematic separate- but-equal phenomenon that perpetuates an inherent hierarchy based on both gender and clerical status. Only ordained men can serve within the magisterium and therefore only ordained men continue to have governing authority. While the *consensus fidelium* ideally allows all the baptized to participate in matters of faith, those with juridical power are not representative of the diversity of the body of Christ.

2.3.1 Reception: Creative Fidelity to the Tradition

The Church is given from another time and place and the Church in its current makeup must discern how to make it its own. Here I speak of the complexity of reception. John O'Brien remarks, "The Church as the pilgrim People of God, is constantly receiving the tradition but in a manner that makes this holy people active participants in shaping the very tradition that it will creatively hand on."[103] Pickard explains this notion well in articulating,

> The Church at any time is always traveling with the saints and sages of past time and space. In such an ecclesial environment, organizational structures and ministrations of ancient lineage can take on a new significance as enablers for deeper freedom and peace. The remarkable thing about such an *ecclesia* is the presence of a surplus of renewable energy, which is continually released through attentive listening to God and one another; to re-membering and celebrating and to care, service and joyful telling of the story of Jesus. This is the unfinished Church of Emmaus Road companions; the slow Church coming on a journey with the peoples of the world.[104]

This slow journey of re-membering and celebrating is one of continuing to listen to how the spirit is unfolding with a discerning eye to the past, present and future. Lennan explains,

> The reception of tradition provides an example of how the identity of the church as a pilgrim community raises questions for practices within the church. Viewed through the lens of eschatology, tradition is not simply the triumph of the past, but a stimulus for movement, for continuing the pilgrimage to God. Since the Spirit is the source of the dynamism of tradition, faithfulness to the Spirit mandates attention to the manifold voices that can express the Spirit. This, in turns, speaks to the need for a commitment to the ongoing reception and re-reception of tradition; this requires "recontextualising" definitions of faith, forms of worship, and practices to respond to the questions and needs of present-day believers.[105]

[103] John O'Brien, "Ecclesiology as Narrative," *Ecclesiology,* 4, (2008): 148-165, 152.
[104] Pickard, *Seeking the Church,* 238.
[105] Lennan, "Church as a Sacrament of Hope," 266.

The Church is constantly moving forward on a hopeful, transformational journey. This hope is not naive about the gaps between the normative and empirical church, but attentive to them so that the Church may move closer to fuller freedom in Christ. As Lennan explains, the Church "manifests itself in both the willingness to acknowledge painful truths and the imagination that strives to develop different possibilities for the future, not as a refutation of the living tradition, but as a creative reappropriation of it."[106] Reception is creative reappropriation embodied in hope.

2.3.2 Companions on the Journey: Celebrating the Diversity of Narratives

A listening Church must take seriously the diversity of experiences within the global Church. According to John O'Brien, this means that the "The basic *loci ecclesiologici* are the lives and action of committed individuals and communities."[107] A listening church relies not on one narrative but many narratives in conversation and intersection with one another. [108] Within this intersection of narratives, there is a necessity of prioritizing listening to the stories of the marginalized. Natalia Imperatori-Lee argues that "In contrast to totalizing metanarratives that erase differences in favor of a unifying story, an emphasis on narratives of particularity allows ecclesiology to avoid the marginalization of non-dominant voices."[109] Unity in diversity does not mean conformity. Pickard is helpful here in articulating that the concept of *companions on the journey* may be more helpful than speaking of community when talking of the People of God. He explains, "The language of community can function as rhetorical language that unintentionally

[106] Lennan, "Church as a Sacrament of Hope," 270.
[107] O'Brien, "Ecclesiology as Narrative," 153.
[108] O'Brien, "Ecclesiology as Narrative," 153.
[109] Natalia Imperatori-Lee, "Unsettled Accounts: Latino/a Theology and the Church in the Third Millennium," *A Church With Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, edited by Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hahnenberg, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015), 46-4.

masks a hermetically sealed, non-porous sociality that rides on dualisms between the Church and the world, an 'us-and-them' notion, which has little if anything to do with the good news of the hospitality of the kingdom of God."[110] Instead he suggests that companionship "lives by and grows through the affirmation of otherness while community can too easily function as a rhetoric for new forms of control and suppression."[111] The Church as the pilgrim People of God, companions on the journey, enable Christ's love and liberation to be present and realized in the world.

2.3.3 Synodality: The Intersection of Narratives

While the previous section argues that a listening Church should be open and inclusive of all of the faithful, the question then remains *how* does listening happen? O'Brien argues that there is a triangular nature of narratives in the Church as a "creative space defined by the intersection of the series of narratives deriving from the People of God, the bishops, and the theologians."[112] This triangle of narratives echoes Rush's articulation of the *consensus fidelium*. This triangle is the synodal embodiment of the Church.

Synodality is an ecclesial articulation of journeying together as the People of God as described in *Lumen Gentium* Chapter Two. In the documents of Vatican II, the actual word synodality is not found, but there are 136 accounts of the concept of synods as a structural model of listening.[113] Theologian Rafael Luciani describes synodality as participation in a "dynamic and inclusive model of being and acting ecclesially."[114] Luciani goes on to explain that,

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[110] Pickard, *Seeking the Church,* 231.
[111] Pickard, *Seeking the Church*, 232.
[112] O'Brien, "Ecclesiology as Narrative,"165.
[113] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 303.
[114] Hosffman Ospino, "A closer look at synodality and its promise for a more inclusive church," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 23, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/closer-look-synodality-and-

> A synodal vision challenges us to transform clericalist practices in which an individual or a group in the church makes decisions without listening and consulting, as if existing beyond the people of God. Synodality demands that we listen and engage in dialogue to establish binding relationships that build church.[115]

Synodality calls for transformation as the synodal process itself makes space for the Holy Spirit to continually move through the People of God. The pilgrim Church is in continual conversion for the sake of fidelity to God's mission in the world.

Authority in the synodal Church lies within the *consensus fidelium*. *Lumen Gentium* insists that by virtue of baptism, the teaching authority and the prophetic office are entrusted to all the faithful.[116] When viewing the teaching authority of the Church in this way it is clear that its primary feature is not unquestioning obedience but one of respect and mutuality between the magisterium, the sensus fidelium and theologians. Synodality fosters a collaborative relationship between all facets of the Church- bishops and local parishes, the clergy, and the laity. It allows room for all voices and experiences to be heard and valued.

Synodality is the experience of "walking together" as a pilgrim Church, rooted in the spirit of Vatican II and has been embraced and promoted by Pope Francis. In his papacy, Pope Francis has strongly promoted the notion of a synodal Church in which governing authority is derived from listening and interpreting and then communicating the needs of the Church. Bradford Hinze argues that "The cornerstone of [Pope Francis'] agenda, which builds on the teachings of Vatican II, has been to promote a fuller and more developed theology, policy, and praxis of synodality."[117] From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has stressed the

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its-promise-more-inclusive-church. See also, Rafael Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People,* (Ossining, NY: Orbis, 2017).

[115] Ospino, "A closer look at synodality and its promise for a more inclusive church."

[116] LG, 12.

[117] Hinze, "Can We Find a Way Together?" 217.

importance of journeying together as the People of God. Francis has called for major synods on the topics of the family (2014), on youth (2018), and on the Church in the Pan-Amazon region (2019). Currently the Church is conducting another synod on the life of the Church. This synod is entitled: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." The Vatican's website devoted to the current synod explains that "The Church of God is convoked in Synod. With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the whole Church to question itself on synodality: a decisive theme for the life and mission of the Church."[118] The current synod which is a two-year process that will unfold in three phases: A diocesan phase, a continental phase, and a universal phase.[119] With this synod, Pope Francis has called the entire People of God to continue to journey together. In his opening address he called us as church to engage this synod as an opportunity to become a *listening church*. He explains,

> The Synod [then] offers us the opportunity to become a *listening Church*, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen…To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground.[120]

He then ends with a rousing call to action in proclaiming,

> Come, Holy Spirit! You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a "museum Church", beautiful but mute, with much past and little future. Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and

[118] "Synod 2021-2023 For A Synodal Church," https://www.synod.va/en.html, accessed on Feb 1, 2022.
[119] Elise Ann Allen, "Vatican says 2023 'synod on synods' will be a process, not an event," *Crux,* May 21, 2021, https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2021/05/vatican-says-2023-synod-on-synods-will-be-a-process-not-an-event .
[120] Francis. Address of his Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod. (9 October 2021). At The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html.

> unproductive discussions. Come, Spirit of love, open our hearts to hear your voice![121]

Francis' call to action makes clear the need for constant conversion filled with hope. Through a commitment to listening through synods, there is trust the Spirit will continue to move the Church towards greater fidelity to God's mission in the world. Pope Francis is creatively holding the Church in its commitment to ongoing conversion through listening. Pope Francis is strongly emphasizing, both in writing and in practice, that the synodal Church acts as a "field hospital" focused on listening and responding to the needs of the world.[122] Pope Francis has called on the Church to also take seriously the movements of the Spirit by encouraging the Church to publicly focus more on the liberative aspects of the Church such as focusing on standing for the dignity of all people and care of creation.[123]

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter is concerned with disrupting a dualistic and narrow vision of the Church. The pilgrim Church is complex and embodied, a hope-filled community of permanent conversion. This vision of a pilgrim Church takes comfort with ambiguity and with paradox. It

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[121]Pope Francis, "Address of his Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod."

[122] Pope Francis has used this metaphor many times. To name a few he used it in his interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J. "A Big Heart Open to God," *America Magazine* Sept. 19, 2013. https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: Joy of the Gospel* [Apostolic Exhortation], 2013, #76, at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. Also used within the context of a Papal audience in August 2019, "Pope at Audience: Church a 'field hospital' that cares for sick" excerpts found at: https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-08/pope-francis-general-audience-church-cares-for-sick.html, accessed February 17, 2022.

[123] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* [Encyclical], 2015, at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html and Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* [Encyclical], 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

invites and honors the voices and experiences of all the baptized, the People of God. The People of God are companions on a journey that surpasses a specific time and space and are called to a shared mission by listening to how the Spirit continues to move in the world towards fuller liberation in Christ. Young adult women need to be exposed to this vision and invited in as companions on the journey. Religious educators can help young adult women see this vision of the pilgrim Church with ambivalent characteristics, to offer hope and resources for those struggling in and with the Catholic Church today.

Chapter Three:
Inhabiting Middle-Space: Contributions of US Catholic Feminisms

Vignette: As a chaplain at a women's college, I facilitated a meeting with ten undergraduate women about to embark on a faith-based alternative spring break trip. As the discussion began, the students were enthusiastic in engaging with the first question I posed: what do you see as the connection between faith and justice? Then, when prompted to articulate their own faith and belief system, there was silence. Finally, one student expressed, "Gosh, I really love Jesus, but I'm not down with the institution." Almost everyone nodded in the room. Of the other nine students, most expressed their own spiritual but not religious status. Most were raised in various faith traditions but didn't practice anymore. One student shared self-consciously that she was Christian, but her faith was a personal, private experience. These are students that are inclined to sign up for a faith-based alternative spring break trip, yet when prompted about their own connection to a religious tradition they expressed a varied degree of ambivalence.

This chapter focuses on the claim that gender inequality exists within the Catholic Church. It explores the paradoxical reality that while many Catholic women acknowledge this inequality, they simultaneously negotiate diverse ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. This chapter has three sections. The first section begins with a brief overview of how the emergence of Catholic feminism in the United States in the mid-twentieth century created a platform for resistance towards theologies and institutional structures that perpetuate gender inequality in the Church. It then describes four different approaches, as described by Lisa Cahill, that Catholic feminists have since taken to address gender inequities in the Church. This first section reveals how Catholic feminists problematized the concept of church membership and articulated an experience of being both insider/outsider within the Church.

The second section illustrates the phenomenon experienced among many women across faith traditions of negotiating an insider/outsider relationship with one's claimed religious tradition. While this dissertation focuses specifically on Catholic women, the literature review

contains studies and terminology that are derived from interdisciplinary sources and diverse religious traditions. The section provides a brief overview of several concepts that have attempted to describe the insider/outsider phenomenon and reveals in the context of Catholicism how this experience challenges the presumption that the Church is monolithic, as in one either belongs or doesn't belong to the dominant (and male) expression of the Church. I then highlight the work of Mary Bednarowski in her book *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (1999) to articulate the ambivalent nature of an insider/outsider stance in relation to one's tradition.

The final section suggests that cultivated ambivalence towards one's tradition can be a posture from which to actively engage in the transformation of the Church. I will do this by showing how cultivated ambivalence is revealed in several recent memoirs and essays by Catholic women struggling with their experiences of being Catholic in the US context.

3.1 Catholic Feminist Traditions in the United States

This section reveals how addressing gender justice in the Church has come from diverse voices and the field of Catholic feminist theology continues to be challenged and informed by the context and intersectionality.

3.1.1 Emergence of the Catholic Feminist Movements

Two events that were integral to creating a Catholic feminist movement were Vatican II and the second wave feminist movement. While the documents and decrees of the Second Vatican Council empowered lay Catholics to actively participate in their Church, the second wave feminist movement empowered certain groups of women to mobilize against sexism in American society. Catholic feminists defined their feminism through their commitment to the

"gospel of Jesus for social justice, liberation, and radical equality."[124] Their unique critique of sexism was not just against societal injustice but also against sexism within the Catholic Church. It is important to note that not all Catholic women were on board with this critique, and not all women who claim(ed) a feminist identity and ideology hold the same views on how to challenge the institution, nor how to transform it. The challenge of sexism within the Church was rooted in the message of Vatican II's "universal call to holiness."[125]

Vatican II's recognition of the role of the laity within the Church created an opening for women, both lay and religious, to be involved in church in many ways not possible before. The Second Vatican Council convened four times from 1962 to its closing in December 1965. The sixteen documents that came out of the Council radically altered the way the Church interacted with the modern world and its faithful members.[126] This call for lay participation comes through most significantly in the document, *Lumen Gentium. Lumen Gentium* empowered lay people with its declaration that the Church is the People of God. Article 12 asserts,

> The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.[127]

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[124] Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement,* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008), 6.
[125] LG, 5.
[126] Colleen McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America,* (New York: Basis, 2011)*,* 73.
[127] LG, 12.

Lumen Gentium opened the doors for increased lay participation by insisting on the prophetic office of each member of the faithful.[128] The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, passed in 1965, also encouraged lay people to take a more active role in their faith.[129] Vatican II inspired lay Catholics to take on leadership opportunities that had not been opened to them before.

During the same period of time that the documents and decrees of Vatican II empowered Catholic women to actively participate in Church, the second wave feminist movement was beginning to empower certain groups of women to mobilize against sexism in the workplace, the home, and in governmental policies. In 1963, Betty Friedan's revolutionary book, *The Feminine Mystique,* shed light on the constraints forced upon middle-class women in the United States. As historian Sara Evans explains in her book *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End,* by the 1960s, "Virtually every powerful cultural institution--magazines, televisions, advice books, schools, and religious leaders--prescribed a middle-class ideal for women: they were to be wives and mothers, nothing more, nothing less."[130] The dissatisfaction with this prescription, described by Friedan as the "feminine mystique," catapulted specifically middle-class white women in America into organizing for change. During the 1960s, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed to be an umbrella organization for advocating for women's equality in the workplace, the academy, and in the home.

The influence of feminism began to be felt in religious circles. Before the 1960s it was stereotypically suggested that middle-class Catholic women could choose one of two roles; wife

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[128] Several secondary sources that explain the continuing impact of increased lay participation include: Oonagh O'Brien, "The Theology of Lay Ministry: "Developments" Since Vatican II," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007): 88-95; Kenan Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church,* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1993); Aurelie Hagstrom, *The Emerging Laity: Vocation, Mission, and Spirituality,* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010).
[129] McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II,* 101.
[130] Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End,* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 19.

or nun. Catholic theologian Susan Ross recalls that in her experiences of the pre-Vatican II Church, the "women we knew were most likely married women, nuns, and the Blessed Mother."[131] As the second wave feminist movement encouraged women to move past the confines of the home, and Vatican II called upon lay people to become active in their churches, certain Catholic women began to challenge both the conventional paths that Ross alludes to and sexism within religion.[132]

In the 1960s women such as Mary Daly, Elizabeth Farians, Rosemary Radford Reuther, and Sidney Callahan, were among the first self-proclaimed American Catholic feminists. They were also among the first American women to obtain doctorates in Catholic theology. Through their scholarship emerged feminist re-interpretations of scripture and Church teachings. They began to publicly challenge what they believed were sexist Church teachings that claimed to be based on scripture, such as the denial of women to the priesthood and the prohibition of the use of contraceptives. They claimed that two thousand years of men interpreting scripture had led to devastating consequences for women and kept them in subordinate roles within society and within the Church.[133] These Catholic feminists defined their feminism through their commitment to the "gospel of Jesus for social justice, liberation, and radical equality."[134] Their experience being Catholic was what informed their feminism. Many Catholic women would follow in their

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[131] Susan Ross, "Pre-Vatican II Church and Women," in *Reclaiming Catholicism: Treasures Old and New,* eds. Thomas Groome and Michael Daly, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 47-51, 47.
[132] It is important to complicate the idea of "Catholic womanhood". The critique of second wave feminism also holds true for Catholic feminists. They were claiming a universal experience for women in the Church and leaving out many voices. Most of the Catholic feminists were white women who came from working class and middle-class backgrounds. I will continue to describe this tension later in the chapter.
[133]Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); and Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990). Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).
[134] Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement,* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008), 6.

footsteps in obtaining degrees in both Catholic theology and pastoral ministry and continue to strengthen the emerging field of feminist theology while also changing how women participated in the Church community.

3.1.1.1 Catholic Feminist Activism

Feminist theologians joined Catholic feminist activists in promoting women's equality in the Catholic Church in the 1960s-1970s. Many wanted to problematize church teachings that promoted the notion that while women were equal to men in spirit, they had completely different gifts and roles in the church and society. Feminist scholar Margaret Farley argues that there was a need among these early Catholic feminists to challenge a long history of Christian misogyny that placed a woman as "exalted" in her seemingly binary choice of roles as either mother *or* virgin, while at the same time places her as inferior in body and mind to men.[135]

As many other Christian denominations were opening their ordination processes to women, there was energy and hope in the years following Vatican II that this would happen in Roman Catholicism too. A national conference was held in Detroit, Michigan in 1975 in order to discuss women's ordination and women's participation in the Church.[136] Two thousand people attended the conference, which was called the Women's Ordination Conference. The women who organized the conference were Catholic feminists who had been empowered through Vatican II to take seriously the call for lay people to get more involved in the Church. Leaders and attendants were mostly white, middle class, educated women. As a radical expression of authority, they did not ask the bishop's permission to hold this conference. The conference

[135] Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics,* (London: Continuum, 2006), 139.
[136] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,*118. Proceedings of the conference can be found in: Anne Marie Gardiner, *Women and Catholic priesthood: An expanded vision: proceedings of the Detroit Ordination Conference* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

participants decided that there was a need to become an official non-profit organization, called Women's Ordination Conference (WOC). In the following years, WOC became an outspoken public voice that countered "official" Church teachings that limited women's involvement in the Church with scriptural re-interpretation. There was a hopeful atmosphere within Catholic feminist circles around the possibility for real change in the institutional church. Though not all Catholic feminists were in favor of advocating for women's ordination. There was a strong debate of advocating solely for women priests within an existing patriarchal structure, and a contingent involved in the movement that sought to rethink priestly ministry all together.[137]

A crushing blow came for Catholic feminists advocating for women's ordination in 1976 when the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith came out with "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood" also known as *Inter Insigniores*.[138] The document declared that the Church is not authorized to admit women to priestly ordination. The reasons given were that Christ called only men to be his twelve apostles and that a male priest has a "natural" resemblance of Jesus on the altar. The document further explained, using the theology of complementarity, that the roles for men and women in the Church are distinct and cannot be confused. *Inter Insigniores* did not end Catholic feminists' call for women's ordination, in response to which Pope John Paul II wrote *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), further enforcing the Vatican's stance against women's ordination.[139] *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* remains

[137] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,* 125.
[138] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,* 199. Document cited: Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Inter Insigniores* (15 October 1976) at Holy See https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html.
[139] John Paul II. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (May 22, 1994), at The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html.

the Church's official stance. While not all Catholic feminists saw ordination as the right path towards advocating for full inclusion, there was a logical argument that if women are not ordained, due to the hierarchical structure of the Church, they lack opportunities to be in positions of power and influence within the institution. Leaders of WOC continue to advocate for women's leadership through publicly disagreeing with policies and doctrines of the Church that perpetuate sexism and gender inequality. They are asserting leadership and claiming a space for an alternative Catholic viewpoint to the Vatican and Bishops within the U.S. Catholic context.

In this early Catholic feminist movement described in the previous several paragraphs, the majority of the leaders and organizers were white women coming from mostly middle to upper class backgrounds. The movement never gained widespread explicit support from the majority of Catholic women in the pews throughout the country and one hypothesis is that the hyper-focus on women's ordination excluded many issues that women cared more urgently about such as parish life and family issues.[140] The development of Catholic feminism in the US was largely a white-middle-class experience and the critique of the second wave feminism also holds true for the early Catholic feminist movement which is that many white Catholic feminists were claiming a universal experience for all women in the Church and leaving out many voices. While limited in diversity of voices, its impact on mainline Catholic theology was significant. Catholic feminists produced groundbreaking theological works and engaged in activism that problematized centuries-old western-centric patriarchal theology and church structures. Even still, the Catholic feminist movement was rightfully critiqued by gender justice advocates and theologians of color, as catering to the experiences of white middle class women and critiquing

[140] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,*132.

internal church issues instead of broader societal issues such as poverty, systemic racism, and intersectional oppressions.[141]

Catholic women of color rose to prominence in the early feminist movement and their activism and theology was rooted in their faith *and* in their racialized and gendered lived experiences. It was an intersectional approach that pushed back on claims of a universal experience for women and instead worked to contextualize and lift up how multiple identities impact how one experiences the Church and how one engages with questions of faith, identity, and liberation. Women of color, both lay and religious, were involved in the early Catholic feminist movement, though they were in the minority. M. Shawn Copeland, at the time a Dominican woman religious and representative of the National Black Sisters Conference, was a prominent voice within the early movement. Copeland advocated that Catholic feminists must look at racism and not only sexism to dismantle institutional prejudice and oppression within the Church. At the first women's ordination conference in Detroit, Copeland was vocal in her concerns and criticism along with Maria Iglesias, who represented Las Hermanas, an organization representing Hispanic women in the Catholic Church. Copeland and Iglesias made statements at the end of the conference expressing that the movement's hyper-focus on ordination and the experience they had at the conference did not serve the interests of nor minister to minority Catholics.[142] While leadership in the conference put some effort into trying to address these accusations of racism, it persisted and women of color who remained involved, continued to experience tokenism and racism in the conference.[143] Copeland and other Catholic women of color who were involved, such as Jamie Phelps, recalled feeling tokenized as the

[141] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,*132-134, 226.
[142] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,*134.
[143] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,* 226.

conference tried to diversify by inviting people of color to sit on committees without doing much internal work of dismantling racist culture or white hegemony.[144]

Catholic women of color involved in the movement such as Copeland, Phelps, and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz would go on to obtain doctorates in theology; their contributions would continue to shape not only Catholic feminist activism but greatly impact academic theological discourse within the growing fields of feminist theology and ethics. In the following two sections I will briefly describe the emergence of Mujerista and Catholic womanist theologies, two unique theologies that arose from an intersectional approach.

3.1.1.2 Catholic Latina/Mujerista Theologies

Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a prominent Cuban-American theologian in the late 20th Century, was very involved in the women's ordination conference, and held leadership positions with the organization in the 1970s. In her obituary in the New York Times in 2012 it was written, "Ada María Isasi-Díaz would have become a Roman Catholic priest, she told friends, if not for the church's ban on ordaining women. Instead, she became a dissident theologian who spoke for those she considered the neglected spiritual core of the church's membership: Hispanic women like herself."[145] Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango first described Hispanic women's experiences of Catholicism and suggested goals for a Hispanic Women's Liberation movement in *Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology (1988)*.[146] Their work is deeply rooted in both feminist theology and liberation theologies of Latin America. Isasi-Díaz is well known for coining the term Mujerista theology to speak to the

[144] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,*132-134, 226.
[145] "Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz's Obituary," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/06/nyregion/ada-maria-isasi-diaz-dissident-catholic-theologian-dies-at-69.html.
[146] Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

experiences of Hispanas and Latinas in the United States in the late 1980s.[147] Mujerista theology speaks to the lived experiences of Latinas. It examines how sexism, ethnic prejudice and economic oppression impact Latinas and how their faith can be a resource in their struggle for liberation. The primary focus is on the experiences of poor, Hispanic, Catholic women. Mujerista theology derived from feminist and Latin American liberation theologies while also addressing a cultural critique of Latino culture and dominant white culture in the US.

3.1.1.3 Catholic Womanism

Womanist theology was mainly derived from the experiences of Black Protestant Christians, although there have been Roman Catholic contributions. Womanist theology centers the experience and perspectives of Black women, particularly African-American women. The term womanist is inspired by Alice Walker's writings on womanism. The concept of "Womanist theology" was first used in an article in 1987 by Delores S. Williams entitled "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices."[148] In her article, Williams uses the term womanism to refer to an approach that offers a lens for interpreting the bible through concern for Black women's liberation. Theologian Emilie Townes explains that "The key for womanist theology is the use of an inter-structured analysis employing class, gender, and race. This kind of analysis is both descriptive (an analysis and sociohistorical perspective of Black life and Black religious worldviews) and prescriptive (offering suggestions for the eradication of oppression in the lives of African Americans and, by extension, the rest of humanity and creation)."[149]

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[147] Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1994). "The Task of Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology – *Mujeristas*: Who We Are and What We Are About," *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21st Century* (Orbis Books, 1996).

[148] Delores Williams, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," *Christianity and Crisis,* March 2, 1987.

[149] Emilie Townes, "Womanist Theology," https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/8226/Townes-WomanistTheology.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1, accessed September 29, 2021.

M. Shawn Copeland and Jamie Phelps were leaders in the National Black Sisters Conference as well as involved in the leadership of the early Catholic feminist movement. In their involvement with the Women's Ordination Conference, they shared critiques from the Black Catholic perspective on racism they experienced and witnessed within the Catholic feminist movement.[150] Copeland, Phelps, along with Diana Hayes would go on to help shape the field and understanding of Catholic womanism as they trained as Catholic theologians and continued involvement in the Catholic feminist movement.[151] Diana Hayes, was the first African American woman to receive the Pontifical Doctorate of Sacred Theology Degree from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.[152] Phelps went on to get her PhD in Systematic Theology from the Catholic University of America in 1989. In 1991, Copeland completed her PhD in systematic theology from Boston College. As prominent, prolific theologians, respected in their respective academic fields of study, they have also all continued to write and remain active in the women's equality movement in the Catholic Church.[153]

This section provided a brief account of the emergence of the Catholic feminist movements in the United States. It is important in understanding how and why Catholic feminists began to engage in consciousness raising that led them to publicly disagree with the institutional Church's teachings towards the role of women within the institution. Women

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[150] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 214, 225-228.
[151] Discussion on Diana Hayes contributions of Catholic womanists found in Karen Baker-Fletcher, "More than Suffering," *Womanist Theological Ethics*, eds Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie Townes, Angela Sims (Louisville, KY, Westminster, 2011), 157-158.
[152] "Bio on Diana Hayes" *Catholic Women Preach* https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preacher/diana-hayes, accessed May 4, 2022.
[153] "Bio on Jamie Phelps" *Catholic Women Preach* https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preacher/jamie-phelps, accessed May 4, 2022; "Bio on Diana Hayes "*Catholic Women Preach* https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preacher/diana-hayes , accessed May 4, 2022; "Bio on M. Shawn Copeland"*Catholic Women Preach,* https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preacher/m-shawn-copeland, accessed May 4, 2022.

pushed boundaries from within the tradition in multiple ways but with the same ultimate goal---to enrich the tradition by the inclusion of the voices and leadership of women, and people of all genders. The next section will expand on how Catholic feminist traditions continue to shape and challenge Catholic intellectual thought and Church doctrine through the lived experiences of Catholic women.

3.1.2 Catholic Feminists and Traditions

Since the 1960s, the Catholic feminist movement in the United States has expanded, been rightfully critiqued, and continues to influence Catholic theology and the Catholic Church. It is important to note that the Catholic feminist movement was never a unified movement and has always contained a plurality of traditions that speak to the many strands of theology and activism that have arisen from the contextualized and lived experiences of Catholic women. Catholic feminists continue to work on re-constructing the historical interpretations of the role of women within their tradition in order to include women's voices and advocate for equality and justice.

This section uses the framework of Lisa Sowle Cahill's keynote address at the 2014 Society of Christian Ethics conference, to reveal how Catholic feminist traditions have grown and diverged since the 1960s.[154] Cahill strives in her address to explicitly work with a broad and flexible definition of feminism,

> So as to be in conversation with advocates in different social and historical locations who define themselves over against white, middle-class, academic feminism as, for instance, womanist, latina, *mujerista,* asian, african, *dalit,* lesbian, or queer. Debates and conflicts among these approaches are real.[155]

[154] This address was later turned into a published article. Lisa Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions: Renewal, Reinvention, Replacement," *Journal of The Society of Christian Ethics*, 34(2), (2014 Fall-Winter): 27-51.
[155] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 27.

She further points out that women she references in the article do not all self-identify as feminists but all are proponents of gender equality. It is an interesting and crucial point to note. I think it is important that she references it and reveals that the word feminism lacks a universal experience. Yet she does not propose a solution or alternative for another word to describe a common goal of working towards gender justice. It is an ongoing conversation in the field of feminist theology and in Catholic feminist activism, and an important one to pay attention to and constantly discern. Is the concept of feminism useful anymore? Is there a better term? Is it ok to create a term without attempting a metanarrative? This ongoing discussion is important and invites humility and engagement with challenge. Cahill's article is compelling because it shows the diversity of ways that even feminists have approached working in the Church, and Cahill argues herself that feminist ethics is an imperfect and non-comprehensive project. Even just focusing on women can be viewed as problematic since there are many Catholic men that are sympathetic to feminist theology and would identify as feminist theologians themselves. All of this is important to note as the ongoing work of gender studies and theologies informs one another.

Cahill first argues that Catholic feminist ethics is ecclesial in character and faithful to tradition. Citing the Vatican II document, *Dei Verbum,* nos. 8-10*,* she explains "tradition as well as scripture is a continuing site of God's self-disclosure, for the risen Christ and Spirit are present in the historical church, bringing forth new experiences of God."[156] She then breaks open the concept of tradition more, arguing that "Catholic tradition is internally diverse and constituted by plural traditions."[157] It is within this diversity and plurality that all of the faithful

[156] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.
[157] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.

are called to "challenge distortions in past teachings and to embody the gospel more effectively in new contexts."[158]

Cahill argues that from an ethical standpoint communities and individuals within religious traditions should always be discerning with a three-fold hermeneutics of appreciation, suspicion, and praxis, asking,

> How does wisdom from the past give life today? (appreciation); how do traditions mediate dominant ideologies that continue to oppress some community members? (suspicion); and how can our traditions be embodied in just relationships now? (praxis).[159]

Cahill explains that what is unique to feminist theology is that it asks these three questions "in light of the experience of the risen Christ and the Spirit within the church, and in light of the church's complicity in the oppression of women."[160]

Cahill argues that the varieties of Catholic feminism can be understood by locating them on a map of four different conceptions of Catholic theology that have emerged since Vatican II; Augustinian and neo-Thomistic, neo-Franciscan, and Junian.[161] I will explain these models in the following paragraphs. These four models are not exhaustive nor mutually exclusive yet all work towards a more just ethic of sex and gender relations within the Church.[162] Each of the four approaches has had its own way of incorporating Catholic tradition within an ethics of sex and gender. In the four different ecclesial models, then, what Catholic tradition is understood to include is likewise different. Catholic tradition can comprise official Catholic teaching, major theological thinkers, sacramental and liturgical traditions, global social and ecclesial

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[158] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.
[159] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.
[160] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.
[161] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 29.
[162] Various scholars have also tried to "categorize" types of Catholic women in regard to their relationship with the Church. Another example is within Ann E. Patrick *Conscience and Calling: Ethical Reflections on Catholic Women's Church Vocations* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

infrastructures, local narratives and practices, or indigenous traditions from the Global South. Each model renews, reinvents, or replaces tradition in a distinctive way, and this is true of the correlative versions of feminist theological ethics. Yet Cahill argues that each variation has six defining commitments of Catholic ethics and Catholic feminist ethics: diversity in unity, moral realism, social transformationism, egalitarianism, preferential treatment of the poor, and interreligious dialogue.[163] In the following sections I will briefly describe Cahill's description of each of the four feminist traditions. I will then provide a contemporary example of woman in each category in order to provide a relevant story of how these traditions are manifesting among young adult Catholic women today.

3.1.2.1 Augustinian

The first tradition Cahill names is, *Augustinian Feminist Ethics.* This tradition builds off of the theological assertion that gender complementarity is helpful for women's flourishing.[164] *Augustinian Feminists* subscribe to the theology that there are natural differences between the sexes and therefore fundamentally different roles for women and men. They argue that men and women are equal before God, but have different functions in society, mainly highlighting the sacred role of motherhood for women. The "new feminism" was a term that John Paul II lobbied for, derived from his theology of the body. John Paul II briefly outlined his idea of the *new feminism* in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* in section 99.[165] John Paul's specific writings that further substantiate his understanding of new feminism are within Theology of the Body (1979-

[163] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 41.
[164] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 31.
[165] John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995). At The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

1984), *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988) and his apostolic Letter to Women (1995).[166] In his 1995 letter, John Paul II explains his theological claim,

> The creation of woman is thus marked from the outset by the principle of help: a help which is not one-sided but mutual. Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary. Womanhood expresses the "human" as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way.[167]

Complementarity of men and women asserts that men and women have natural differences and therefore are inclined towards different roles in society and church. New feminism supports the idea of the feminine genius, which points out that each woman has a special essence and unique capabilities that complement and balance the masculine genius. The feminine genius is women's specific way of viewing the world that is both maternal and nurturing. Therefore, John Paul II insists that motherhood is the ultimate purpose for women.[168] Throughout his writings Pope John Paul II highlights how a woman can embody spiritual authority through her feminine genius just as Mary did through her submission to God and service to Jesus.

Catholic women adhering to this ideology reject the secular feminist movement, claiming it does not speak for them. They reject male dominated versions of success which they claim that secular feminists embrace.[169] Instead, they believe that through God's love, Christ liberates

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[166] *Theology of the Body* is the topic of a series of lectures given by Pope John Paul II between 1979 and 1984. The full series can be found in John Paul II, *Theology of the Body: Man and Women He Created Them, Translated by Michael Waldstein,* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006); John Paul II. *Mulieris dignitatem* (15 August 1988), John Paul II. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html *Letter to Women.* (29 June 1995). These two documents can be found on Vatican Website, http://vatican.va.

[167] John Paul II. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html *Letter to Women.* (29 June 1995). At The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women_en.html, no. 7.

[168] Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM "Philosophy of Relation in John Paul II's New Feminism" *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism,* ed. Michele Schumacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 95.

[169] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Equality Difference and the Practical Problems of New Feminism," in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism,* ed. Michele Schumacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004),

women to a call to vocation which is unique to their feminine nature. Helen Alvare, a law professor at George Mason University, is a leading scholar and advocate for new feminism. In an article she wrote in 2003, "Christian Feminism and Family Life in the New Millennium: A New Feminism Fit for a New Family?" she argues that women need to take on leadership within the Church where their natural feminine gifts are most needed.[170] She describes an encouraging rise of women's leadership within mother's groups, homeschooling communities, and especially through the initiatives of women within Catholic organizations such as Regnum Christi.

A contemporary example of young adult women who adhere to the new feminism are many missionaries affiliated with the organization Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). It is a two-year program where recent college graduates volunteer to be on college campuses throughout the country, leading bible studies, organizing Catholic fellowships. Katharine Dugan's book *Millennial Missionaries* (2019) looks into the realities of their theologies and mission.[171] Throughout her book Dugan shares examples of women involved in FOCUS that she spent time with while doing her research. Dugan explains that the women leaders in FOCUS subscribe to a type of Catholic womanhood that "requires leadership defined by multiple submissions: to men and to God."[172] Dugan describes a bible study in which the FOCUS missionaries, Emma and Caroline, were leading a discussion on women's leadership. While Emma began by explaining the concept of the feminine genius and gender

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301. Also see Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM "Philosophy of Relation in John Paul II's New Feminism," *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism* ed. Michele Schumacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 102.

[170] Helen Alvare, "Christian Feminism and Family Life in the New Millennium: a new feminism fit for a new family?" in *Themes in Feminist Theology for the New Millennium* ed. Francis Eigo, (Villanova: Villanova Press, 2003), 50.

[171] Kate Dugan, *Millennial Missionaries: How a Group of Young Catholics is Trying to Make Catholicism Cool,* (New York, New York: Oxford, 2019).

[172] Dugan, *Millennial Missionaries,* 111.

complementarity based on John Paul II's Theology of the Body, Caroline "jumped in" to emphasize that this didn't mean that women cannot be leaders. Caroline encourages, "You're [in college!] You're a leader! You're going to do stuff!"[173] Dugan further explains that Caroline then "challenged the women to recognize that "real" women's leadership means being 'humble' and being willing to 'submit' to men's action-oriented leadership."[174] This vignette highlights the underlying theology for these women that women's leadership is valued and encouraged but through gender complementarity and not gender equality.

3.1.2.2 Neo-Thomist

Neo-Thomist Feminist Ethics incorporates scripture and tradition, with contemporary secular disciplines and experience. Often Aquinas' belief in the goodness of creation and in human flourishing is a location where these women start from.[175] Cahill maintains that the majority of Catholic feminists fall under this category, and names Cristina Traina and Margaret Farley as leading two examples. In my own reading, I would concur that Traina and Farley fall into this category, using thomistic theology in particular, to create an ethic of sex and gender that is not just for the benefit of women, but for the whole Church. Farley asserts that the question used by many feminists is "what is the 'usable past' in the Christian tradition as well as other traditions?"[176] Traina uses classical texts from the natural law tradition, starting with the *Summa Theologiae*, in an effort to "identify authentic insights useful for its renewal or criticism."[177]

[173] Dugan, *Millennial Missionaries,* 110.
[174] Dugan, *Millennial Missionaries,* 110.
[175] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 27.
[176] Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics,* (London: Continuum, 2006), 188.
[177] Cristina Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas,* (Washington: Georgetown Press, 1999), 17.

Traina further argues that a Catholic feminist ethic based on thomistic theology, can help fill the gaps that secular feminist ethics are creating in a post-modern era.[178]

Many younger Catholic feminist theologians continue to forge this path. An example is Megan McCabe, a professor at Gonzaga University. McCabe's research "develops an understanding of 'cultures of sin,' specifically in the context of an examination of the problem of the cultural foundation of sexual violence.[179] McCabe's doctoral research looked at sexual ethics and rape culture on college campuses, addressing contemporary feminist issues with Christian tradition. McCabe is an example of a feminist theologian who continues to work within the framework of Catholic theology to respond to human suffering caused by sexism and sexual violence perpetuated against women.

3.1.2.3 Neo-Franciscan

Neo-Franciscan Feminist Ethics prioritizes small faith community, personal holiness, and service. Cahill sites Catholic Workers as examples within this category. This group does not always "claim a feminist identity" or outwardly critique sexism in the Church and instead are interested in promoting equality of all through service, social action, and care for all creation.[180] Following in the footsteps of Dorothy Day, they embody a prophetic witness of solidarity with the poor and marginalized. An example of a contemporary young adult woman with this ethic is Brenna Cussen Anglada, a farmer and co-founder of the St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm in southwest Wisconsin. Brenna's work is focused on raising consciousness and eradicating specifically societal injustices rooted in the tenets of Catholic Social teaching. Brenna, who

[178] Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law,* 17.
[179] Academic Profile of Dr. Megan McCabe accessed September 20, 2021. https://www.gonzaga.edu/college-of-arts-sciences/faculty-listing/detail/mccabem
[180] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 36.

identifies as white, is currently part of a group of Catholic workers who are pushing to call out the internal racism of the Catholic Worker Movement and work to become anti-racist.[181]

3.1.2.4 Junian

Lastly, *Junian Feminist Ethics* is a movement that includes examples like Catholic womanists, Mujeristas, and Asian American feminist theologians. Junian comes from the name of the female apostle, Junia, mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:7. Junia's status as an apostle and her gender have been debated throughout church history, concerning the implications of a female apostle leading within the early Church. She is a saint in the Orthodox tradition. Cahill highlights that these Catholic ethicists differ from those described above in what they regard as "tradition."[182] Beyond thinkers like Augustine, Francis, and Aquinas, these theologians lean more on scripture, and on contextualized cultural narratives from communities of faith. Beyond what sources they use, a larger concern is a focus on broader social sins and injustices such as violence, racism, and poverty. These voices are crucial in the work of addressing intersectional oppressions, and bring an important critique to all Catholic feminist thought and practice, to speak truth to the fact that sexism is only one of many sins operating within society and church. To commit to justice, feminists must commit to working to dismantle all forms of oppression.

An example of a contemporary Junian feminist ethicist is Olga Segura. Segura is a freelance writer and journalist for the National Catholic Reporter. She recently published the book, *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church* (2021). While Segura is

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[181]Brenna Cussen Anglada, "In 'followership,' Catholic Workers take action for Black Lives Matter," *National Catholic Reporter,* June 4, 2016, *https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/creative-disruption-followership-catholic-workers-take-action-black-lives-matter* and *The Catholic Worker Anti-Racism Review,* September 2018, http://newsite.karenhousecw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/cw-anti-racism-review-vol1.pdf.

[182] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 38.

not a trained theologian, she is a powerful example of a younger adult who is using the medium of popular journalism and blogs to relay her theology. Her articles broach the subjects of the pandemic, #Metoo movement, misogyny, racism, and immigration, all through stories and narratives of individuals living their daily faith.[183] In a March 2021 interview with *Commonweal magazine,* Segura reflected that "The pandemic radicalized me politically and spiritually."[184] While she speaks of the realities of white supremacist culture rampant in the US Catholic church, she sees hope through the actions of the many faithful around her. She reflects,

> The thing that really gives me hope is Black and Brown Catholic women. Amid all this suffering in the past year and as I was trying to write a book, I found a community of Black and Brown Catholic women who remind me why I stay in this Church and what this Church should be. Black women are teaching me Christ-centered liberation.[185]

Segura's reflection and work is a powerful example of use of contextualized cultural narratives. Her intersectional approach to justice work is not focused on rooting out sexism from Catholicism, but on focusing on how Catholicism can become more liberative in its teachings and practices for all the faithful.

While Cahill does not add this specific group to the list, feminists working in the field of queer theologies also are important to name and fall within this category. In the twenty-first century, queer theologies continue to push Catholic feminism to be a praxis-based theology to contextualize the lived experiences and honor the intersectionalities of individuals.[186] Scholars of

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[183] *Website for Olga Segura,* https://olgamsegura.com, accessed September 29, 2021.
[184] John Gehring, "Becoming the Church We Say We Are: An interview with Olga Marina Segura," *Commonweal Magazine*, March 12, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/becoming-church-we-say-we-are.
[185] Gehring, "Becoming the Church We Say We Are."
[186] "Queer Catholic Theologians of Color Gather for Ground-Breaking Dialogue," *New Way Ministry*, November 4, 2021, https://www.newwaysministry.org/2021/11/04/queer-catholic-theologians-of-color-gather-for-ground-breaking-dialogue/.

queer theologies interrogate the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality through the lens of Catholic theology.

Cahill names these suggested traditions, not to neatly place people within categories but to show different strategies Catholic feminists have taken in working within the institution. She explains that what she is focusing on here are feminist reformers. Feminist reformers "tend to draw from within the tradition to critique patriarchy and sexism."[187] They are not breaking from tradition but are faithful to the Church and to different works of thought within Catholic theology. The main thread throughout Cahill's work is that tradition is not static nor ahistorical but living and fluid, making space for religious imagination and faithfulness that it not rigid but open to how the Holy Spirit is moving in contexts and lived experiences of the faithful. This section has provided an overview of the emergence of Catholic feminist movements and the contributions of women who helped define their Catholic faith and how they saw themselves as participants in the Church. Catholic feminists highlighted how people can and do define their own Catholicism and offer a framework for operating from within a middle-space of both insider/outsider.

3.2 Insider/Outsider Phenomenon: Inhabiting a Middle-Space

Catholic feminist ethicists and theologians created space and pathways for women to engage in creative fidelity to the Church. Catholic feminists problematized the concept of Church membership and articulated an experience of being both insider/outsider within the Church. Many women beyond activists and theologians also acknowledge the ongoing existence of gender inequality in the Church *and* choose to remain Catholic. While women are intentionally disaffiliating from the Catholic Church due to various reasons, women are also choosing to stay

[187] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 27.

for other reasons. The phenomenon refutes a binary choice of staying or leaving or even being an insider/outsider.[188] It instead breaks open the reality of the occupation of a middle-space, where one feels both challenged and nourished, like an insider and an outsider. This section serves to review the literature on addressing the phenomenon of women's experiences of being in an insider/outsider relationship with one's religious tradition.

Multiple scholars of religion in the latter half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century have attempted to describe this phenomenon of women choosing to stay within their respective traditions while acknowledging gender inequality and sexism within the traditions.[189] In the following paragraphs I will highlight several of the concepts that reflect this middle-space. This is not an exhaustive list but an attempt to reveal that this phenomenon of navigating identity, belief, and tradition is not unique to twentieth century American Catholic women.

3.2.1 Nepantla

Throughout the history of Christianity many faithful have experienced a tension of feeling they both belong and are alienated from the community for one reason or the other. For example, Lara Medina in her article, "Nepantla Spirituality: Negotiating Multiple Religious Identities among US Latinas," explains that the word *Nepantla* means "the middle place." It comes from the language of the Nahuas, who were the largest indigenous group in Central

[188] This choice of staying or leaving is a modern privileged concept. Thinking of the people in Mexico, during the time of the Conquistadores there was little choice in outwardly choosing if one should stay or leave. Even with women in Euro-American Catholic immigrant communities in the early twentieth-century, the option of "leaving" your faith community, would have meant leaving your entire network of support and family. This did not mean there were not many ways of resisting, and many who did. This concept of choice in religion is a positive result of secularization, since no one should ever have to stay in a tradition that they find abusive, or oppressive.

[189] "Otherness" Mary Daly, 1984; "Resident Alien" Schussler Fiorenza, 1992; "Defecting in Place" Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes, 1994; "Cultivated Ambivalence" Mary Ferrell Bednarowski, 1999, Mahmood, 2005.

Valley Mexico in the 1500s.[190] Medina explains that the word came to represent a conceptual space in which many indigenous people negotiated their existence after the Spanish conquered them, as they tried to incorporate their newly inculturated Catholic beliefs with their Indigenous beliefs. Medina introduces *Nepantla* spirituality to her mostly Catholic Latino/a students in her classes as a spirituality that creates a middle space that allows the Christian and Indigenous aspects of their heritages and beliefs to coexist in harmony.[191] She argues that,

> Middle space is a site of meaning making and healing. Rather than be limited by confusion or ambiguity Latinos/as act as subjects in deciding how diverse religious and cultural forces can or cannot work together.[192]

Medina is suggesting that this middle space is not one of confusion nor ambiguity but "a manner to attempt to hold onto dignity; a conscious choice to be in the middle."[193] This perspective instills agency and does not presume confusion. Medina's article also is important because it rightfully points to this negotiation as one that gave agency to indigenous people in the midst of often experiencing violent colonial and missionary actions of people representing or professing allegiance to the Catholic Church.[194]

3.2.2 Politics of Piety

Nor is the phenomenon unique to Christians. Saba Mahmood in her book *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005) problematizes the theories of agency and power that have dominated feminist theory. She refutes the binary framework of

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[190] Lara Medina, "Nepantla Spirituality: Negotiating Multiple Religious Identities among US Latinas," *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity,* eds. Miguel de la Torre and Gastón Espinosa, (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 251.
[191] Medina, "Nepantla Spirituality," 257.
[192] Medina, "Nepantla Spirituality," 257.
[193] Medina, "Nepantla Spirituality," 253.
[194] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), Clara Román-Odio, "Nepantlismo, Chicana Approach to Colonial Identity," *Sacred Iconographies in Chicana Cultural Productions,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), eBook Collection, EBSCOhost.

victim/agent, oppressed/liberated in her ethnography of women in the Islamic piety movement in Cairo. She argues successfully that the dominant feminist framework is inadequate in describing the lived experiences of these women in the Cairo Mosque movement since they choose to be part of male-dominated movements, while simultaneously carving out spaces for agency and power. Mahmood's groundbreaking critique re-shaped scholarship concerning women within religions. For example, in January 2012, a compilation of essays was published in an anthology entitled *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority*.[195] This anthology focuses on the changing dynamics of women's participation in the formal sphere of Islamic leadership within mosques and madrasas. Editors Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach credit Mahmood's work as inspiration.[196]

3.2.3 Defecting in Place

In the mid-1990s, Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes set out to conduct qualitative interviews with Catholic and Protestant women to explore what it was like to be a woman in the Christian church at the end of the twentieth-century. Four out of five Roman Catholic women who participated in the study expressed feeling alienated from the institutional Church.[197] While many disagreed with the Church's stance particularly on social issues, they nevertheless chose to remain Catholic. The researchers named this shared experience they heard from many of the women as *defecting in place*. They articulated that *defecting in place* pointed

[195] *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* Eds. Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, (Leiden: Koninklijke, 2012).
[196] Hilary Kalmbach, "Introduction: Islamic Authority and the Study of Female Religious Leaders," *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority,* eds. Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, (Leiden: Koninklijke, 2012), 22.
[197] Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis and Allison Stokes, *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for their Own Spiritual Lives,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 101.

to the experience when one remains in their faith community but leaves their old ways of relating and stays on one's own terms, in order "to be present in a whole new way."[198] The reasons they remained varied but the common message the researchers heard was that the women liked being Catholic, and that they had reconciled that there are numerous ways to be Catholic.

In the Epilogue of *Defecting in Place* there are brief commentaries by several well-known theologians on their reactions to the concept of *defecting in place.* Several are theologians of Color who point out that this term does not confirm or relate to their experience of being Catholic. Toinette M. Eugene in her commentary, "No Defect Here: A Black Roman Catholic Womanist Reflection on Spirituality of Survival," responds to the concept of *defecting in place* as one she does not resonate with. Instead, she argues that the lives and experiences of black Catholic women point to a *spirituality of survival* that, "Fosters an empowering self-esteem and affirms the presence of God in day-to-day praxis of justice and struggle for survival."[199] While Eugene is not opposed to the use of the term for others, she cautions in using it to describe a shared or universal experience for Catholic women.

Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz in her brief commentary, "Mujerista Perspective on the Future of the Women's Movement in the Church," asserts that *defecting in place* is an experience that Latinas have been living with for centuries, yet with little effect or recognition. She argues that Catholic Latinas "have learned to separate their religion from the church and relate to the church insofar as we need it to maintain and/or celebrate our faith and our daily struggles for

[198] Winter et al, *Defecting in Place,* 114.
[199] Toinette Eugene, *"*No Defect Here: A Black Roman Catholic Womanist Reflection on Spirituality of Survival,*" in Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for their Own Spiritual Lives,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994)*,* 217.

survival."[200] Again not negating the concepting of defecting in place, but using it as a rallying call for more of the faithful to be vocal about the varying oppressions that women suffer in the Church, and seeing it as a call to not just combat sexism in the Church but to work for justice as a seamless garment.[201] While not all of the scholars who offered commentary shared the experience of *defecting in place*, all named an awareness of belonging to a tradition that simultaneously contains theologies of liberation and practices of oppression.

3.2.4 Cultivated Ambivalence

Religious scholar Mary Bednarowski added greatly to the conversation of the experience of occupying a middle-space for American women in dominant religious traditions, in her book *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (1999). It is an interdisciplinary exploration of religious belonging among American women in the late twentieth century, with particular attention to the 1990s.[202] Bednarowski's work is integral to the rest of this dissertation. Bednarowski locates herself as a scholar of American religion and culture. Her goal in the book is not to create a monolithic narrative of the religious experience of American women, but instead to offer informed insights into how "gender consciousness is shaping religious thought and what it has to contribute to understandings of particular traditions and theology and religion in general."[203] She asserts that it is her "strong conviction that women's religious thought offers us not just insights into possible relationships between gender and religion but powerful examples of theological creativity."[204] Bednarowski is intentional in her research to look at

[200] Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, "Mujerista Perspective on the Future of the Women's Movement in the Church," in *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for their Own Spiritual Lives,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 231.
[201] Isasi-Díaz, "Mujerista Perspective on the Future of the Women's Movement in the Church," 232.
[202] Mary Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 7.
[203] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 11.
[204] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 15.

women's experiences across varying religious traditions with attention to the diversity even within traditions. She does so through looking at narratives, theological works, and popular pieces of writing among a variety of women. She also notes in her introduction the importance she placed on paying attention to the "theological work of women in communities of color and to point out that the categorization of 'communities of Color' brings with it its own complexities."[205] She notes that there is an "obvious bias" towards narratives that can be construed as liberal in the works that she cites and uses in her research, but also argues that her book should not be labeled as only contributing to liberal religious thought.[206]

Bednarowski's first chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the book arguing for *ambivalence* as a new religious virtue. She describes the shared experiences of many women across traditions within the United States who express degrees of ambivalence towards their religious traditions. She refutes the popular belief that being ambivalent implies being in a state of indecisiveness or confusion. She instead offers an alternative vision of ambivalence as a vehicle for creativity and a virtue to be cultivated.[207] She explains, "It is a functional ambivalence that offers a contrast to the certainties of tone that are typical of much religious thought. It is also an ambivalence that requires the telling of detailed stories about their wary and rueful, deeply loving and knowledgeable experiences of their traditions."[208] Bednarowski highlights instances of this type of ambivalence within narratives coming from women within various Christian denominations, Jewish traditions and Buddhist affiliations. Bednarowski argues that within this state of *cultivated ambivalence* there are three tasks in relationship to an individual and their tradition: to maintain a critical distance, to commit to conservation of their

[205] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 8.
[206] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 9.
[207] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 19.
[208] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women, 32.*

tradition's deepest insights, and to move forward with innovation.[209] Bednarowski's articulation of the three tasks aligns closely with Cahill's "appreciation, suspicion, and praxis." By innovation she sees this meaning "imagining and constructing new visions by combining a tradition's insights with revelations that come from culture."[210] She further explains that,

> It is an ambivalence that demands wariness that does not lapse into cynicism, loyalty that does not succumb to docility or resignation, creativity that flourishes on the margins without losing sight of the center.[211]

The concept of *cultivated ambivalence* attempts to shift the experience of ambivalence from one of confusion to one of agency. Maintaining a critical distance does not mean disengaging but in feeling healthily detached from the ongoing effects of sexism within the institution.

Women are remaining in their traditions on their own terms, finding a sense of spiritual home and agency in a "middle-space" where they feel they are both an insider and an outsider. Though it is not just enough to leave it at finding a spiritual home despite sexism. Bednarowski explains the stories she writes about have the "dynamic reality with the capacity for both good and ill. By acknowledging their willingness to shape this formative power in ways that are transformative, women make it clear they do not experience themselves at the mercy of their traditions but instead are responsible for them along with other members of their communities."[212] This point is central to the findings of all Bednarowski's observations, that the women understand their personal agency and their communal responsibility.

Choosing to stay within an institution that one feels is unjust is only the first step. The next step is to think about one's responsibility to engage so as not to remain alienated nor complicit. Viewing ambivalence as a virtue can serve as an access point for creativity,

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[209] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 20.
[210] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 20.
[211] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 20.
[212] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 33.

empowerment, and identity formation for women. Bednarowski's articulation of a *cultivated ambivalence* creates room for both doubt and thoughtful informed critique while simultaneously acknowledging cherished Catholic traditions and rituals that bring meaning to life. While in this section I have named different concepts, Bednarowski's *cultivate ambivalence* resonates most with the work I have done as a chaplain as well as offers a specific framework with which I find it fruitful to engage. The rest of the dissertation will pick up her invitation in her book to build off of this concept and apply it. The following section will show how I have identified cultivated ambivalence in several current memoirs and essays.

3.3 Struggling for the "Soul of Something": Cultivated Ambivalence in Action

What does cultivated ambivalence look like in action? While Bednarowski uses anecdotes throughout her book of the women she interviewed and observed, she does not offer specific vignettes that are helpful as teaching tools. In this section I seek to build on her work by identifying cultivated ambivalence in several recent memoirs and essays by Catholic women on their experiences of being Catholic in the US. What I see within these accounts is how many women who are choosing to stay and claim a Catholic identity are not passively accepting the institutional Church's position on every issue wholesale – in fact, they struggle against every semblance of sexist and gender discrimination by their church. Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson is one such woman who has deliberately chosen to stay and has been an outspoken role model for many others. When asked by journalist Jamie Manson why she stays, Johnson explained, "If you feel deeply enough, you stay. Not because you are a masochist, but because it's worth it. You're struggling for the soul of something."[213]

[213] Oakes, *The Nones Are Alright*, 65.

I find this idea of choosing to stay for the struggle for the "soul of something" comes across in several recent memoirs and compilations of essays from the lived experiences of young Catholic women. *From the Pews in the Back: Young Women and Catholicism (2009),* is a compilation of essays from young women and their experiences within Catholicism in the twenty-first century. In their introduction, the editors Jen Owens and Kate Dugan, explain that,

> The majority of memoirs we received came from women who have at some point, struggled to be Catholic and hold political and social position against which Catholicism teaches- moms who have been on birth control, female seminarians who believe in women's ordination, lesbians who don't believe their lifestyle ought to be condemned.[214]

Catholic Women Speak is also an excellent source with prime examples of Catholic women sharing their complicated relationships with the Church and their faith. It was intended as a contribution to the synodal process of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the family (2014-15).[215] The introduction asserts that the authors, "Do not speak as one voice but as many voices with a common desire to enrich the Church through our differences. We do not speak as 'Woman' but as many women who together form part of the Body of Christ."[216] The compilation consists of stories of divorce, same-sex marriage, call to priesthood, birth control, etc. All the stories share descriptions of struggle, nuanced belonging and of a deeply held faith. After publication, the organizers of the project created an intentional social media network that now provides a "theological forum focusing on Catholic women in the

[214] "Introduction," *From the Pews in the Back: Young Women and Catholicism,* eds. Kate Dugan and Jen Owens (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical -Press, 2009), xviii.
[215] *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table,* edited by the Catholic Women Speak Network, (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), XII-I.
[216] *Catholic Women Speak*, XXVIII.

Church, societies, cultures and families around the world."[217] It continues to be a platform for engagement and support.

Kaya Oakes in her book, *Radical Reinvention: An Unlikely Return to the Catholic Church* (2012), describes the winding road she took back to the Church after years away. She describes in the opening paragraphs that she searched other denominations but "the feeling is not the same."[218] She goes on to reflect that, "I missed Catholicism, the feeling it gave me to pray and to pray with others: deep in my guts…I'm Catholic in my Guts."[219] Her book articulates the constant tensions of feeling Catholic in her guts while also feeling challenged by many of the Church's official position on social issues. In her discernment, Oakes ultimately decided to stay through questioning "Would [Catholicism] ever have any hope of changing if people like me bailed on it?"[220] Editors Owens and Dugan also describe this commitment among the writers of their collection and how they stay and work for change. They explain that,

> Many of the young women in the collection push boundaries of the Vatican's definition of Catholic identity and do so with profound respect. These authors live committed lives, and they bring that same commitment to exploring and defining Catholic identity. We are forward-thinking women of faith whose reflections on our experiences of life are filled with hope, and we challenge our church to think carefully about how it can be even more faithful to Jesus' radically inclusive message.[221]

This is the ideal condition for a *cultivated ambivalence* to be a useful access point for thinking about nuanced belonging. Kaya Oakes describes this best in her own relationship with Catholicism,

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[217] *Catholic Women Speak Facebook Page*, https://www.facebook.com/catholicwomenspeak/, accessed on December 22, 2021.
[218] Oakes, Kaya, *Radical Reinvention: An Unlikely Return to the Catholic Church* (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint, 2012), 11.
[219] Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 12.
[220] Oakes, *Radical Reinvention,* 11.
[221] Dugan and Owens, *From the Pews in the Back,* xix.

> Faith is part of my identity and it's not going away, even if it's not always a perfect fit. Maybe the sense of rebellion felt by those of us who envision a better version of the Church is the same as the anger the Psalmists expressed. A better version of the Church, after all, is where we will ultimately find a better version of ourselves. All the saints whose examples I follow- alive and dead, believers and not, secular and holy- are agitators for reinventions: Of the Church, the self, the world. And they never give up. [222]

Never giving up is a sure sign of commitment. Indeed, it is a liberative commitment, fueled by faith and grounded in hope. Particularly for individuals who are able to integrate the voices of internal and external authority, this commitment can provide a realized and legitimate state of being, one that is not filled with confusion and anxiety.

Kate Dugan, Jen Owens, Kaya Oakes all articulate an active participation in each of these three tasks of *cultivated ambivalence*. Kate Dugan and Jen Owens reflected that their own identities as Catholic women are "rooted in growing up Catholic. Something about Catholic rituals and the Catholic way of thinking and expressing faith seeps into our bones and grabs hold of our religious sense."[223] This articulation expresses the shared respect for ritual and Catholic thought. In producing the collection of essays, they were engaging in critique and innovation. The personal stories throughout the book also reveal diverse ways of maintaining a critical distance and working towards innovation and transformational change in the Church. Oakes mirrors these three tasks in reflecting that,

> Faith is a love story. Over and Over Christ tells us to love one another, love our enemies, love the people who persecute us. The Catholic Church is so good at ministering to the poor, caring for the sick, educating people in forgotten communities. It is so good at encouraging its flock to stand up to injustice and fight oppression. And it is just freaking awful at understanding what it means to be a woman, or to be gay, or to want to express your sexuality without catching a disease. Yet what being Catholic has given me is a sense of love and compassion for the people around me that was pretty much absent in my decades of fake atheist faithlessness.[224]

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[222] Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 240.
[223] Dugan and Owens, *From the Pews in the Back,* 227.
[224] Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 187.

This love story that she speaks of is a nuanced one. It is a love story that entails being part of a church that does not ordain women *and* calling yourself a feminist. It is a love story that gushes about the Catholic rituals and compassion rooted in Catholicism. It is a love story that can hold the tension of realizing that sexism and homophobia exist in the Church, while knowing this is not the end of the story, that it will continue, and the only way it will get better, is if one doesn't walk away.

3.4 Conclusion

The narratives and experiences articulated throughout this chapter share insight into how ambivalence as a virtue can shape one's religious imagination inspiring ways to participate and belong. These examples complicate the monolithic assumption that there is a defined and clear distinction of being in or out of the Church. Common themes resonate throughout the stories of a nuanced love for the tradition, a feeling of "at- homeness" in Catholic spaces and with Catholic ritual, a desire to challenge *and* contribute to the tradition and a recognition that the hierarchy should not be conflated with the Church. These experiences are intentional engagement and authentic discernment with one's faith and are helpful examples of creative fidelity to the tradition. It reflects a capacity to be comfortable with paradox, and an ability to value both trusted authorities and one's own internal authority. As Bednarowski explains, "Ambivalence leads not to final resolution of issues affecting the equality of women but to an ongoing commitment to a tradition that, she believes, will continue to offer both limitation and transformation."[225] It is a commitment to be part of moving the Church forward towards liberation for all, guided by the Spirit, and this commitment is deeply rooted in fidelity to Catholic tradition. Not all Catholics are called to write memoirs, become feminist theologians, or

[225] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 41.

become activists, but all can be invited to discern how they practice faith and participate in their faith communities. The next chapter will focus on how religious educators can invite young adult women to understand and discern this middle-space of cultivated ambivalence as an opportunity for belonging and participation.

Chapter Four:
Growth and Belonging: Engaging Faith Development and the Religious Imagination of Young Adult Women

Vignette 1: Joy was a rising senior whom I had known since she came to university as a freshman. She enthusiastically attended every retreat and activity the Catholic ministry put on and regularly served as a lector at Mass. She grew up in what she described as a deeply religious household and often shared how her grandparents had met on a Catholic retreat and now basically "ran her whole parish." One day as she helped clean up after Sunday dinner, she quietly approached me and said that she was really nervous. We sat down to talk and she shared that she was struggling with her sexuality. She believed she might be queer and felt relief and excitement in sharing this news. Then with tears streaming down her face she earnestly looked at me and said that she didn't want to have to leave her spiritual home, her beloved community because of this news. She was scared of disappointing her family, her community and disappointing God.[226]

Vignette 2: Marjorie had a deep devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and often prayed the Rosary, in Spanish. She would go to the local parish whenever they had adoration and always invited other students to join her. She had a strong commitment to social justice that she attributed to Catholic Social Teaching and was planning to join the Jesuit Volunteer Corps once she graduated. She shared with me her anger with the Church at the lack of women's leadership and often felt frustrated at Mass, and angry that women could not be priests. She had begun to join her friends down the road at the United Church of Christ church for service, but each time she went, it "just didn't feel like home."

Vignette 3: When I was working for a parish, I received an email from Charlotte, a student at a nearby university who wanted to meet to talk. When we met, she shared that she was considering coming back to the church after years of being away. She said she had a few things to tell me first then she nervously blasted a laundry list: She was pro-choice, living with her Jewish boyfriend, and didn't really understand how the heck Mary was actually a virgin. When she was done with her list she took a deep breath, and with teary eyes confessed, "but I miss Mass and the Eucharist, I miss praying in a community, I miss the connection Catholicism gave me to my ancestors, and my grandmother, I miss my spiritual home."

[226] These stories are an amalgamation of encounters I have had over the years as a college chaplain. The names and specific details have been intentionally altered in order to respect the confidentiality of the students' experiences.

In these vignettes, the young women were all struggling with components of the institutional Church and trying to figure out if they could stay in their spiritual home with integrity. Their experiences share similar threads to the stories in Chapter Three from memoirs and accounts of women in *Catholic Women Speak, From the Pews in the Back* and Kaya Oakes' memoir. The women all expressed a tension with feeling that they were somehow becoming separated from their spiritual home because of their solidifying values, beliefs, or identity exploration. This process of naming this tension is one rife with grief, as they questioned whether they could belong within their beloved spiritual home. They were struggling with dissonance related to self-understanding and community understanding.

Religious educators must help young adults realize that nobody actually fits neatly into a "church box" nor that belonging is synonymous with uniformity. The role of religious educators is not to convince young adults to "stay" in the Church or "come back" if they have rejected the tradition in the past, but to provide affirmation and models that reveal that there is a wide spectrum of belief and practice within the faith community. The point is to help young adults to move past feeling caught in a dualistic mindset where they see the options are to reject/or be rejected from their spiritual home or to not question or stay silent at inconsistencies they see in the vision and mission of the Church.

This chapter explores how religious educators can better accompany young adults in these moments and times of dissonance. I argue for the importance of helping young adults understand and feel supported within an expansive spiritual home where there is room to question, doubt, and grow in their faith. Section one argues that it can be helpful for religious educators to interpret this sense of dissonance through the lens of constructivist developmental theories. If viewed through this lens, this type of dissonance is seen not as a problem, but as a

potential opportunity for growth in one's meaning-making capacity. The second section asserts the importance for religious educators to cultivate dynamic networks of belonging and mentorship opportunities to accompany young adults in their faith development. The second part of section two argues for the re-imagining of the communion of saints as a specific and powerful resource for exposing young adult women to a dynamic and diverse network of belonging. I then ague in section three that story-sharing can be an effective pedagogical tool to support young adults in both cultivating belonging and encouraging faith development. Story-sharing has the potential to help young adults understand and feel affirmed that their own story is part of larger dynamic, complex and diverse story of the body of Christ.

4.1 Losing a Sense of a Spiritual Home: Interpreting the Dissonance

Seeking, doubting, and questioning belonging are all healthy parts of faith development that are particularly acute during young adulthood. Students, like those in the vignettes at the beginning of the chapter, would often share with me a sense of grief of not feeling at home anymore in the Catholic community that once felt comfortable and nurturing. As I would sit with these students, my goal was to help them comprehend that they did not necessarily have to grow apart from their spiritual home, but they were growing into a new relationship with their spiritual home. As young adult women display seeming distress in their sense of belonging, it should not be seen as a problem but can in fact be that they are growing in their meaning making capacity. Constructivist developmental theories can help religious educators understand the dissonance taking place within students. This section will show how constructivist developmental theories can help religious educators interpret these times of questions and dissonance as valuable opportunities for growth. Growing into a new relationship with one's spiritual home is in fact, part of a healthy process of faith development.

4.1.1 Struggling with Belonging in the Context of Faith Development

It is crucial to begin here in explaining what I mean when writing about faith development. Faith development is ultimately about meaning-making. James Fowler, a psychologist and theologian, is best known for developing a six-stage theory of faith development, spanning from early childhood through adulthood.[227] Fowler states that faith and religion are not synonymous and should not be considered as such, yet acknowledges that the use of the word faith can confuse and conflate the two.[228] Yet Fowler is firm in his belief that when speaking of faith development it encapsulates something more than religious belief in stating,

> There simply is no other concept that holds together those various interrelated dimensions of human knowing, valuing, committing and acting that must be considered together it we want to understand the making and maintaining of human meaning.[229]

Faith as meaning-making is about how one processes and understands their worldview, life experiences and self-perception of how one feels at home in the universe. Faith development is not about becoming "better at religion" nor at becoming more pious or obedient, but in development of a more complex way of knowing.

Faith development is ultimately about transforming the way we know and understand the world and our place in it. Theorist Sharon Daloz Parks explains, "The growth of the self and the development of faith may be understood as transformation of the boundaries that have defined home."[230] As young adults display seeming distress in their sense of belonging, it should not be seen as a problem but can in fact be that they are growing in their meaning making capacity. As young adult women exhibit dissonance as a choice point of whether they need to leave their

[227] James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning,* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), 117-199.
[228] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 92.
[229] Fowler, *Stages of Faith,* 92.
[230] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 51.

spiritual home, religious educators can interpret it differently. Struggling with belonging in the context of faith development can be viewed as an opportunity for growth and time of re-orienting what is means to belong.

4.1.2 Developmental Shifts as a Time of Re-orienting

Viewed from a constructivist developmental lens, the women in the vignettes are exhibiting a dissonance that has the potential to expand their capacity for meaning-making. Developmental theorist Robert Kegan offers helpful insights into how developmental shifts are a re-orienting process.[231] His most pertinent contribution to this conversation is his subject-object theory which describes the process of assessing the shifting meaning-making capacity of an individual as one moves through childhood-adolescence-young adulthood-adulthood. Kegan's theory attempts to explain how development takes place as one can comprehend more complex systems of mind.[232] Kegan's theory stresses the importance of paying attention to what the individual holds as object, what they have control over, and what is subject, what is fixed or beyond one's control. According to Kegan's theory, growth occurs when the individual "dis-embeds" from what they were subject to, so that it becomes object. Kegan argues that growth involves movement through five progressively more complex ways of knowing which he refers to as orders of consciousness. The orders are Stage 1 — Impulsive mind (early childhood), Stage 2 — Imperial mind (later childhood), Stage 3 — Socialized mind, Stage 4 — Self-Authoring mind, Stage 5 — Self-Transforming mind. Kegan argues that the age period of twelve to twenty is often a gradual transformation of mind from the second-order to the third-order.[233] According

[231] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 32.
[232] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 9.
[233] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 37.

to Kegan, most traditional college-age students are coming to the university in a late second-order or early third-order of consciousness.[234] Within second-order consciousness, the world is one of "durable categories." This re-ordering begins a classification process of objects, people, or ideas as separate from the individual. Kegan reflects that in this order, "rules, sets of directions, and dualisms give shape and structure to one's daily activity."[235] Thinking in terms of durable categories makes group association very concrete and focused on the practices and outward manifestations of the group.

In the third-order of consciousness, there is a move to awareness of self-consciousness and noticing internal authority. In third-order, one can recognize that the groups one is affiliated with have shared meaning and purpose, and values associated with belonging. One can now independently choose "loyalty and devotion to a community of people or ideas larger than the self."[236] At this stage, membership can seem very dualistic; one is either with us or against us, in or out. In light of Kegan's theory, in an article co-written with Theresa O'Keefe, we claimed that "it requires at least third-order capacity to knowingly affiliate or disaffiliate based on a conception of belonging that is beyond pure circumstance or self-interest."[237] In the third-order, one develops the capacity for intentionally choosing one's affiliation, as affiliation becomes "object." As they mature into third-order, they have the capacity to understand they are no longer their beliefs and begin to have a capacity to analyze and question the beliefs they hold and choose to affiliate or disaffiliate with groups that share their beliefs and values. Prior to third-

[234] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 47.
[235] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 4.
[236] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 32.
[237] TA O'Keefe and E. Jendzejec, "A New Lens for Seeing: A Suggestion for Analyzing Religious Belief and Belonging among Emerging Adults through a Constructive-Developmental Lens," *Religions*. 11(11), (2020): 573.

order, choices to affiliate with a group are based on "limited perspective of self-interest or circumstance and less on the more complex awareness of and choice for or against association."[238] In third-order, one chooses to affiliate with a group by internalizing and aligning with the values of a group. Interpreting Kegan for this context, we explain,

> The third-order knower may agree with the values of the religious community but find the moral or religious injunctions out of line with those professed values, and so choose not to follow or support the injunctions. In this case, they are engaging with the tradition knowingly, but seeing contradictions within its practice. This might be a sign of misunderstanding or prophecy. This level of disagreement is much different from the second-order knower, who would choose not to follow simply because they do not want to, not because they understand and disagree.[239]

As young adults shifting from second-order to third-order wrestle with identity and belonging, it is crucial to help them see different ways of belonging while acknowledging their feelings and experiences. The hope is that as younger adults go through developmental shifts, they can come to understand Catholicism as more than just an "institution" that is separate from them (second-order consciousness), and that Catholicism is a diverse and dynamic community with underlying values that they share, and they can be at home within (third-order consciousness). With the understanding that Catholicism is diverse comes the awareness that they may feel more at home in some Catholic settings than in others.

Kegan calls the shift to fourth-order, a shift towards self-authorship in which an individual can value both trusted authorities and their own internal authority in their meaning making process. In fourth-order one can see the complexities of a group *and* commit to holding in tension their own authority and their individual beliefs. Remaining at home within a community does not mean one needs to agree with everything, but one can disagree with aspects

[238] O'Keefe and Jendzejec, "A New Lens for Seeing," 573.
[239] O'Keefe and Jendzejec, "A New Lens for Seeing," 573.

and has the agency to voice these disagreements as an active participant of the group. He explains with self-authorship one can,

> coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer *authored by* them, it *authors them* and thereby achieves a personal authority.[240]

Someone in fourth-order comprehends that there is such a thing as objective knowing where one can understand institutions and relationships as separate from self. This separation does not imply a physical separation from other individuals or communities, but a re-ordering that is more authentic.[241] One also has moved beyond dualistic thinking and can embrace paradox.

Kegan's theory is very useful when sitting with students who are struggling with aspects of their faith or practices and doctrines of the institution. This again is not to convince them that they should stay, rather to provide viable options for belonging and thriving within the context of the faith community. For religious educators it is essential to affirm that the young adult's struggles and questions are important, valid, and to keep in mind that it is a great sign the individual is developing in their faith! If students are intentionally wrestling with these questions, it is often because they are in a time of "re-orienting" and developing in their cognitive capacity. This "wrestling with questions" can be a sign of a shift from second-order to third-order or from third- to fourth-order consciousness**.**

While Kegan argues that most people do not reach fourth-order until their early 30s, there are possibilities to offer bridging opportunities to begin the process of moving traditional college-aged students towards self-authorship. Marcia B. Baxter Magolda is most helpful in her

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[240] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 185.

[241] Marcia B. Baxter Magolda "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(4), (July/August 2008): 269-284, 270.

research in exploring this transition towards self-authorship in relation to college student development. She describes self-authorship as, "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations."[242] Baxter Magolda has conducted numerous qualitative studies on the cognitive developmental experiences of traditional college aged students, including a 21-year longitudinal study of young adults aged 18 to 39. This study supports Kegan's stance that "complex epistemological, intra- personal, and interpersonal development is necessary for adults to build complex belief systems, to form a coherent sense of identity, and to develop authentic, mature relations with diverse others."[243] Baxter Magolda's work nuances Kegan's in explaining that there are three elements toward self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments.[244] In the 21-year longitudinal study she identifies four phases of development of self-authorship (External Formulas, Crossroads, Becoming Author of One's Life, Internal Foundation), but notes that External Formulas and Crossroads were most common during college for her participants.[245] External Formulas are when one relies on others for their definition of values and expectations. Crossroads is when one begins to realize the need to establish a sense of self in terms of what one values and believes in. She argues that while none of the participants in her study reached self-authorship in college, "enabling this capacity should be a key focus of a college education."[246] It is also crucial to point

[242] Baxter Magolda, "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," 269.
[243] Baxter Magolda, "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," 269.
[244] Baxter Magolda, "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," 269.
[245] Marcia Baxter Magolda, Elizabeth G. Creamer, Jessica Yue, "Preliminary Evidence of the Reliability and Validity of a Quantitative Measure of Self-Authorship," *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(5), (September/October 2010): 550-562, 550.
[246] Baxter Magolda, "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," 282. Baxter Magolda credits that there are other studies that argue that self-authorship can happen before college (Pizzolato, J. E. (2003). "Developing self-authorship: Exploring the experiences of high-risk college students," *Journal of College Student Development, 44*, (2003):797-812) or during (Abes, E. S., & Jones, S. R., "Meaning-making capacity and the dynamics of lesbian college students' multiple dimensions of identity," *Journal of*

out Baxter Magolda's assertion that "self-authorship is more complex and nuanced than a simple linear trajectory."[247] Development towards self-authorship is not the same for everyone and can be heavily dependent on context and varying identity factors.[248] Culture, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class can all affect both the pathways towards developing self-authorship and the necessary supports needed to nurture growth. While the participants of her study moved towards self-authorship by the end of their thirties, all took differing paths, and no specific journey nor time frame was the exact same.

In each of the three vignettes shared at the beginning of the chapter, the young women exhibit being in a Crossroads phase. There are seeming tensions of conflicting identities and values that these college students are wrestling with as they feel they need to come to terms with a decision of whether to "remain" in their spiritual home. They point to the struggle of trying to make complex life choices in relation to religious belonging. *Can I be Catholic AND feminist? Can I be Catholic AND Queer? Can I be Catholic AND Pro-Choice?* These women's questions reflect a conflict that holds the potential for developmental growth in bridging towards self-authorship. They are naming that the "values" that the differing groups and identities that they align with are seemingly clashing and contradicting, while they are also beginning to trust their

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College Student Development, 45, (2004): 612-632; Torres, V., & Hernandez, E., "The influence of ethnic identity development on self-authorship: A longitudinal study of Latino/a college students," *Journal of College Student Development, 48*, (2007): 558-573.

[247] Baxter Magolda, "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," 281.

[248] Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato, Tu-Lien Kim Nguyen, Marc Johnston, Sherry Wang, "Understanding Context: Cultural, Relational, & Psychological Interactions in Self-Authorship Development," *Journal of College Student Development.* 53(5), (2012): 656–679; Roberto C. Orozco, Lara Perez-Felkner, "Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá : Conceptualizing the self-authorship experience of gay Latino college men using conocimiento," *Journal of Latinos and Education.* 17 (4), (2018-10-02): 386–394; Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato, "Developing Self-Authorship: Exploring the Experiences of High-Risk College Students," *Journal of College Student Development*. 44 (6), (2003): 797–812; Vasti Torres, Ebelia Hernandez, "The Influence of Ethnic Identity on Self-Authorship: A Longitudinal Study of Latino/a College Students," *Journal of College Student Development*, 48 (5), (2007): 558–573.

own internal voice and authority. Baxter Magolda's classification of Crossroads is helpful for religious educators because it helps indicate that these types of voiced struggles can provide opportunity to support students in developmental shifts.

Sharon Daloz Parks, like Baxter Magolda, focuses on the acute development shifts in young adults in settings of higher education. Parks argues that young adulthood is a time when meaning-making is constantly happening, and individuals are often wrestling with big questions regarding faith, vocation, and identity.[249] Young adults start forming what Parks coins their *inner dependence*. She explains that "The developmental movement into *inner dependence* occurs when one is able self-consciously to include the self within the arena of authority. In other words, other sources of authority may still hold credible power, but now one can also recognize and value the authority of one's own voice."[250] This interplay is a shift from solely trusting external authority to cultivating an internal authority.

Baxter Magolda and Parks acknowledge the traditional college years as a time that is often filled with vulnerability and uncertainty as young adults begin to learn to trust their internal authority as they ask questions such as "Where and with whom do I belong?"[251] As young adults begin trusting their inner voice, there is often a process of seeking, asking big questions and needing to push back against outer authority. This again should not be seen as negative but a step at exploration in understanding what is credible authority to them and what is not. An individual who can value both trusted authorities and their own internal authority can better define their own sense of belonging in a community as they re-orient their relationship with their spiritual home. For one to feel at home in a community where they comprehend that there is tension and

[249] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 16.
[250] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 77.
[251] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 34.

contradiction (and most communities contain this!) one should have a capacity to hold paradoxes of loving and critiquing simultaneously.

4.1.3 At Home with Complexity: Developing an Ambivalent Relationship with One's Spiritual Home

Here we begin to clearly connect the dots for the relevance of cultivated ambivalence as an appropriate and fitting faith expression in the face of the contemporary realities of religious belief and belonging for young adults. Cultivated ambivalence acknowledges a paradoxical relationship with the Church institution, that invites participation to remain and resist instead of settling into complicity or rejecting their faith. The tasks of cultivated ambivalence (maintaining a critical distance, conserving the traditions deepest insights, and moving forward with innovation and transformation) can provide pathways for healthy faith development and creating a viable option for intentionally remaining while strengthening one's internal voice and authority. While cultivated ambivalence as a faith identity is in service of healthy faith development it also helps develop one's capacity for living with paradox and nuance, which is so crucially needed in our world of increasing polarization today. The overall epistemic aim is for young adult women to develop a capacity for meaning making that can navigate the complexity of both church and world.

4.2 Who Shares This Home with Me: The Importance of Exposure to Diverse Networks of Belonging

How does one begin to understand that navigating the complexity of ambivalent belonging is possible? Baxter Magolda argues that "Success in promoting developmental capacities is possible when educational practice is developmentally sequenced to foster increasingly adaptive ways of making meaning of one's beliefs, identity, and relationships so

that students grow away from authority dependence and move toward self-authorship."[252] Providing viable networks of belonging and relatable role models can provide bridging opportunities and scaffolding for this developmental growth to take place. It can also affirm that the community of faith is more diverse than anyone could imagine it to be. Religious educators must refute and complicate the assumption that there is a narrow definition of who is in and who is out of the Church community by helping young adults understand and affirm that their own stories are a part of the larger, dynamic, and diverse story of the body of Christ. This section looks to the role of religious educators and the communion of saints as access points for mentorship, role models and creating dynamic networks of belonging that support developmental growth and encourage participation.

While religious educators can preach diversity and say that all are welcome, young adults won't believe it until they experience it for themselves. If they don't see anyone like them, how can they believe it is a community for them? Young adult women must be able to see themselves reflected in the sacred, historical, and present-day narratives of the Church. The need for positive and diverse mentors and role models for young adults in general has never been greater. Theologian Theresa O'Keefe points out in her article "The Same but Different," that youth today are living in a more isolated, poly-vocal world than ever before.[253] This creates even more of a challenge and confusion as they enter young adulthood, as they are trying to make meaning out of their multiple worlds, while searching for belonging and trying to figure out their identities. Multiple and conflicting voices are constantly telling them who they should be and

[252] Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Patricia M. King, Kari B. Taylor, Kerri M. Wakefield, "Decreasing Authority Dependence During the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Development,* 53(3), (May-June 2012): 418-435, 419.
[253] Theresa A. O'Keefe, "The Same but Different: The culture in which our adolescents live," *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 7(2), (2008): 41-59, 43.

where they should belong, but little intentional space is given or cultivated to help them discern and listen for themselves to determine which voices are authentically speaking truth to them.

4.2.1 The Role of the Religious Educator: Creating Dynamic Networks of Belonging

The role of religious educators is to assist and accompany young adults in their faith journey. If religious educators make room for a young adult's doubt, critique and questioning, there is the possibility that those young adults can emerge with a deeper, more mature and committed faith and sense of belonging. Religious educators should help move students towards a faith that reflects a meaning-making capacity that values both trusted authorities and one's own internal authority.

Parks stresses that young adults need mentoring communities and networks of belonging to cultivate and nourish alternatives to buying into consumeristic values or inauthentic communities. These types of communities that Parks speaks of can provide safe spaces for young adults to wrestle with their fragile *inner-dependence* as they try to figure out their identities, about purpose, vocation, faith, and core values.[254] Parks argues that "The power of mentoring relationships is that they help anchor the vision of the potential self. They beckon the self into being and, in so doing, help to ground a place of commitment within relativism."[255] Mentoring relationships help move young adults towards what Parks names as *confident inner dependence.*[256] This names the ability to trust both one's inner authority and external authorities and intentionally choose to affiliate with groups due to this interplay.

There is an obligation and opportunity for religious educators to cultivate networks of belonging in more effective and supportive ways that inform and nurture young adult faith and

[254] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 82.
[255] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 81.
[256] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 84.

identity formation. Parks asserts that, "Faith is a patterning, connective relational activity embodied and shaped not within the individual alone but in the comfort and challenges of the company we keep."[257] Our values are also largely shaped by the company we keep and in turn shape us into who we are. Therefore, it is important to think about how the Church can provide networks of belonging that relay Catholic values and encourage practices that support these values.

Kegan argues that in order to navigate meaning-making and self-discovery, young adults need environments that provide both support and challenge.[258] Kegan articulates a *holding environment* as an "evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over" that fosters "developmental transformation."[259] Cultivating networks of belonging that provide both support and challenge aid in moving young adults along within the developmental stage as they are given tools to learn how to critically reflect and are exposed to ideas that help them cultivate their own authority. Parks illuminates this idea by explaining,

> There are too few networks of belonging in which young adults are encouraged to critically reflect on the primary images, symbols and stories-ideologies and myths that shape their souls and their society. A strong empathic, moral imagination-not just on behalf of the self but on behalf of the other as well-is increasingly critical to the practice of citizenship and the vocation of a faithful adulthood in a world marked by social diversity and awareness of suffering on a global scale.[260]

Young adults need mentors and role models that are realistic examples for how to navigate the world's complexities and deal with both the hardships and joys of life. Parks offers insight that "If young adults are steeped in images that grasp both the suffering and wonder of their time,

[257] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 89.
[258] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 43.
[259] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads,* 43.
[260] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 124.

they may gain faith that can be sustained because it cannot be in a certain sense surprised. A great mentoring environment skirts neither suffering nor wonder; rather it holds them in a dynamic of paradox."[261] Religious educators must offer diverse and relatable narratives and images to young adults that help them navigate belonging, belief, and behavior.

When cultivating networks of belonging to develop a critical faith it is imperative that young adults are exposed to a diversity of ways of experiencing belonging. Parks explains that,

> Images, symbols, stories, insights and theories that create durable, widening and open-ended patterns, systems and networks of connection and meaning enlarge the mind and expand the heart. They enable young adults to compose and anchor an increasingly trustworthy faith that, in spite of immediate circumstances, makes it possible to become at home in the universe.[262]

The Catholic Church is ripe with over two thousand years' worth of images, symbols and stories that have the potential to enlarge the mind and expand the heart. If religious educators intentionally and creatively drew on those resources, they could be valuable gifts to young women in liminal spaces.

4.2.2 Better Utilizing the Communion of Saints: The Need for Diverse Role Models

One particular treasure trove of stories and role models within the Catholic Church is the tradition of the communion of saints. As a network of belonging, the communion of saints has the potential to offer dynamic and rich narratives. While there is no true replacement for face-to-face relationships and networks of belonging, I think there is also an important role in providing role models that go beyond the everyday people with which young adults interact. Parks herself argues that a network of belonging does not need to be a physical group of people or even in a physical space. She explains that a role model mentoring relationship could be "a strong sense of

[261] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 149.
[262] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 153.

identification with an historical figure one has never met but who nevertheless serves as a touchstone for one's life and values."[263] The communion of saints has a plethora of historical figures that could provide touchstones for young adults. The communion of saints has the potential to nurture young adult faith formation and act as a network of authentic and realistic belonging. In Kegan's third-order, identification with authority is crucial in understanding what groups we want to align with. Providing authorities like members of the communion of saints for young women to be able to relate to, provides access points to not only feel welcomed, but encouraged to participate. Beyond that lies the possibility that religious educators can create a bridge to Kegan's fourth-order by showing how these authorities navigate religious belonging as critical believers. These role models can serve as dynamic and relatable company and support throughout the various stages of faith development. Parks argues that mentors and guides are particularly important as young women begin trusting their own authority.

Cultivating the communion of saints as a network of belonging, can provide access to role models for female young adult Catholics but first we must challenge the long-standing meta-narratives of the communion of saints that often leave women on the margins, or put them on unreachable pedestals. While I was growing up, reading about the lives of saints was captivating, particularly learning about the female saints. Mary, mother of God, Saint Teresa of Avila and Joan of Arc were some of my favorites to read about. Their stories were fascinating-Mary, a virgin who had a child— (that one was hard to understand but really interesting), Teresa, a feisty woman religious who worked for change from within the Church, and Joan of Arc, who led an army and was burned at the stake. All were incredible stories, but the way they were presented to me were models of a Catholic identity to which I could not relate, nor found realistic.

[263] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 90.

Such inaccessibility is not unique to my experience with the saints. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson better articulates this often disconnectedness with the actual lives of the saints in her book, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (1999). She laments, "Traditional saints stories are filled with 'titanic acts' such as martyrdom" she then goes on to argue that, "telling [these stories] within a tradition of holiness interpreted along the lines of hierarchical dualism serves to reinforce the 'un-saintliness' of those who do not measure up to these epic proportions."[264] This reinforcement leaves saints in prayer books, and within church halls, with little ability to truly access them as models for living faith.

So how do we make the saints more accessible so that they can be role models and help cultivate networks of belonging for young adults? First, we must expand and re-interpret our concept of sainthood. Johnson argues that "In reclaiming the communion of saints as company of friends of God and prophets, allows us to see the 'creative fidelity in the midst of everyday life.'"[265] In Robert Ellsberg's book *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time,* he stretches the canonical definition of sainthood. He explains,

> Saints are those who, in some partial way, embody -- literally incarnate, the challenge for faith in their time and place. In doing so, they open a path that others might follow...saints are not perfect humans, but in their own individual fashion they became authentic human beings, endowed with the capacity to awaken that vocation in others... to call someone a saint means that his or her life should be taken with the utmost seriousness. It is a proof that the gospel can be lived.[266]

Utmost seriousness does not mean it does not need to be creative. In fact, it has been detrimental to the Church to present saints to adolescents and young adults as people in the past put on

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[264] Elizabeth Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints,* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 229.
[265] Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets,* 229.
[266] Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time,* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 6.

pedestals that they cannot relate to at all. This not only isn't a good pedagogy for religious education, but it also misses the opportunity to provide relatable role models for young Catholics. The communion of saints in general could be better utilized to provide role model opportunities for young adults in the Church.

Turning back to my own story, to help illustrate how this could work, while I admired Teresa, Mary, and Joan greatly, none were presented as models of a Catholic identity to which I could relate. It was not until college that new names began to accompany the Catholic heroines of my childhood—M. Shawn Copeland, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elizabeth Farians. I wrote my MDiv thesis on Elizabeth Farians and began to explore the narratives of these pioneering Catholic lay feminist theologians. In my research I explored the contributions of Catholic feminists and learned about how during the 1960s and 1970s, post-Vatican II, they changed the Catholic Church forever as discussed in earlier chapters. While their theological pursuits changed the Church, so did their very physical presence and vocations since before the 1960s it was stereotypically suggested that Catholic women should be either mothers or nuns. At this intersection of secular and church transformations, Catholic feminists were not only challenging constructs of gender and sexuality, but also challenging vocational opportunities for Catholic women.

My own sense of vocation and commitment to my Catholic faith were deepened by reading about these fascinating Catholic feminists. They were women I could relate to, who struggled in their personal lives and with their faith, all the while grounded in commitment to the gospel values of social justice and inclusivity. The examples of the first Catholic feminist theologians in the United States is only one example of a group of women who devoted their lives to the Church and made major contributions to the life of the community yet remain

obscure and not well known outside of academic circles. Within the pews, within faith formation curriculum, and within church halls their names and contributions continue to be at best unknown, at worst intentionally ignored.

The little-known history of the stories of Catholic feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, is part of a larger problem in the Catholic Church, which has excluded the voices and narratives of women from the common historical narratives and within the canon. Johnson laments that,

> The exclusion of women from the public culture of the church has resulted in an official memory that has erased a good part of the history of women's discipleship, giving to the communion of saints a largely male face both in heaven and on earth. This erasure has never been wholly effective, however, and feminist hermeneutical methods now bring to light women and the contribu-tions they have made in licit and illicit ways. For ecclesial practices of memory to be liberating to women, to poor women, to women of color, to lay women, to married women everywhere, deliberate attention must be turned to their stories. Their absence must be noticed, missed, criticized, and corrected. It is not just a matter of adding women to what remains a patriarchal master narrative. The challenge, rather, is to reshape the church's memory so as to reclaim an equal share in the center for women and thereby transform the community.[267]

An important point Johnson makes is that just telling their stories is not enough. The stories of female discipleship have the potential to be transformative for not only women to hear the stories, but for the entire Church community to live more authentically into the reality of how the Body of Christ has, does, and will continue to function in the world.

This encouragement of re-shaping of the church's memory is also echoed by theologian Tina Beattie in her article "Transforming Time—The Maternal Church and the Pilgrimage of Faith." Beattie insists that,

> We must [also] focus our gaze on the women who surround Jesus and ask anew what these models of female discipleship are telling us. In the scriptural and

[267] Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets,* 234.

> sacramental inheritance of the Christian faith, women's stories are yet to be given evangelical expression and sacramental embodiment.[268]

Incorporating more diverse images of female saints helps re-shape the church's memory and gives evangelical expression and sacramental embodiment to stories of women throughout the Church's history.

This is not the only benefit to an exploration of sharing these narratives and claiming them as part of the Catholic tradition though. Focusing on these stories of female discipleship affirms a theology that is inclusive and celebratory of women's bodies and experiences as sacred. When thinking of role models for young women in the Church, it is also important again to think about the underlying shared and passed on values. The ultimate hope is that young women experience and see themselves as sacred and beloved with the God-given right to be on a path of holiness. Johnson argues,

> As research continues to reveal underlying male/female historical differences in experience of the sacred, resulting from inculturated experience of the embodied self in a given society, it becomes ever more clear how women's exclusion from the church's public culture has led to one-sided definitions of exemplary character, holiness and spiritual paths, The result is an official ideal that disvalues the different paths to holiness taken be all saints.[269]

In order to be an inviting and dynamic network of belonging, different paths to holiness cannot be excluded but embraced and exemplified. More explicitly, the diversity of paths that women have taken to holiness need to be explored, valued, and celebrated. Johnson continues to explain that "Women form a piece of 'living Christology,' drawing from traditional and conciliar teaching that all the saints are images of Christ."[270] Female saints can encourage and attract

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[268] Tina Beattie, "Transforming Time—The Maternal Church and the Pilgrimage of Faith," *Ecclesiology* 12 (2016): 72.
[269] Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets,* 230.
[270] Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets,* 226.

young females on pathways of holiness, but they also can help young adult females see the image of Christ within themselves.

The communion of saints expanded upon by Elizabeth Johnson helps create an opportunity to delve more deeply into the lineage of Catholic women in order to bring to light role models for young adult Catholic women today. As they navigate the complexity of their worlds, access to the communion of saints can be a positive network of belonging that has the potential to transform and nourish their faith lives. Saints as role models for how we are to live, as human beings, complete with faults, all striving to live lives of holiness and meaning. Realistic role models cannot be left up to the tropes oftentimes associated with female saints portrayed as compliant, obedient, virginal.[271] It is critical that religious educators challenge these often limited and sometimes harmful (and sometimes false) depictions of female saints.

Through engagement with the communion of saints there is potential for young adult Catholic women to form relationships with these Catholic women of the past and present. The hope is that these relationships help them cultivate what Parks calls a strong *inner-dependence* while also having better role models that allow them to feel at home within the Catholic tradition. Elizabeth Johnson validates the potential role of the communion of saints in this necessary work of young adult faith development when she proclaims, "Cheered on by the great, richly varied cloud of witnesses, learning their lessons of encouragement, protesting their pain, catching their hope, standing their shoulders, the church today takes its own steps on the path of discipleship as legacy for future generations."[272] There is a strong need to better utilize and make

[271] Oliva Espín, "Female Saints: Submissive or Rebellious? Feminists in Disguise?" *Innsbrucker Gender Lectures,* (Universität Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2012), 135-161,136.
[272] Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets,* 234.

accessible the great cloud of witnesses of Catholic women, so that future generations of young adult Catholic women can hear the cheers and find belonging.

4.3 Sharing the Stories of Home: The Affirmative Power of Story-Sharing

While expanding access to stories of the communion of saints is a necessary first step, from a religious educator's perspective, the question then is how to share these stories, and what pedagogical models can be most effective in supporting young adults towards feeling at home in their faith tradition. This section looks specifically at the pedagogical function of story-sharing in Christian religious education. It argues that narrative pedagogies can aid in shaping the spiritual identity and religious imagination of young adults and aid in connecting them to a greater Christian story and mission. The section has two parts. The first section argues that narrative pedagogies can aid in the identity-formation and faith development of young adults. The second argues that narrative pedagogy can be a tool for cultivating belonging through an effective interplay of connecting individual stories and the greater Christian story, providing relatable and contextualized role models, and helping learners develop a critical consciousness.

4.3.1 Narrative Pedagogy as a Tool for Faith Development

The art of storytelling has long since served a purpose beyond mere entertainment. The practice instead serves as a means for passing down traditions, teaching morality, and making meaning out of life and circumstance. Jesus himself was a gift storyteller, using parables to engage his followers and stories to instruct and lead his disciples to better understand his message. Narrative pedagogy is a process that gives the learner agency of their own story and can help locate them in the dynamic and complex larger Christian narrative, as a disciple of Christ in and for the world.

The ability to tell our life-stories is crucial to meaning-making. Mining one's stories and critically reflecting on oneself as an active and moral agent in the stories can help one develop skills of perception and understanding. Josh Lunde-Whitler does an excellent job in his article, "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue: Towards A 'Narrative-Developmental' Approach to Human Identity and Its Value for Christian Religious Education," marrying the work of Ricoeur in philosophy and Kegan in cognitive development theory to argue that the process of telling and sharing narratives provides an excellent vehicle for healthy and identity formation in order to meet the needs of one's environment. Lunde-Whitler argues that developing the ability to integrate and negotiate one's life stories, "creates the possibility for a more adaptable (yet not chaotic or rudderless) sense of self, which corresponds with a certain inherent posture of respect and anticipation towards others and the world."[273] Lunde-Whitler further argues that narrative practice in the field of religious education ultimately allows participants to "become theologians, by learning how to reflect theologically and critically about oneself and the world."[274] Ultimately, narrative practice can and should support young adults in developing a meaning-making capacity to strengthen their inner-dependence while encouraging them to participate in the communities they are now intentionally choosing to align with as they are firmly in Kegan's third-order consciousness. Narrative practice can also then help shift young adults in exploring their own internal authority, voice, and agency which is a crucial bridging to Kegan's fourth-order.

[273] Joshua H. Lunde-Whitler, "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue: Towards A 'Narrative-Developmental' Approach to Human Identity and Its Value for Christian Religious Education," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19(2), (2015): 310.
[274] Lunde-Whitler, "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue," 311.

4.3.2 Examples of Narrative Pedagogies in Religious Education

In this section, I engage with three examples of narrative pedagogies in Christian education. Each offers a specific contribution to the conversation of how narrative pedagogy can aid in development and create a sense of belonging. The first is *Shared Christian Praxis* by Thomas Groome.[275] *Shared Christian Praxis* has been highly influential in catechesis and Christian education worldwide. Groome's major contribution is a framework that enables a process of life, to faith, to life integration. His model invites the interplay in faith formation between individual stories as part of a larger Christian narrative. Groome's model begins with the experience of the learner and engages both the autobiographical stories of the learner and the communal narratives of the Christian story. In *Sharing Faith* (1991), Groome defines *Shared Christian Praxis* as,

> A participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place, and on their socio-cultural reality, have access together to Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith towards God's reign for all creation.[276]

Groome explains that the importance in his method of linking personal stories to a larger Christian story is that the,

> Christian story and vision suggest a narrative of faith that is ongoing that reaches into our own time and will continue after us. They can be engaging for people, as all stories are, and invite participants to step inside them and find echoes and horizons for themselves.[277]

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[275] A detailed description of "Shared Christian Praxis" can be found in Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 299-300.
[276] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith*: *A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis,* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 135.
[277] Groome, *Will There Be Faith,* 291.

Groome's process gives the learner agency of their own story and can help locate them in the larger Christian narrative, as a disciple of Christ in and for the world. Groome's method has been the inspiration for many curricula of transformational Christian religion education.

Religious Educator, Ann Streaty Wimberly builds from Groome's narrative pedagogy model in her *Story-Linking Process.*[278] Her model engages both autobiographical narratives and historical and scriptural Christian narratives that Groome suggests. She then adds a movement to include post-biblical Christian African American heritage stories to reflect on as well. Her model offers a practical guide for how religious educators can help learners weave and reflect upon personal, scriptural, and specific cultural narratives in order to shape and confirm identity and invite participation. Wimberly's contribution I want to highlight here is the importance of curating and sharing narratives that are relevant and specific to the community of learners. When thinking of young adults, this again does not need to be stories of young adults (though that would be helpful to an extent) but stories that are contextualized and share common values and struggles that young adult women may be sitting with in the moment. If narratives shared are simply scriptural, or even generalized about the "lives of the saints," then it is less likely that young adults will be able to glean from them or see themselves reflected in the narratives.

Another important contribution from both Wimberly and Groome is that there is an essential decision-making aspect that invites action as the last step of their narrative pedagogies. It is important for them that the work of unearthing one's story and linking it to a greater Christian narrative, is ultimately for the sake of greater society, which should be a liberative process. Groome states that religious education at its best, "Informs, forms, transforms the very

[278] Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education,* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 2005), 25.

being of people and does so in ways that are powerfully life-giving for both themselves and society."[279] Wimberly argues that sharing narratives can be a liberating tool. It encourages participants to critically engage the stories of self and community to become aware of how to make decisions that enable liberation of self and others. The learning outcome of their pedagogies is not only personal faith development and identity formation but forming disciples in mission that are intentionally invited to participate by making decisions of how they participate and act in and for the world.

Belonging to a spiritual community comes with responsibility. A narrative pedagogy that is liberative should not focus on the individual journey alone, lest it fall into the traps of individualism. To be invited into a decision is an invitation to participate, for the sake of the community. Wimberly argues that story-sharing within religious education should be for the benefit of the whole community and not just for individuals. She explains,

> When we arrive at positive notions of self-identity, we regard ourselves as valued human beings…Our positive view of who we are liberates us to be positive forces in the lives of others.[280]

Narrative pedagogy within a theological framework is liberative in helping one come to see oneself as beloved, as knower, as liberated agent. Because of this transformative experience, it should instill a responsibility to then help liberate others. Decision making is a crucial component to the work of faith development for young adults. I agree with Wimberly and Groome, that ultimately, the goal of religious education, through practices such as narrative pedagogy, is to form critically conscious disciples and co-creators of God's liberative vision for humanity. One's religious belonging should inspire action and participation.

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[279] Groome, *Will There Be Faith,* 94.
[280] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* 37.

The third narrative pedagogy example I want to lift up is *Life-Story in Metaphor,* which Evelyn Parker used in her research presented in *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class, and Gender.* While Parker focuses on adolescent girls (15-18 years old), I believe her contribution is significant in working with young adult women as well. Parker found that in her work with narrative pedagogy, the process is not just about identity formation and belonging, but also about the development of a critical consciousness.[281] Parker interviewed adolescent girls, inviting them to share their stories using the metaphor of a song. She argued that the girls could not identify nor name aspects of their own story to begin with so intentionally chose this creative approach. For example, in an interview she would ask the girls, *If your life were a song, what would it be and why?* She then looked for recurring themes in their answers, listening for how God was showing up in their stories.[282] Her conclusion is that these "stories of young people are the stories of the gospel, being lived out and spoken to us in this generation."[283] Her findings suggest that through this narrative process, the girls began to develop a critical consciousness and in developing a critical consciousness they were empowered to begin asking questions about oppressions and injustices that they had faced in their lives.[284] She argues that a critical consciousness is an aspect of a healthy spirituality for everyone, therefore intentionally helping to form this aspect of spiritual identity should be taken more seriously by religious educators.[285] Her conclusion is that the concepts of realization, resistance, resilience, and ritual as four components for nurturing a healthy spirituality. I found this conclusion compelling in that

[281] Evelyn Parker, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class, and Gender,* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 172.
[282] Parker, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls,* 8.
[283] Parker, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls,* 160.
[284] Parker, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls,* 172.
[285] Parker, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls,* 166.

it focuses again on a crucial developmental leap that narrative pedagogy can help support, one where the learner begins to understand and articulate their own agency and internal authority.

What is missing within the three pedagogical methods I presented here is an invitation or intentional space for critical engagement with the institutions and religious communities of which the learners are a part. The goal for Groome and Wimberly is to connect one to a larger story but does not provide explicit encouragement for challenging how parts of that larger story may be problematic. While Parker addresses the importance of awakening a critical consciousness among teenage girls, she does not offer a specific avenue for them to then ask the "So what?" questions such as, what we do with this newfound consciousness. Groome and Wimberly's models are helpful in the process of fostering faith development and a sense of belonging within a spiritual home. Parker's model is explicitly supportive of faith development, through cultivating the critical consciousness of adolescent girls. There is room to build beyond their models to encourage and support critical engagement with and within the religious traditions of the learners. While it is important to feel a part of something, it is also important to be able to wrestle authentically with what it means to belong, and what it means to express agency by questioning and doubting parts of the community to which one belongs. This is especially crucial in the young adult years as many are in third-order consciousness and are discerning and wrestling with questions about where "can I belong" and "who are *my* people." As they wrestle with these questions, religious educators must provide affirmation of their experiences and bridging opportunities for them to continue to develop in their faith towards a fourth-order consciousness.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that religious educators can support young women in feeling at home through supporting them in developing their meaning-making capacity. Religious educators should encourage faith development for young adult women to be able to comprehend an expansive understanding of a spiritual home. The hope is for young adult women to be able to embrace the paradoxes of their faith, to be critical believers, and to feel at home within the context of a dynamic and diverse community. To do this, religious educators must provide welcoming viable networks of belonging and show relatable mentors for young adult women to feel at home and provide role models to reveal how one can cultivate a critical consciousness and self-authorship. Finally, I argued that the pedagogy of story-sharing, can help one develop skills of perception and understanding not only to help shape and affirm the identity of an individual, but in their sense of belonging and call to participation. The final chapter will now go on to describe in depth how a narrative pedagogy inspired by the three tasks of cultivated ambivalence can provide an effective and engaging tool for religious educators to use with young adults in this work of identity formation and faith development.

Chapter Five:
The Prophetic Call to Critique, Conserve and Transform: A Narrative Pedagogy

"It's definitely messier taking a nuanced stance, but it's also critically important to true belonging."
Brené Brown, Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone[286]

In this final chapter, I propose that exposure to and engagement with narratives of cultivated ambivalence can serve as a theological access point for healthy faith development for young adult Catholic women. I suggest a three-fold approach of *critique, conserve, and transform* as a pedagogical framework to encourage prophetic participation. In the first section, I suggest contexts where fruitful faith formation conversations can happen in settings of higher education. I build off of Sharon Daloz Parks' conceptual settings of *hearth, table,* and *commons.* In the second section, I argue that *cultivating ambivalence* among young adult Catholic women has both helpful pastoral implications and prophetic possibilities. In the third section, I introduce sections of my narrative framework that builds off of the pedagogies of Thomas Groome, Anne Straety Wimberly and Evelyn Parker. It draws from narrative sources that are tradition-based (Communion of Saints), contemporary memoirs (*Catholic Women Speak*, *Radical Reinvention, From the Pews in the Back*, etc.) and personal accounts of the learner (autobiography) to offer narrative content pertinent to the concept of cultivated ambivalence. In the final section, I

[286] Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone,* (New York: Random House, 2017), 66.

introduce the full narrative framework and close with examples of how this framework can be used in conversations with students in the conceptual contexts of *hearth, table* and *commons.*

5.1 Contexts for Conversations

This dissertation is concerned with Catholic young adult women on college and university campuses. College campuses and institutions of higher education have a unique opportunity to engage students in faith formation. This is because there is already a contained and bounded space and professed belonging to a specific community as a baseline. Beyond that, it is also a space designed for students to become engaged and thoughtful citizens and not just skilled professionals. Parks argues, "At its best higher education is distinctive in its capacity to serve as a mentoring environment in the formation of critical adult faith."[287] The university can be viewed as a constellation of many mentoring environments existing throughout the institutional structure, but for it to be most effective, it benefits from intentionality and strategic clarity.[288] This chapter offers principles of context that can serve to create effective holding environments for developmental growth. I build off of Sharon Daloz Parks' conceptual spaces of *the hearth, table* and *commons,* to create effective mentoring environments within a university setting. While Parks argues that faith development can happen within the classroom, there are immense opportunities, especially on residential campuses, for faith development to happen within mentoring communities outside of the classroom. She uses these three conceptual spaces of hearth, table and commons to expand on how shaping spaces on campus can provide opportunities to engage students and create "communities of imagination and practice."[289] Therefore, I consider how such spaces can be used for our purposes. However, beyond the

[287] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 159.
[288] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 159.
[289] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 154.

physical spaces in which students engage face-to-face, I suggest we must also consider the digital spaces that are so much a part of student's lives.

When exploring the contexts for conversations I believe it is also important to understand and engage in how the internet and particularly social media impacts student experience. Students' use of technology alters, challenges, and contributes to their experience of *hearth, table,* and *commons*. Particularly the platform of social media is an ever-increasing ecology in which young adults are immersed in for large parts of each day whether it is for school, work, social time, or entertainment.. As our world becomes increasingly connected and tied to screens and the internet, communities of faith must embrace the internet and find creative ways to engage with it as a necessary space of ministry. In the following paragraphs, as I describe *hearth, table, commons*, I will give examples of these conceptual contexts both in physical spaces and virtual spaces.

5.1.1 Hearth

Parks describes *hearth* spaces as comfortable places that draw us in and invite us into reflection. The image of the hearth conjures up feelings of coziness and a desire to linger, "warmed in both body and soul."[290] *Hearth* spaces offer time for pause, and conversation.[291] The kind of discourse possible in this space is reflection "within and among" where young adults can talk through challenges or questions. Hearth spaces invite dialogue that moves beyond and deeper than transactional relationships and surface-level, limiting conversations. Parks terms the conversations that happen with the context of the hearth, *hearth-sized conversations*.[292] These *hearth-sized conversations* can happen during a campus minister's office hours, but more often it

[290] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 154.
[291] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 154.
[292] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 155.

is during a walk around campus, or over a cup of hot chocolate in the student lounge, or while a student lingers and helps clean up after an event. The location doesn't matter, as much as the feeling that is expressed and created within the conversation.

While Parks insists that the practice of *hearth* can happen anywhere, I think it is also important that the religious educator create welcoming, even cozy, spaces for students to visit. Often institutional furniture, fluorescent lighting and desks are not conducive to "hearth-sized conversations." In the chaplaincy office where I worked, colleagues of mine would bring in couches, have electric candles and lamps to offset overhead lights, always have a pot of tea going, to create warmth in their offices so as to create an inviting place for students to sit and relax and breathe. One chaplaincy office I am aware of, located in a building in the middle of campus, bakes cookies several times a week, so students passing by can smell the baking, and of course are drawn in to come get a cookie or two.

As important as it is to create welcoming physical spaces, I argue that *hearth-sized conversations* are possible in digital spaces as well. A silver lining of the pandemic was the increase in technology that allows people to connect virtually. The digital platforms such as Zoom, Google-meets, and FaceTime, have allowed for face-to-face conversations to become a normal part of many daily interactions. Connecting students with potential mentors, spiritual directors, and even peers that are in different areas of the country, or even world can lead to *hearth-sized conversations* online. This is especially beneficial for students who may be from specific places or dealing with specific challenges and looking to connect with someone who can relate or has knowledge of where they are from and there is no one on campus who could fit this description. It is important to be mindful though, that just as students are not looking for more office hours, they are not looking for more Zoom meetings either. There is an important

atmosphere of pause and reflection and invitation to the conversation into which the mentor or religious educator must mindfully invite the student.

The nature of the *hearth* is to create moments of pause and to elicit feelings of comfort, so that students can let down their guard, breathe and reflect. Creating a welcoming and cozy atmosphere that invites students to relax and take a break from their routine can help them enter into *hearth-sized conversations*. I have witnessed a strong hunger for hearth places, and *hearth-sized conversations* among students. They welcome a change of pace from the busyness and high expectations that are both outwardly-imposed and self-imposed and a change of conversation topics that are not focused on school or achievements, or an opportunity to show off their knowledge, but on inward movements of the soul. While they may not ask for it explicitly, students welcome moments of intentional conversation and contemplation, a time of lingering. Religious educators need to be mindful to create such spaces.

5.1.2 Table

Parks' second conceptual space is the *table.* Parks argues that gathering over shared meals can provide moments for students to practice dialogue and understand that "we can disagree yet remain deeply aware of our common bonds."[293] Gathering around food is sacramental and is commonplace. The table can elicit feelings of belonging and nourishment, which is crucial as young adults are drawn "to places that nourish them."[294] It is no secret that students love free food and it is a frequent tactic to entice them with food, but Parks' intent is more than simply drawing them in. Inviting students to gather at a table over a shared meal invites them into a space of engagement and dialogue. It allows them to participate in and experience being a part of the community and contributing to a communal life.

[293] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 156.
[294] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 156.

Most religious educators are already very good at gathering students around food. Food is often a central component to ministry events, and if a full meal is offered, it allows students to take a break, sit down, and be present at the table with others. I share an example of the *table*, from my own ministry as a chaplain. During my first year on campus as a chaplain, it was a tradition that every Sunday night after student Mass, the chaplain would provide cookies and juice in the vestibule. Students would grab a few cookies, share a few greetings, and then be on their way. It was a nice gesture but did not create a space where students would linger or share in longer conversations. The current student leadership believed that students didn't have time to stay for dinner, because they had to get to their homework. At a meeting with a generous donor who asked how she could help the ministry, I suggested she sponsor a weekly meal for the students after Mass in the multi-faith center, located in the same building as the Chapel. With that donation, we began to serve dinner. The social time after Mass became a more intentional *table context*, where people stayed to talk, build relationships, and engage with one another. Countering our assumption that students were too busy to stay for dinner, many more students did stay. As the months progressed, students began to volunteer to help prepare the meals, set-up, and clean-up as well. It became a shared weekly ritual and space that we looked forward to each week. This also created immense opportunities for *hearth-sized conversations*, for which there had been no time when we only had cookies at the exit of Mass.

While it is more challenging to break bread together in a virtual space, conversations around the *table* are still possible online. In fact, over the past two years, during the pandemic, this has become a necessary way to connect and create community as we have been isolated and have had more limited opportunities to gather in person. While food is a component of table conversations, the heart of the discourse is about engaging with others in a communal way. A

great example of *table* conversations done well online, is bi-monthly Friday luncheons that my dissertation director hosts on Zoom with her doctoral students. The small group has met every other week, online for over a year, despite differences in geographic locations and Covid status. While not physically present together, the participants eat lunch (or coffee) together, sharing in an intentional break from their workday to check in with each other and engage in meaningful conversation. These online lunches have been crucial for building relationships among student colleagues and between faculty and advisees. While the pandemic has disrupted what would have otherwise been in-person interactions and occasional opportunities to break bread together, the digital space creates a regular practice that fits easily into the schedule, regardless of what the rest of the day demands.

Gathering students into conversation at mealtimes can also be a subtle antidote to the silent and lonely atmosphere that often haunts dining halls. Over the past decade, I have noticed a change in dining room behavior on college campuses. Where tables once used to be full of students chattering, the volume making it hard sometimes to hear the person next to you, now those same spaces have an eerie quiet feel to them. Dining spaces that were once centers of socialization now have individuals sitting spread out, wearing EarPods, staring at their computers, while eating their meals alone. At the institution I worked for, some dining halls even created "social tables" to encourage students to sit together and have conversations with people they may not know without the awkwardness of wondering if you will bother someone who is staring at their computer screen while eating. I see the role of the religious educator as not only providing food but also initiating spaces where the table can once again be a place of conversation and where students can have permission to put down their work and engage one another in meaningful ways.

5.1.3 Commons

Parks explains that the *commons* are open public gathering spaces, "where people meet by happenstance and intention and have a sense of a shared, interdependent life within a manageable framework."[295] Most traditional college campuses are ripe with opportunity for the practice of the *commons.* Just imagine the beauty of the quad, student unions, lecture halls, and campus worship spaces. Parks suggests that the *commons* is "an embodied image and practice that nourishes an imagination of the possibility of shared participation in creating the common good."[296] In this description she goes on to say that the commons bring together people "in fruitful tension to celebrate the disparate elements of the community. It is a place within which we confirm a common, connected life, and in combination with various forms of story and ritual it can become our center of shared faith and grounded hope."[297] The kind of discourse possible in this space is dialogue across differences. These are conversations that counter-self-interest in favor of the common good. The commons can challenge young people to see themselves as part of a community beyond their own family and friend circle. It is about communal engagement toward becoming an engaged and thoughtful citizen.

While I believe that Parks' description of the *commons* is important, there needs to be emphasis on how these spaces are facilitated and cultivated in order for fruitful dialogue and conversation to occur. A practice of the commons takes work and modeling. There is opportunity for introspection from the campus community of how faculty and staff can model the *commons*, whether in terms of inviting dialogue, and in how they use the common spaces, to model and practice a collective *we*.

[295] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 156.
[296] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 157.
[297] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 157.

In one campus setting I worked in, the campus Rabbi and Muslim chaplain would intentionally sit on a set of benches in the middle of the campus quad weekly, weather permitting, to have coffee together, catch up and check in. Often students would come sit with them and engage in conversation. This was particularly poignant when there was a lot of tension among students about a controversial speaker on campus who had recently addressed the political climate in Palestine. The Rabbi and Muslim chaplain chose to gather in this common space instead of a meeting room, or even a dining hall, to publicly model engagement and cooperation for students. Their efforts created a chance for students to meet and to build relationships with others outside of the tense moments that the students sometimes found themselves in during a classroom debate, or heated discussion at a student forum.

Social media has inevitably become a type of *commons* in our society, and instead of pushing against this, it is crucial that religious educators learn to engage within it if they are to meet students there. Social media can be a space that can perpetuate tunnel vision and division. Yet, there is also immense opportunity to create engaging dialogue and faith formation opportunities. Jesuit priest, James Martin provides a great example of how virtual space can be used as *commons.*. Through various social media outlets, Martin invites engaging dialogue. On his Facebook page, he posts articles relevant to the Catholic Church, inviting and moderating conversation well in the comments.[298] He also hosts a weekly Facebook Live session, in which he talks about some issue, creating a community among those who tune in for the live session, but is available for any to watch later. This takes diligence and commitment to moderate a space where people can question, dialogue, and discern together. Martin models well how social media can be a useful tool especially in engaging young people in matters of the Church. He is able to

[298] "James Martin, SJ" *Facebook Page*, https://www.facebook.com/FrJamesMartin, accessed April 22, 2022.

provide a productive *commons* like space to productively discuss challenging issues such as Church teachings and larger ethical questions relating to current events.

In this section I have reviewed Parks' concepts of *hearth, table,* and *commons* and demonstrated how each can be helpful in creating spaces on campus where students can engage in fruitful and formational spiritual conversations both physically and virtually. Later in the chapter I will return to these three contexts to provide specific examples of how narrative pedagogy can be useful in each of these spaces in supporting faith development of young adult Catholic women.

5.2 Prophetic Possibilities of Cultivating Ambivalence through Praxis

This section serves to show the pastoral implications and prophetic possibilities of *cultivating ambivalence* among young adult Catholic women. Throughout this dissertation I have made the argument that the concept of *cultivated ambivalence* can serve as a theological access point for young adult women to find nuanced belonging and assert spiritual authority within the constructs of a Catholic identity. The concept of *cultivated ambivalence* has greatly shaped my own pastoral work in working young adult women in chaplaincy settings. I have found it incredibly helpful while sitting with individuals who feel stuck in this space of belonging and alienation and struggling with a feeling of having to decide of whether to stay or leave the Church. Viewing ambivalence as a virtue has been a source of empowerment for many students I worked with. Ambivalent belonging offers a nuanced way of belonging that does not make it an either/or decision to stay or leave the institutional Church. Rather it affirms the mixed and often conflicting experiences. So they do not feel that they are the only one who has ever experienced it, nor do they feel forced into a decision to leave the Church.

I suggest that ambivalence is not only a virtue to be cultivated but it can be a prophetic mode of belonging. One engages in thoughtful, well-informed critique, while simultaneously acknowledging cherished Catholic traditions and rituals that bring meaning to life. *Cultivating ambivalence* is a pathway for prophetic participation through praxis. The term praxis, a Greek word, became common vernacular among liberation theologians in the later 20th century. Gustavo Gutierrez asserted that both orthopraxy (right practice) and orthodoxy (right belief) are critical parts of being engaged fully in the community of the faithful.[299] Gutierrez advocated for an integrated relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis and at times has been criticized for what critics view as him emphasizing praxis over belief.[300] Gutierrez' inspiration for lifting up the concept of praxis grew from empowering lay people to work for their own liberation and to being agents in ending oppression. It is a central theological claim by liberation theologians that instilling agency in individuals to critically reflect on the gospels, will promote their agency to act for justice because of their faith and understanding of Christ's mission in the world. Through praxis, they are participating as a part of the living Christian tradition. A liberative praxis seeks to impact the theologies which support what is normative in the Church and often in society. A reflective praxis empowers individuals to shape the Church, and not just to consume or be a bystander in one's tradition. It is to be a part of a living tradition as a fully engaged person, bringing one's experiences, identities, questions, and joys.

I see the concept of a liberative praxis as complementary to the assertion in *Lumen Gentium* that the People of God share in the prophetic office of the Church. I see that young women are the embodiment of the Church through their lived experiences and are part of the

[299] Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, (Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis,1990).
[300] John J Markey, "Praxis in Liberation Theology: Some Clarifications," *Missiology*, 23(2), (1995): 179-195.

prophetic office of the Church.[301] I argue that the three-task movements of *cultivated ambivalence*: *critique, conserve* and *transform*, offer a specific way for young women to engage in the prophetic office of the Church through praxis.

I suggest that *prophetic ambivalence* is an active commitment to slow work, transformational work, and all rooted in the knowledge that the pilgrim Church is more than an institution. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bednarowski explains, "Ambivalence leads not to final resolution of issues affecting the equality of women but to an ongoing commitment to a tradition that, she believes, will continue to offer both limitation and transformation."[302] This ongoing commitment is not rooted in false hopes that the Church will change overnight, but that people *are* the Church and in their very actions they are being the Church and transforming the constantly journeying, pilgrim Church.

Prophetic ambivalence is not only relevant to women's experiences in the Church. Listening, dialoguing, and critiquing for the benefit of moving the Church forward towards liberation for all, guided by the Spirit, are deeply rooted in fidelity to Catholic tradition. All Catholics should be inspired to be actively engaged in discerning the three tasks of *critique, conserve* and *transform* as members of the body of Christ. Bednarowski suggests,

> One could argue that cultivating the virtue of ambivalence is just what all religious communities need to do to prevent reification of symbols, rigidity of teachings and rituals, and the failure to be aware of the needs of all their members, no matter how various. It may be the case that sustaining an ambivalence that is intensely aware of the simultaneous need for critique, conservation, and innovation will be an ongoing major contribution of women's religious thought to their communities and other forms of institutional life in American culture as well.[303]

The invitation to engage in *cultivating ambivalence* is the ongoing work of the pilgrim Church. It

[301] LG 2, Line 12.
[302] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 41.
[303] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 43.

is a call to continual conversion and transformation, promoting a prophetic vision and voice within the Church's membership.

5.3 Narrative Tasks: Critique, Conserve and Transform

As I argued in Chapter Four, a narrative pedagogy can situate discipleship in a diverse, complex, and sacred web of narratives that better expresses the nature of the Church. Sharing personal stories and reflecting on the narratives of the saints and contemporary experiences of Catholic women, can lead to sacred insights for how the Church can be a space of belonging and participation in God's mission in the world. A narrative pedagogy can help young women authentically discern their core values and commitments and see themselves as participating in a larger, dynamic, and nuanced Christian narrative.

In relation to faith development, I see that *cultivated ambivalence* can help one name and navigate the complexities of a tradition *and* can commit to holding in tension one's own spiritual authority, one's individual beliefs, as well as the Church's authority, history, and context. Narrative pedagogy can be a helpful framework for religious educators to introduce the concept of *cultivated ambivalence* because it provides a way to introduce role models that can serve as bridging opportunities towards this type of ambivalent belonging.

In relation to theological goals, this narrative framework is inspired by both Mary Bednarowski's three tasks of cultivated ambivalence: *critique, conserve, and innovate* as well as Lisa Cahill's articulation of the feminist ethic three-fold hermeneutics of suspicion, appreciation, and praxis.[304] This framework provides scaffolding for students to be able to engage through a critical lens to explore and thoughtfully discern participation in their faith community.

[304] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.

The learning goals of this process have both developmental and theological ends. They are to 1) Comprehend that "the Church" is not one static, unified institution. 2) Learn how different individuals have navigated ambivalent belonging within the constructs of a Catholic identity. 3) Develop one's own spiritual authority and move towards a critical faith. The overall framework has three-steps: story dwelling, storytelling, and story movement. I now describe the three pedagogical movements.

5.3.1 Critique

I suggest that the first pedagogical movement helps cultivate one's awareness and develop a critical distance from one's tradition. Bednarwoski explains that cultivated ambivalence requires, "constant critical distance from one's community."[305] In her observations this did not necessarily mean physical distance, but instead seeking creative ways of participation while having an awareness of the frustrations and limitations the tradition posed to women. It also means recognizing that the patriarchal structures that cause sexism and gender inequality to flourish are not at the heart of the tradition's deepest truths and contributions and are instead often culturally imposed.

The task of critique mirrors closely, a hermeneutics of suspicion.[306] In the field of feminist theology, this lens was first articulated by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza through which to interpret scripture. In her book *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (1984), Schüssler Fiorenza presents "feminist evaluative hermeneutics" to engage in biblical exegesis. Fiorenza's proposal insists on being aware of the historical context in which the texts were written and compiled. Those historical contexts, from

[305] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 20.
[306] This mode of interpretation was first articulated by philosopher Paul Ricoeur in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Translated by Denis Savage. (New Haven: Yale, 1970).

her perspective, were biased against women. Therefore, she argues a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is needed to detect the distortions within the text with relation to the treatment and portrayal of women.[307] Many feminist theologians have built off of Schussler Fiorenza's concepts and expanded its use outside of the field of biblical interpretation. Lisa Cahill articulates its use in the creation of feminist theological ethics. Cahill highlights that one of the central question in feminist ethics is "how do traditions mediate dominant ideologies that continue to oppress some community members?"[308] The task of critique is to always be willing and poised to interrogate, or as Bednarowski says, "to be vigilant" of one's traditions' inclinations towards exclusion.[309] This does not mean to constantly be looking for the negative or things one does not agree with. Rather it is to constantly question why things are the way they are, so as to better uncover the cultural and historical implications of the situation and context. Bednarowski observed in her work that most women did not get overwhelmed with their critiques with the institution or let them get in the way of participation, but instead learned to recognize them, articulate them and continue to navigate their belonging. Bednarowski shared that the critiques she observed were not towards the "traditions' most central insights, but of the traditions' failings particularly in regard to women."[310] This is not to say frustration and hurt are not also a part of this process. Yet it did not completely cloud or get in the way of the women's ability to participate, since there was a greater awareness that the failings in regard to women, were not of God, but of the brokenness of the human institution.

[307] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984).
[308] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.
[309] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 20.
[310] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 19.

As discussed in Chapter Four, according to developmental theorists Kegan and Parks, most younger adults (18-22) are typically in the third-order of consciousness (Kegan) and grappling with a *fragile inner dependence* (Parks). It is a time often rife with questioning and identity exploration, and as they explore and come into their own authority, there is often push back against outside authority. While working with students in these stages, a question of critique is a good place to start to engage students where they are. If a religious educator starts the conversation by asking a student about what they love about the religious tradition from their upbringing, it might feel to the student as if the religious educator was trying to manipulate them, as the religious educator is a representative of authority they are seeking to resist. By allowing space for there to be critique first, there is the possibility to build trust and understanding that it is not only ok to question, doubt and vent but encouraged and supported.

5.3.2 Conserve

I suggest the second task of this narrative framework is to *conserve*; to focus on conservation of the deepest insights of the tradition. Bednarwoski observed that many Roman Catholic women, articulated that their religious community was an essential part of their identity, "however flawed they experienced its teachings in regard to women."[311] One woman she interviewed explained why she remained Catholic, "Because it's in my bones. Where would I go? Because I'm Catholic. It's who I am. Because I love the saints. I love ritual. Because all my formation was in this tradition. It's like asking, why do I remain Irish? Even if I didn't go to church, it's not what it's about. It's in my thinking; it's in my vocabulary. It's who I am."[312] On further reflection with Catholic women, Bednarowski surfaces similar stories that point to their

[311] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 34.
[312] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 34-35.

love of specific memories of people and events or rituals, and not specific doctrine or theological convictions.

As discussed in Chapter Three, within Cahill's articulation of the feminist ethics framework, a conserving movement is focused on appreciation, to reflect on how wisdom from the past gives life today, in one's personal experiences and in the context of the community.[313] It also allows a connection to realize that the Church is not a static institution, but is contextualized in people, places, traditions and experiences. I often found that students, when prompted, loved to share what they cherish about their faith by sharing experiences about their communities and families growing up. These memories often included relationships, transformational moments, and value-centered lessons they learned. Exploring a question of conservation is one where students begin to examine how positive memories and appreciation of the deep insights within the tradition reflect their core values and commitments.

While exploring and lifting up these core values they are hearing through the student's story moments, the religious educator has an opportunity to also empower students to see how their values may be in line with these deep insights of the tradition and create opportunities to engage with the original texts and sources from which these insights come. It is an opportunity for theological reflection, as well as helping students connect the dots as to why these experiences were meaningful for them. This task encourages not only personal exploration but also theological reflection.

As students move from critique to conserve, it can allow students permission to begin to name and understand the paradox of belonging. Here I refer back to Kaya Oakes' description of her own nuanced "love story" with the Catholic faith.[314] It is worth repeating her expression that

[313] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.
[314] Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 187.

as much as she struggles with many aspects and actions within the institutional Church she concludes that ultimately, "what being Catholic has given me is a sense of love and compassion for the people around me."[315] Religious educators can help young adult women express their own nuanced "love stories." One of the things that can come from sharing love stories is recognizing that members of a group can love very different things. This can contribute to their understanding of the diversity within the Church.

5.3.3 Transform

I suggest that the third task of my narrative framework is to *transform.* Bednarwoski uses the term innovate to describe the third task of *cultivated ambivalence*.[316] I intentionally use the concept of transform instead of innovation. The third task is not just about innovating an institution or even one's own religious imagination but should ultimately be about continual transformation and constant renewal of a living tradition. Lisa Cahill describes the third hermeneutic of a discerning feminist ethics as praxis. She frames the question as, "how can our traditions be embodied in just relationships now?"[317] The Church is not only over there in Rome, or even down the street at the local parish, but also being lived out in how students participate, engage, and act in the context of their community; it is about praxis.

This task of transformation is both personal and communal. Focusing on transformation is crucial in encouraging and inviting young adults to not just observe but to take responsibility for *being* Church by how *they* live, act and participate. It allows them to expand their religious imagination to reveal how their own lived experience *is* part of the embodied church. While there is a need for collective action for institutional structural change, mining narratives both personal

[315] Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 187.
[316] Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women,* 20.
[317] Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions," 28.

and of others can help young adults comprehend that transforming the Church also happens through *praxis* -- everyday lived actions, relationships, and experiences. This task of transformation helps move the conversation to an invitation to participate in the change one wants to see by also helping young adults realize their own spiritual authority and place within the People of God. It affirms women's experiences of being Church and their contributions of continuing to live into realizing the Church as a sacrament in which everybody's presence is not only celebrated but honored and acknowledged. Ultimately, it provides a pathway for prophetic participation, and it provides a way for young women's stories, experiences, and actions to help continue to transform the pilgrim Church.

Having identified the three aspects of the pedagogical movements, I now lay them out in a narrative framework.

5.4 The Framework

In this final section I introduce my narrative pedagogical framework. There are three steps to this framework: Story dwelling, storytelling, and story movement. The first step looks at stories of others, for models of ambivalent belonging. The second step is to look at one's own story. The third step is to decide on how this experience is moving one forward in their faith. Within each of these steps, we are attending to the three tasks of cultivated ambivalence: critique, conserve and transform.

5.4.1 Step One: Story Dwelling

The first step of this framework offers reflection material for students to engage with another's experience of cultivated ambivalence. This intentional move to begin with another's story follows Evelyn Parker's methodology as discussed in Chapter Four.[318] The purpose of this

[318] Parker, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls,* 172.

process of reflecting on another's experiences is to offer a model to reflect upon. Beginning with another's story creates the possibility for students to develop and expand a critical consciousness. It opens a way for young adults to see the complexity and diversity within the Church through the eyes of another. It begins to help break apart the perception that the Church is monolithic, an unmoving institution or a block of unified thought and beliefs. It is hard sometimes for young people to get past the critique, especially if they are in a developmental space where they are questioning authority. Also, for those who are afraid of critique, and unquestioning of authority, this process demonstrates how people can both question and remain faithful. Entering into another's narrative provides a pathway for how to hold that critique without allowing it to completely define one's entire experience of Church.

In order for this framework to be useful, the religious educator must contextualize and be responsive to the student's experiences. A narrative that works for one student is not going to work for all students. I encourage religious educators to create a library of these types of narratives. The religious educator has a great opportunity to become a curator of stories of a contemporary communion of saints, helping expand the cloud of witnesses to support students in their spiritual growth. It is also crucial to pay attention and have resources for narratives that have explicit intersectional experiences when working with students. I also challenge the religious educator to look beyond books and ancient texts to find examples to share. Blogs, popular media, podcasts, and news stories can also provide great examples to share.[319] Another wonderful resource is asking the student about people they may know personally that they

[319] Websites: *Catholic Women Preach* located at https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org; Olga Segura's Website located at: https://olgamsegura.com; Podcasts: Anne McNamee-Keels and Stephanie Chavara *Lapsed-Podcast* located at: https://www.audible.com/pd/Podcast/B08K56NR6Z; Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center's *Justice Rising Podcast* located at: https://ipjc.org/justice-rising-podcast/; *The Good Girls Podcast:* https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-good-girls-podcast/id1486082796; *A Nun's Life* located at: https://anunslife.org.

admire in their faith journey. Inviting the student to reach out to someone they admire to ask about their faith journey can be very powerful and can create the possibility for a stronger mentoring relationship.

Throughout the dissertation I have offered examples of narratives, memoirs and historical accounts of women who embody cultivated ambivalence. Familiarity with Catholic feminist traditions and suggested memoirs and essays, as seen in Chapter Three, can provide role models and faith companions for young women struggling with gender inequality in the Church. Memoirs or historical biographical accounts of Catholic feminists, Mujeristas, womanists can offer pathways and examples for *how* to participate when one feels marginalized or unseen in the institutional structures of the Church. In this dissertation I have shared and suggested tradition-based (communion of saints), contemporary memoirs (*Catholic Women Speak*, *Radical Reinvention, From the Pews in the Back*, etc.) and examples within Lisa Cahill's categorization of four Catholic feminist traditions to provide role models for young women, who may be interested in which way they see their own lived experiences and traditions reflected. The sources I have used are a limited collection, and only a suggested starting place. It is for the religious educator, who knows their students best, to find the most applicable stories to share. What is encouraging is that these stories are probably already on campus bookshelves, or in the resources both written and oral, that religious educators already use --- I am simply offering a pedagogical framework to analyze and help students synthesize these resources.

Story dwelling can provide intentional content to analyze the way women negotiate authority, claim leadership, and reconfigure identity within their tradition. It can affirm that cultivated ambivalence is a valid faith stance and its prophetic nature can be illustrated by diverse women of faith. I suggest offering one or two "memoirs" or accounts to read or listen to

and then have a chance to reflect on the following questions. The first step invites students to reflect on and witness others' nuanced faith stories. This provides an opportunity for the learning goals, as described in section 5.3, to be met for them to comprehend that "the Church" is not one static, monolithic institution by investigating examples of women who have challenged and been challenged by the church yet have remained faithful to and prophetic within the Church.[320] As they witness how others navigate ambivalent belonging, they can begin to see pathways for how it can be possible for them as well.

Reflection questions:

After taking time with another's narrative, reflection needs to be prompted by good questions. The following are examples of good questions that can help parse out the three movements of cultivated ambivalence within the person's story: critique, conserve and transform.

1) **Critique:** What did _____ (Name of author/speaker) find challenging about the Catholic Church? In what ways did they creatively participate while having an awareness of the frustrations and limitations the tradition posed to them?
2) **Conserve**: What is it that _____seemed to cherish about Catholicism? What Catholic tradition(s) did _____ name, uphold, and follow in her faith life?
3) **Transform:** What were _____hopes for how the Church can better reflect the liberative nature of Christ? How did _____ embody these hopes through action?
4) **Further suggested questions:** Can you relate to this _____'s journey? What gives *you* hope about _____'s story? Does anything frustrate *you* about _____'s story?

[320] While my context is working with Catholic young women, I also would hope this framework and content could be useful in different ministry settings and different denominations.

It is necessary to help students see how the person in the narrative was challenged by parts of the tradition, and upheld other parts, modeling a critical faith and ability to hold paradox. It is the role of the religious educator to begin to help connect the dots for the students and help them see the often nuanced and paradoxical space that those within the story examples inhabit. As students begin to reflect on these narratives of others, they can possibly find mentors and models of a cultivated ambivalence that resonates with them.

5.4.2 Step Two: Storytelling

The second step is a chance for individuals to share their own experiences. I see this step as useful and adaptable for religious educators whether they are working with individuals or groups. As discussed in Chapter Four, exploring one's own story is crucial for development as one is invited to critically reflect on oneself as an active and moral agent in their story. As asserted in Chapter Four, narrative practice can help young adults in exploring their own internal authority, voice, and agency. Storytelling can aid students in coming to understand one's sense of self, and one's own value system. This work can vary in challenge depending on where students are at developmentally. Some may identify so closely with their religious identity that they don't see themselves as having it. This is where it is helpful that religious educators are familiar with developmental theories to be able to recognize what is happening for students and support them in their growth no matter where they are.

The following suggested reflection questions, based on the three-tasks of cultivating ambivalence, are intended to help the student tell their stories, process their own experiences and help them better realize their ability to hold all in a tension of loving critique.

Reflection Questions:

1) **Critique:** What do you find challenging about the Catholic Church? Do these challenges frustrate and limit your involvement in the community?
2) **Conserve**: What is it that you love/cherish about Catholicism? Do you have any fond memories of growing up Catholic? Can you share a memory that reveals something about you and what you love?
3) **Transform:** What are your hopes for how the Church can more reflect the liberative nature of Christ?

When students share these answers, it is important to not immediately engage their answers with solutions. The best approach is through validation and curiosity. For example, if a student shares that she hates how the Church is terrible to the LGBTQIA community, an appropriate response might be, just to invite them to share more about that. The religious educator must be careful not to jump too quickly to providing resources or "solution driven" responses. There is not a specific timeline for how long one needs to share their challenges, it may be over several conversations, or several years and the religious educator should commit to continuing to accompany them, providing resources and support as appropriate. The point is not to challenge the student's experiences or beliefs but instead to help them in this process of expanding their understanding of the Church and their place within it. It is about introducing a wider, more nuanced version of the Church's reality than the student's reality of what they define as the Church, which is perhaps colored by certain Church teachings, doctrine, or specific experiences. It is also about continuing to provide images and understanding of the pilgrim Church, that is broken *and* holy, changing *and* constant.

While students may already be exhibiting the ability and desire to engage in the tasks of critique, conserve and transform, the religious educator's role is to mirror back what they are hearing and affirm that it is an important and normal negotiation of belonging. When one can begin to share both their struggles and connections with the Church, then they can begin to see that ambivalence more easily is at the heart of many of their experiences and others' as well. It is the religious educator's role to encourage and support students in this so that they see this ambivalence as a fruitful and healthy tension.

5.4.3 Step Three: Story Movement

This third step, story movement, is crucial in supporting faith development and growth of students. The main question to ask in this movement is basically, so where do you want your faith story to go next? It is about participation. Religious educators can help move students in the direction of decision-making. It is not about a decision to commit to staying Catholic or to reconcile their faith identity and feeling okay with what they perceive to be injustices within the institution. Instead, it is about intentionally and actively deciding how to participate in one's faith community. Perhaps it is simply identifying a next step. It is not always about an individual response in this movement either. If a religious educator is working with a small group, there is a possibility that this movement can be a collective reflection and response. The following are some suggested questions that again follow the three-tasks of critique, conserve and transform.

Reflection Questions:

1) **Critique:** How have our conversations shaped, challenged, or strengthened your understanding of what the Church is and who the Church is?
2) **Conserve**: What spiritual practices help you connect to God and how can you commit to more intentionally making those a part of your life? Are there mentors or role models

from our conversations that you would like to reach out to personally, or are curious to learn more about?

3) **Transform:** Drawing from your own personal reflection on your hopes for how the Church can more reflect the liberative nature of Christ, how can you embody these hopes through actions right now?

Naming action steps within this movement is crucial in keeping students involved and not stagnant in their faith maturation and development. Some examples of action steps I witnessed among my students: Writing a letter to a local Bishop, committing to meeting with a spiritual director on a regular basis, starting a Catholic LGBTQIA group on campus, committing to becoming a lector at Mass, applying to seminary, exploring different church communities. The hope is that this process instills agency so that they feel compelled and encouraged to engage.

While I do think there is wisdom in the linear approach to the three steps of story dwelling, storytelling and story movement as suggested above, they also don't necessarily have to happen in a linear way. They also do not necessarily happen over the course of one or even a few conversations. The three steps may be fluid in conversation, or may take months to unpack, or even perhaps several years of building a trusting relationship with a student as they progress through their four years on campus. The most important crux of the method is the integration. The pedagogy offers inroads and categories of questions to support students to develop a more critical faith, helping them feel more confident in their own spiritual authority and place of belonging within the context of the pilgrim Church.

It is also critical that the religious educator be aware of their own biases and hopes and disassociate them from the journey and development of particular students. The action steps with the story-movement are for the student to discern, and the outcome may not be what the religious

educator had hoped. Sometimes it may be best for a student to walk away and intentionally disaffiliate from Catholicism, and if this is the case, a religious educator should be willing and supportive to provide resources for the student to search for different faith communities, or even be supportive of the student's choice not to engage with any tradition. This should not be seen as a failure, but again as a supportive accompaniment in the faith development of the student, who is intentionally making an informed decision.

5.4.4 Examples of the Framework in Contexts of Hearth, Table, Commons

As a means of finishing up this section I share illustrations from my own work, which serve as examples of this framework in the contexts of *hearth, table,* and *commons.*

5.4.4.1 Hearth

Hearth spaces invite a vulnerability and intimacy that allows for pause and reflection. *Hearth-sized conversations* explore life's bigger questions of purpose, meaning and connection with trusted others without fear of judgment or retribution. There is a necessity for these intimate spaces to unpack the internal struggles with care and intention with students who are struggling with belonging, and often taking issue with church teachings because of its direct impact on their lives. Using narrative pedagogy in these spaces, does not mean there needs to be three set meeting times where you meet with a student to go through a formula or the specific movements in a linear way. The point is that narrative pedagogy can be a tool for the religious educator to provide resources and conversation points to help the student navigate their sense of belonging and discernment.

I offer an example of how I used narrative pedagogy within the context of ongoing *hearth-sized conversations* with a student. Rose came to me at the beginning of her senior year. She had been involved in the Catholic community on campus for all four years and in leadership.

Rose, who was queer identified, was struggling with how she perceived the Church as an unwelcoming place for her and the LGBTQIA community. Through the course of several conversations that took place during a walk around campus, a meal together, and sitting together in my office over several cups of tea, I engaged her in the narrative framework of critique, conserve, transform for guiding our conversations. I shared with her about Gail, a prominent church justice advocate in the local community, and invited the student to look at Gail's website. We reflected together on Gail's journey and her ambivalent, both/and, approach to her Catholic faith. Rose then shared that Gail's story resonated with her own love for the Catholic rituals, her home parish, and Jesus' commitment to justice and for Catholic social teaching. She shared her frustration with the patriarchal structure, exclusion of women from leadership, and specific stories of the denial of Eucharist to out LGTBQIA individuals.

After several meetings, I asked Rose if there was something she thought she could do about it. "Well…" she thought, "I could start a Catholic LBGTQIA group." She planned that after Mass, she would stand up and share that she was starting the group and give her email address to anyone who wanted to join. Throughout the school year, each Sunday during announcements after Mass, she would stand up and invite people. A group was established, and it created a nurturing and supportive environment for students involved. While this was not going to change the Church's official teachings, it was changing how Church was lived out on the campus, and within the weekly rhythm of worship and praxis of the campus community.

This example of Rose reflects the power of critique, conserve, and transform on an individual level and a communal level. The narrative process invited Rose to reflect on her own experiences, it supported her growth and confidence in her spiritual authority, and ultimately called her to prophetic participation. Through praxis, Rose, and others that joined her, were

creating the Church they wanted and felt seen in. The change I saw in Rose as a result of this process was a comfort with her own nuanced belonging, exhibiting a more critical faith, that was not only comfortable with paradox, but exhibited a willingness to hold that space for others. All of which indicate a maturity towards Kegan's fourth-order. As she matured, she was becoming a leader and model for other students as well.

5.4.4.2 Table

Over food, there is opportunity to engage in conversation that is nourishing while also creating a container for nourishing intentional discourse and reflection. Around a shared table, space is created for purposeful engagement with others. The context of the table as a space of mentoring communities is not just about bringing people together to eat and socialize but has a focused conversation topic for the group to chew on together. The narrative pedagogy can work in this context, as a specific approach and intentional flow to the conversations.

I offer an example of narrative pedagogy might be used in a *table* context, looking to a lunch program my colleague facilitated. While this colleague did not use the specific pedagogy, I argue that the pedagogy would enhance the program, and provide an intentional tool for student development. Chaplain Susan had a popular tradition of every Monday having a lunch time discussion drop-in table in a cafeteria on campus. The series was called "Faith and Feminism." Even the title of the lunches was intentional. In the name itself implied a both/and approach that named for many who would attend the seeming paradox and tension of being a person of faith and a feminist. There was no sign up or RSVP, simply a consistent space where Susan would be each week, prepared with a topic, saint's story, or story about a current day "faith-filled feminist." The chaplain was skilled at making the students feel comfortable asking anything they wanted and would always encourage their curiosity and engage their doubts. The conversations

would ultimately then go towards personal reflection. I would hear from students that this was one of the more meaningful groups they were a part of during their college experience. It gave them a space to bring their questions in a nonjudgmental and casual setting.

Table spaces like the series "Faith and Feminism" would be an ideal setting for my narrative pedagogy to work. Susan was already engaging the students in the tasks and movements of the pedagogy. She would begin with sharing diverse stories of potential mentors and role models, and then invited personal reflection and shared conversation. There can be a great benefit for having this narrative pedagogy used in the context of a small group process over a shared meal, like the "Faith and Feminism" lunch, so that young women have peer companions for conversations. The recipe is a small group meeting around food, at a consistent time, concerning a relevant topic, and valued sources. Mealtime discussions allow the space to explore stories together and grow in their faith development over a shared meal.

The narrative pedagogy could help enhance a program like "Faith and Feminism" by engaging students in the third step of story-movement. This third-step makes the outcome of the program not just about social support and even beyond individual formation. Instead, the greater goal is to involve students in co-creating spiritual communities that inspire hope. It is within a community that one can discern values and commitments and be held accountable to act on them. There is also great potential as the group bonds, for shared ideas to arise about how they may engage in the third step of story-movement together. Is there a decision the group can take together, to be the Church they want to see? While the religious educator should not push this, there is the potential to continue to point out and guide the conversation so that the underlying ecclesiology of a pilgrim Church, realized by the People of God, is made manifest in the actions of the group.

5.4.4.3 Commons

The *commons* as context, alludes to communal engagement for the sake of the common good. The type of discourse possible is practicing how to be an engaged and thoughtful citizen within a diverse community. Utilizing the narrative pedagogy in the *commons'* context can provide viable mentors and role models for students that are physically present in the community. Religious educators have immense opportunity to discern how communal gathering times are spaces to celebrate the diversity and breadth of the Catholic tradition. Religious educators intentionally can use the *commons* space to lift up the diversity within the community and help model for students an ecclesiology that celebrates unity in diversity.

Inviting speakers who are professors, leaders in local church communities, or graduate students at a nearby theology school or seminary to partake in public conversations is a great way in which to utilize the narrative framework in a *commons* space. It can create opportunities for engagement on challenging ethical and faith topics such as the sanctity of life, sexuality and war. Sharing with the speakers ahead of time the framework of *critique, conserve and transform* helps presenters shape their own reflections and remarks. After the public discourse, it is crucial that there is also time for personal reflection and/or small group sharing for students to synthesize what they learned and for them to engage in the steps of *critique, conserve, and transform*. The goal is to invite students to experience more of the breadth and diversity within Catholicism from the speakers, the content, and from one another. It is then, often over a shared meal, after the public discourse, that students can then reflect on their experiences of what they witnessed, what stretched them, what they resonated with, and what actions in their own life did the conversation inspire them to take. Students were more willing to linger and reflect when food of course was present, and they were given specific questions to respond to. This highlights that

hearth, table, commons are not always separate but are often intertwined within different certain types of programming.

This section has provided several examples of how the narrative framework has been and could be utilized within conceptual spaces of *hearth, table,* and *commons*. I suggest that the framework of narrative pedagogy within individual conversations, small group mealtime gatherings, and community forums, allows a process for growth and faith development to occur. The framework is flexible enough that religious educators can craft and mold it to what works best for their students. The hope is that it provides a tool to be used in diverse mentoring settings for engaging with students on their journeys and supporting them as they question, discern, and grow.

5.5 Conclusion: Cultivating Prophetic Ambivalence

In this chapter I have suggested that a narrative pedagogical framework, based on the three tasks of *critique, conserve,* and *transform*, can help young adult women embrace the paradoxes of their faith, to be critical believers and prophetic participants in their Church. I have suggested that this narrative pedagogy can serve as a discernment tool for young adult women to examine and articulate ambivalent and nuanced belonging within the constructs of a Catholic identity. Religious educators have an opportunity to introduce the concept of ambivalence as a virtue through this pedagogical tool so that young women may discern a prophetic call to *critique, conserve and transform.* The goal of this approach is to invite young adult women to embrace a faith that acknowledges the paradoxes of their tradition and one in which they recognize their own spiritual authority, agency, and responsibility to their faith community. It is not only about transformation of the individual, but how the individual is invited into

participation within a community, and by their presence and participation, transforms that community as an active member of the pilgrim Church.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore how religious educators can support the faith development of young adult Catholic women. I have focused specifically on the experiences of young adult Catholic women, coming from my context of working as a Catholic Chaplain at a women's college. I have explored the lived experience of many Catholic women who are negotiating diverse ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. I have suggested that this negotiation of *ambivalent belonging* should be articulated, validated and taken seriously as a faith experience to be cultivated. I have argued that the experience of *ambivalent belonging* can serve as an access point for belonging, faith development, and prophetic participation.

Ambivalent belonging can articulate a faith experience that leaves room for doubt and thoughtful, well-informed critique, while acknowledging cherished Catholic traditions and rituals that bring meaning to life. I have argued that the three tasks of *critique, conserve* and *transform* can cultivate nuanced belonging and welcome creative participation. Furthermore, I suggested that a narrative pedagogy based on these three tasks could serve as a useful pedagogical tool for religious educators to work with students. The epistemic aim is for college students to begin to develop a mature faith that acknowledges the paradoxes of their tradition while also recognizing their own spiritual authority and agency to enact change and work towards transformation in the institutional Church.

I began in Chapter One, by describing the landscape of research on religious belief and belonging with a specific focus on young adults and Catholics in the United States. I argued that the current phenomenon of religious disaffiliation is not a crisis, but an opportunity to creatively respond to the contemporary spiritual needs of young adults in the United States.

In Chapter Two, I grounded the conversation in articulating that ambivalence flows from Catholic tradition. The ambivalent nature of Church as bounded openness, slow changing and hopeful, is enacted in synodal process of journeying together as the people of God. This ecclesiology is rooted in concept of the pilgrim Church, articulated in the vision and writings of Vatican II, that is open to how the Spirit is working through all the faithful, revealing God's mission in the world.

In Chapter Three, I engaged the reality that while many women acknowledge gender inequality in the Catholic Church, they are negotiating ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. I illustrate that an experience of ambivalence often manifests from the dialectical nature of this negotiation. The chapter began with an overview of the contributions of the Catholic feminist movement articulating and creating space for women to negotiate and define their own Church membership. Then, drawing from the work of Mary Bednarowski, I argued that ambivalence, cultivated as a virtue, serves as a prophetic posture from which to participate in transforming the Church. Finally, I offered examples and opportunities to engage stories of young Catholic women who embody *ambivalent belonging*.

In Chapter Four, I argued that the role of religious educators is to assist and accompany individuals on their paths towards a mature faith that can hold paradox. The aim is for young women to develop an internal process of meaning making that is capable of navigating the complexity of both church and world. Religious educators can help begin to shift the narrative for young adult women away from a false binary choice of leaving or staying, to one where there is another option of nuanced belonging. Religious educators can do so by introducing role models, many named in Chapter Three, and mentors that model the lived experience of cultivated ambivalence. These models can provide affirmation that one can struggle and disagree

and still belong and provide bridging opportunities for students to move towards a meaning making capacity able to hold paradox. I proposed that narrative pedagogy can be a way to invite people into listening to the stories of others and sharing their own stories, to discern how they are called into participation.

In the final chapter, Chapter Five, I suggested a narrative pedagogy, based on the prophetic call to *critique, conserve* and *transform*. This narrative pedagogy provides a praxis-based tool, that empowers students to engage in their faith narratives, inviting them to participate and feel affirmed in the larger dynamic, diverse, pilgrim Church. I shared examples of three mentoring environment contexts, hearth, table and commons, where this pedagogy could be used in higher education settings. The hope is that affirming ambivalent belonging is not solely to validate one's experience but to encourage prophetic participation in the pilgrim Church.

I am hopeful that this dissertation will serve as a launching pad for future research and writing projects. Questions that I have now offer exciting possibilities of what I hope to work on next: What could it look like to further explore and further articulate the ambivalent nature of the pilgrim Church? What would it look like to assess the impact of this narrative pedagogy in small groups in chaplaincy settings? What would it look like to create a handbook and curriculum to share with religious educators based on this narrative pedagogy? What would it look like to share the concept of ambivalent belonging more widely in sociology of religion circles so that it may help inform data collection and terminology? What would it look like to compile a robust multi-media library of stories within the communion of saints that embody *ambivalent belonging*?

There is ample opportunity for research and writing building from the fruits of this dissertation. The concept of *ambivalent belonging* and the experiences of many who embody it hold much wisdom for the Church. In Chapter Three, I shared Kaya Oakes description of faith as

a nuanced love story. Religious educators have an opportunity to help young adult women express their own nuanced "love stories." *Ambivalent belonging* can articulate a faith experience associated with these nuanced love stories. Sharing personal stories and reflecting on the narratives of the nuanced love stories of saints through the ages and contemporary Catholic women such as Oakes' can lead to sacred insights and avenues for belonging *and* participation in the Church. These nuanced loved stories must be cultivated, celebrated, and proclaimed, as prophetic manifestations of the lived experiences of the body of Christ.

I came to this conversation as a religious educator in higher education wondering how best to help students discern belonging and mature in their faith development. I think often about the young women whose experiences I have shared throughout this dissertation. The beauty and challenge of the work of college ministry is that you are invited into moments of someone's story but then they move on and often you do not know what happens. There are times that students come back for reunions, or they write updates through Christmas cards and emails. But not always. And in a way this is also a gift. Religious educators are invited into acute, sacred moments of students' lives as they wrestle with big questions of who they are in the world and how they want to be in the world. When students are with us, even briefly, we may provide opportunities for them to experience belonging and prophetic participation, even as that invites ambivalence.

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