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Mutual Flourishing? Women Priests and Symbolic Violence in the Church of England

Abstract

This article explores the experiences of women priests in the Church of England through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. Comparing acts of symbolic violence perpetrated against women in the priesthood with the categories of domestic abuse set out in the Duluth Wheel of Power model, I highlight how institutional discourses in the Church and relational interactions can hold hidden abuses based on how gender is constructed at the symbolic level. My intention is to show that the Church of England's split structure, known as the two integrities, is a manifestation of religious discourse that frames women as differently human and that this fundamental view of gender perpetuates masculine domination and violence against women, often in unseen ways. My argument concludes with a call to better understand the nature of gendered symbolic violence and how religious institutions provide justification for and legitimisation of such violence.

Keywords: Symbolic violence, women priests, Church of England, mutual flourishing, domestic violence, Duluth Wheel.

Introduction

> …masculine domination, and the way it is imposed and suffered, [is] the prime example of this paradoxical submission, an effect of what I call symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), or even feeling. (Bourdieu 1998, 1-2).

Male violence against women is widely acknowledged as a global issue that occurs across societies, social class, and belief systems (McQuigg 2018). bell hooks (2004) maintains that despite the feminist work to expose the levels and frequency of such violence, particularly in the domestic sphere, its prevalence has not declined and in some contexts its intensity has increased. There is, however, debate amongst practitioners in the UK and the US about whether domestic violence is a form of *gendered* violence (see Hamner and Itzin 2000). This dispute suggests a disagreement about whether there are fundamental connections between the individual male who perpetrates violence against a woman and the social and cultural discourses that construct gender, determining who has access to power over whom. I take the position that domestic violence should not be treated as gender-neutral.[1] I argue, therefore, there is an imperative to understand more deeply and fully the reasons why women experience violence in their relationships with men. Moreover, I agree with Jalna Hanmer (Hanmer and Itzin 2000, 21) that treating these occurrences as individual forms of deviance obfuscates social and structural origins.

Within the landscape of literature on domestic violence, terminology can be confusing and often the words 'violence' and 'abuse' appear interchangeably. In this discussion, drawing on definitions provided by Hanmer and Itzin (2000), I use the term 'violent' to mean all forms of gendered abuse (emotional, psychological, coercion and control, and so on). My reasoning is that we need to widen our understanding of what constitutes violence beyond the physical blow, as Judith Butler suggests (2020, 2), to challenge drifts towards normalisation of non-physical but harmful encounters between men and women. I bring to the fore a form of gendered violence that appears infrequently in the literature on violence

[1] See Beavan et al 2021, for a discussion on how domestic violence is largely perpetrated by males and reproduces gender inequalities

against women, but which is likely to pervade many social and relational interactions between men and women, particularly in religious settings: symbolic violence. Encompassing the non-physical act in our definition of violence is at the heart of symbolic violence; the use of the term 'violence' unmasks the harm to personhood whether physical, emotional, or spiritual.

My inquiry asks a deeper question about how religion – specifically Christianity – as an institutional form and its discourses, provides the symbolic basis on which gender is constructed in ways that allow male access to power over women. I argue that we need to orientate the discussion about male violence against women back to the foundations of such gender construction and be wary of individualistic explanations for male privilege being used violently. This requires us to scrutinise the Christian discourses that construct gender – not just in terms of gendered characteristics but going deeper into how women and men are conceived as differently human within the context of the symbolic divine, instilling the sense of a natural or divinely appointed gendered order. The idea that gendered characteristics and roles become naturalised is taken up by bell hooks (2004); patriarchy requires the reproduction of fixed ideas about how men and women should relate, and sometimes these naturalised ideas are violently imposed and reproduced. Indeed, for hooks (1994) the Christian church is one of the institutions that reinforces gender constructions and ultimately encourages male access to power and therefore gendered violence (though she is nuanced, arguing male violence is a product of the harms inflicted on men by patriarchy). I intend to explore hooks' claim in more detail using the Church of England as an exemplar. I ask the question, does the institution, through its use of symbols, theology, and disciplinary discourses, lay the foundations for gendered violence?

What is symbolic violence?

The concept of symbolic violence as an integral part of domestic violence is finding its way into research literature. Magdalena Grzyb (2016), for example, argues that symbolic violence against women is perpetrated through familiar social and cultural processes – highlighting religion in particular – as part of a lead up to physical, and sometimes fatal, violence. Building on this discussion by bringing the notion of symbolic violence into the study of religion is useful in tracing foundational beliefs that contribute to gendered violence. Researchers have already examined specific gendered conditions associated with the Church of England's priesthood using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital (see for example Page 2017). My intention here is to take the discussion further by exploring Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to argue that internalised religious discourses that establish divinely appointed complementary gender characteristics, arranged hierarchically, produce conditions in which gendered violence can occur in hidden ways. The notion of symbolic violence is formulated by Bourdieu (1998) in his discussion about masculine dominance, whereby he explores the connections between language, symbols, and signs used by dominant groups to oppress subjugated groups, making it clear that violence against women also occurs at a symbolic level. Put simply, at the symbolic level, interactions that rob women of subjectivity and agency – discursively or materially – is symbolic violence. This type of violence, Bourdieu emphasises, is as real as physical violence given its harmful impact and is perpetrated by individual agents and by institutions including the Church (1998, 34). The importance of viewing male violence as rooted in religious foundations is that, as Bourdieu implies, constructions of gender coming out of symbol systems – or in his words 'cultural arbitrariness' (1998, 2) – become naturalised, generating conditions in which gendered violence in all its forms can thrive. Symbolic violence, though,

is that which is harmful but wrapped in the velvet glove, to borrow from Catherine McKinnon's (1997) imagery, allowing it to be hidden and unacknowledged. The above quote from Bourdieu suggests symbolic violence is disguised within cordial communication and interaction. In other words, acts of domination take place within everyday language and in the relational, often appearing as kindness and warmth, in interactions that are gentle, supportive, and collegiate. This is the key to understanding symbolic violence in Bourdieu's framework; it occurs in relationships in profoundly hidden ways, using feelings such as shame and guilt as disciplinary tools. Whilst these interactions are between individual agents, Bourdieu emphasises that symbolic violence ultimately derives its potency from the structural arrangements that create dispositions. Our task is, therefore, to reveal the relationship between structural forces and individual beliefs in the perpetration of symbolic violence.

Importantly for the following discussion, Bourdieu also recognises that rituals, rites, and mystical boundaries are part of the support system for masculine domination, and which are resources for symbolic violence. I interpret this as a call to understand how the Christian symbol system perpetuates symbolic violence and to ask whether it provides fertile ground for more general masculine (and violent) domination. Drawing on Bourdieu's discussion, my research suggests that ordained women in the Church of England experience high levels of symbolic violence because they are female and perceived and constructed as differently human to men and therefore differently priested.

Gendered Violence and the Christian Church

The relationship between religious discourse and domestic violence is increasingly recognised as an important research area (Wendt 2008). If we use domestic violence as a

bellwether for assessing the relationship between Christianity and gendered violence there is a complex picture emerging within academic literature. Some research suggests there is good support offered to victims provided by churches and Christian organisations (Levitt and Kimberley 2006; Sevcik et al 2015; Zust et al 2018); domestic violence is framed as a social ill that church communities and Christian faith can help to alleviate. Other research indicates a 'holy hush' around violence within Christian families (Nason-Clark 2004; Houston-Kolnik et al 2019) suggesting a reluctance in faith communities to acknowledge the violence perpetrated by Christian men. Christian beliefs are sometimes closely connected to acts of violence in the domestic lives of believers (Nash and Hesterberg 2009; Koch and Ramirez 2010), whereby literal interpretations of doctrines that allow male dominance over the family are used to justify abusive and violent treatment of women. Understanding the impact of discourses is key; analysis of certain Christian messages that encourage feminine sacrifice, for example, reveals the ways women are more vulnerable to harm where certain submissive behaviours are made pious (McIntosh 2007), and such exploration begins to shift the focus on to the hidden harms that come to light when we see them as symbolically violent.

The priesthood of the Church of England, now made up of men and women, provides a magnified view of how gender is constructed at the symbolic level. The premise of my argument is that attempts to preserve certain beliefs about gender in relation to the divine lead to acts of symbolic violence against women priests, who disrupt these beliefs. Having conducted 26 interviews with women priests in the Church of England, I began to wonder whether there are parallels between their stories of negotiating their belonging in the Church and the experiences of women subjected to violence in a domestic setting. I began to wonder, in fact, whether women priests are locked into an abusive relationship with the

Church. In my work as a domestic violence practitioner, I encountered forms of abuse that deny women their subjectivity and autonomy, perpetrated through strategies that humiliate, silence, isolate and control – the more obvious forms of masculine domination. As an academic researcher exploring the relationship between gender and religion, I have encountered versions of this abuse occurring as symbolic violence, which also undermine female subjectivity and autonomy, within the context of the priesthood. Using the Duluth Wheel of Power (see Pence and McDonnell 2000), a model used to identify and categorise domestic abuse, I highlight some of these parallels and suggest that, although the institution of the Church and the domestic sphere are different contexts, the symbolic violence perpetrated against women comes from the same symbolic wellspring.

The Duluth Wheel of Power

The Duluth Wheel of Power and Control, named as such because it was developed in Duluth, Minnesota (see Pence and McDonnell 1984; 2000), is a commonly used model for domestic abuse practitioners which identifies categories of behaviours that constitute a violent relationship. Its feminist underpinnings are, for some, a reason to abandon its use, particularly where there are misgivings about treating domestic violence as a gendered issue (Dutton and Corvo 2006). My position is that it is the feminist ethos behind the model that makes it a powerful tool for discussion, intervention, and understanding. The Duluth Wheel image arranges sets of behaviours as 'spokes' around a hub labelled 'power and control'. There are various iterations of the model tailored to different communities and different types of relationships, though it was originally conceived as a response to male violence (Pence and McDonnell 2000). Intimidation, economic abuse, emotional abuse, isolation, threats, minimisation strategies, and physical and sexual violence, and – important

for this discussion – the leveraging of male privilege are categories arranged within the Wheel to define a violent relationship. Moreover, the Duluth model places the person experiencing violence at the centre of discussion at the same time as aiming to identify and generate structural reforms in both responses to, and understanding of, domestic violence.

In a more detailed iteration, the model identifies religion as a structural and institutional agent. There is, therefore, an invitation within the Duluth Wheel to examine how the elements of religion and male privilege are interconnected. The Duluth model is a practitioner's tool that seeks to build multi-agency responses to domestic violence, but I see value in using this model multi-dimensionally to delve more deeply into the dynamics between male power, religious discourse, and the framing of women in pejorative difference. This is also an opportunity to develop the Duluth model as a more theoretical tool by introducing symbolic violence as a 'spoke', underlining the need to see beyond individualised deviance and emphasise what occurs at the symbolic level.

Background to research with women priests

The celebration of 25 years of women's ordination in the Church of England took place in March 2019 (Church of England 2019). There are now significant numbers of women who are priests in the Church and the numbers of women preparing for ordination are reportedly increasing (Church of England 2020). On the surface, this could suggest an equality of opportunity and institutional parity between male and female priests, particularly since women were accepted as bishops in 2014 (Church of England, 2014). The long gap, however, between the vote to allow women's ordination in 1992 and the introduction of women bishops in 2014 indicates a continued anxiety over the status of ordained women. The shock of the introduction of women as priests in the Church energised some

theologians opposed to the move, who began to produce a more thorough explanation of the theology of male priesthood; Jonathan Baker (2004) and Colin Podmore (2015), for example, published commentaries on the reasons why women cannot be bishops derived from arguments against women's priesthood, re-igniting the debate about women's differentness within the Christian symbol system. My conversations with women priests revealed that the campaign to allow women into the episcopate (to become bishops) was a reprise of the earlier campaign for women's ordination; institutional and personal wounds were inflicted as the Church was required, once again, to rehearse arguments about women's difference specifically within the priesthood.

The background to women's presence in the priesthood is characterised by the 'ambivalent invitation' to women priests (Walrond-Skinner 1994, 7); it was 'the frostiest welcome imaginable' (Furlong 1998, 17). For some more recent commentators, this ambivalence is still experienced by women (for example, Percy 2017; Greene 2017). Research on gender in the priesthood has revealed the significant impact of the legacy of the original debate and the continued rejection of women's priesthood in some quarters of the Church. Employment and material disadvantages to women have been highlighted (Walsh 2001; Bagilhole 2002; 2003;2006; Randall 2015) and cultural discriminations have been found to underpin gender stereotyping (Page 2014). Women priests may find themselves the target of sexist attitudes and their public and visible presence within a differentiating structure can make them the focus of abuse and harassment (Robbins and Greene, 2018). An arts-based project recently gave women priests the chance to publicly share the derogatory comments they endure; the installation was entitled 'Eva's Call' and featured phrases such as 'daughter of Satan' and 'your miscarriage is probably a blessing, given your job', arranged in speech bubbles over the now-iconic phrase 'nevertheless she persisted' (Davies, 2018). Such

research indicates the Church of England has not fully embraced women in the priesthood, nor offered them parity within the structure – I will explore this structural issue in more detail shortly. The conversation about the status of women priests needs to shed light on the symbolic violence that comes from both sexist attitudes (which might also be rendered individualistic resistance to social change) and from the Christian symbol system itself which creates, legitimises, and makes pious attitudes to women's difference within the priesthood.

Many of the discriminatory and differentiating experiences highlighted in the research cited above are still part of women priests' lived experience according to the stories shared during my research. Whilst Jones (2004) has previously reported a conciliatory environment (78% of respondents in her research had good relationships with those opposing women's ordination), I examine the basis on which these 'good' relationships are constructed. I suggest there is continued significant differentiation between male and female priests justified and legitimised theologically and doctrinally. Importantly, such gender differentiation is reified at an institutional level and supported by the discourse of 'mutual flourishing' (Cocksworth 2018) of all positions on women's priesthood and the appeal to 'good disagreement' (Groves 2014) where there are irreconcilable differences (I will return to a fuller explanation of these terms shortly). That such language of mutuality and conflict management is being constructed institutionally suggests the place of women in the priesthood is still not secure. Some in the Church use the discourse of 'reception' – the notion that doctrinal change must be accepted by the worldwide Church before it can be considered permanent (Avis 2004) – which keeps women priests at some level in a state of precarity since women's ordination is not accepted by other denominations, most importantly, the Catholic Church. Previous research indicates the Church of England is in permanent crisis over women priests (Thorne 2000) and my research confirms this at an

experiential level, though the debate about gender has receded into the background whilst controversies regarding sexuality and racism in the Church are rightly receiving attention (see France-Williams 2020 for a discussion on institutional racism in the Church). Mutual flourishing and good disagreement, policy language set out by the Church hierarchy to enable the healing of institutional rifts over women in the priesthood, are discourses which are in themselves symbolically violent and produce acts of symbolic violence against women priests and I will elaborate further on their impact.

The structural differentiation of women priests was laid down in the Act of Synod in 1993, which created a split structure in the Church to accommodate male clergy and their congregations who could not (theologically or doctrinally) accept women's ordination (see Furlong 1998). Known as 'the two integrities' this dual structure allows parishes to avoid the ministry of ordained women and to be overseen by bishops who have never ordained a woman. The Church of England continues to ordain male clergy who oppose women's priesthood, maintaining the demand for structural space in which the priesthood is understood as exclusively male. Whilst parishes choosing to officially avoid the ministry of women priests are in a minority – there are 590 or 4.7% of all parishes according to recent Church statistics (Church of England 2020) – they represent a structural endorsement of theologies that exclude women from priesthood. My research suggests that regardless of the numbers of parishes closed to women priests, the existence of this mechanism legitimises the framing of women as differently human. The split in the Church's structure leaves ordained women in liminality, a term derived from Victor Turner's (1969 [2008]) exploration of how ritual allows the passage from one status to another. Since women are only partially accepted as priests structurally in the Church of England their ordination (through a rite that has ontological significance) is only a partial journey; the institution

holds ordained women as ‘threshold people’ (Turner 1969 [2008], 95). It is from this liminality, I propose, that symbolic violence arises.

To understand the mechanics of gendered symbolic violence in the Church, we need to examine how the woman priest is constructed as differently human. The two integrities are a manifestation and perpetuation of difference that is the product of the male formed as the norm, which, as Rosi Braidotti (1997) proposes, makes female difference ‘monstrous’, an analogy she associates with abjection. She writes: ‘the misogyny of discourse is not an irrational exception but rather a tightly constructed system that requires difference as pejoration in order to erect the positivity of the norm’ (64). In other words, for men to be supported as the norm, women must be framed as negative in their difference, and practices that materialise this difference are not accidental or idly conceived. More precisely for the Church, the male priest as the norm is supported by fragmenting the accommodation of the woman priest, facilitating the continuation of the belief that she is differently human. This difference is maintained by the belief that a woman is unable to represent the masculine in the divine symbolic and God is disinclined to produce the ontological change at ordination or work through her in ritual. By accommodating these beliefs, by encouraging them to thrive, the two integrities allow women priests to be defined in terms of such symbolic lack; the woman priest provides a magnification of how women are constructed as a few degrees away from the ‘zero’ that is the male (Braidotti 2013) at the most fundamental level.

Several foundational theologies and doctrines justify the exclusion of women from the priesthood (see Baker 2004; Podmore 2015; Kirk 2016) and beliefs about representation of the masculine symbol system are, in my view, the most significant for generating difference.

Christ was humanly male, and for some this requires faithful male representation at the altar. Additionally, the tradition that only men have been ordained throughout the history of official Christianity (known as the Apostolic Succession) precludes the disruption of this male line. The Biblical instruction that women should not have authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12) is associated with conservative evangelicals in the Church, which complicates the situation for women priests since this scriptural interpretation is not restricted to parishes who have structurally refused the ministry of women. Women priests may come across doubt over their authority in any part of the Church. Symbolically, the part of the Church that rejects women's priesthood frames the female in such a way that she relates fundamentally differently to the symbolic divine, preventing women from being always and everywhere priests.

Some male clergy soften their theological opposition to women's ordination by hitching the argument to the potential reunification of Catholic and Anglican Churches; if Rome were to ordain women, the doctrinal change could be embraced, but without a lead from the Catholic Church the Church of England has no authority to make such a significant doctrinal shift. This argument side-steps the responsibility for holding beliefs that exclude women from the priesthood. There are voices within the Catholic Church agitating for women's leadership and priesthood, however, until this doctrinal change has been made, some Anglo-Catholic clergy in the Church of England feel ordaining women creates further alienation from Rome (for a discussion on women's leadership in the Catholic Church see Wallace 1992).

The positions I have outlined necessarily privilege male authority, reinforce the masculinity of the divine, and make the male the universal representation of humanness, leaving the

female, at the very least, with a different relationship to the divine and at worst, entirely at odds with the priesthood. Boundaries are therefore built as protection from the female as abject (Kristeva 1982); the Church structure itself is confirming and legitimising the abjection of the woman priest through the two integrities. Counter-arguments to anti-women's ordination positions are well-rehearsed by feminists theologians and theoreticians who either reject Christianity as a belief system in which women can be self-actualised (such as Daly 1995; Hampson 2002; Irigaray 2002) or suggest the feminine be revealed in the Christian divine symbol system (such as Green 2009). What my research suggests is that far from being a theoretical debate, beliefs that frame women as differently human have a real-world impact on the lives of women in the priesthood.

Methodology

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 ordained women in the Church of England. Although interviews are a contrived setting for participants (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011), their conversational quality allowed the interviewees to control the flow of information and there was a good degree of freedom for the women to decide what was important for them to narrate and what they did not wish to discuss (see Duncombe and Jessop 2002). I was also aware throughout the interview process that meanings were created and explored and that the act of telling a story simultaneously unfolded into something newly thought (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005); several women began to develop new theological ideas during the interviews themselves.

The interviewees were recruited through social media and personal contacts. Snowball sampling (Ritchie and Lewis 2014) – a method that relies on recommendations made by participants to their own networks – was an important part of the recruitment process,

generating a cohort with a wide demographic range. Because my initial question asked about the lived experience of ordained women in the Church of England, I had no pre-determined limits on the cohort. However, I used snowball sampling to ensure women with school-aged children and women who worked outside the Church of England were included. The cohort represented various vocational stages and career trajectories (2 retirees, 2 non-stipendiary, 7 parish priests, 11 curates in training and 4 chaplains working in other institutions) and were located in various geographical areas in England. There were differences between women's theologies, perspectives, and rationales; around half of the cohort (13) aligned themselves to the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church, 9 identified as 'middle of the road' and 4 stated they aligned themselves to evangelical theological positionings. The benefit of not restricting the cohort to one part of the Church emerged once the stories were thematically coded; I discovered patterns of experiences that were dependent on the women's alignment to theologically defined groups (Anglo-Catholic and evangelical are the most identifiable groupings). It should be noted that women identifying as Anglo-Catholic centred this position around sacraments, liturgy, and ritual, without subscribing to those traditionalist beliefs that problematise gender in the priesthood; this became a focus for my analysis since it created discomfort for both male and female clergy attempting to operate in the same theological space. Similarly, women identifying as evangelical did not subscribe to conservatism in evangelical circles that troubles gender in leadership. I need to emphasise that these positionings are nuanced and often interviewees found themselves at odds with beliefs circulating within their 'wing' of the Church. Attitudes to women's priesthood are supported by allegiance to certain theological and doctrinal understandings. Where women priests place themselves on the theological and doctrinal continuum impacts upon how they experience institutional discourses that undermine their

priesthood. It is important to note, however, that the theological positions of the interviewees are highly individualistic and, in some cases, only loosely aligned with theologies represented by traditions.

I anonymised the interviews at the transcription stage; names included below are pseudonyms. After an initial thematic analysis, I focused on Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2001; Van Dijk 2003) to explore connections between institutional discourses and the ways women perceived their individual experiences. Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on issues of power, hegemony, and social domination. Revealing opaque discourses and power relationships, researchers who use this method are seeking to facilitate change. Not only am I in search of cultural hegemonies that wield power through belief systems (Fulton, 1987) – such as how gender is naturalised through religious symbols – I also examine micro-discourses that express individual agency (for example, agreeing to assist in a non-priest role for a male colleague who does not recognise women's priesthood). Exploring the contextual and social structure from within which the women speak also supports the analysis of the historical discourse that has constructed the current context; how women relate to past debates about women's ordination and the continuing influence of these debates is a strong theme in the interviews. (For more detail on the campaign for women's priesthood in the Church of England, see for example, Petre 1994; Francis and Robbins 1999; Furlong 1998).

My decision to use the Duluth Wheel as a tool for further analysis was prompted by working with victims of domestic violence. I revisited the stories of women priests to explore how interactions with the institution and with male clergy who do not accept women's priesthood could be interpreted if placed within this context. I returned to Fairclough's

method of Critical Discourse Analysis to connect how the Duluth model weighs male privilege, gender roles, institutional power, and religious beliefs and the ways women talk about their encounters with male clergy who do not accept women as priests. I asked a fundamental question: is there a shared set of experiences and beliefs that underpin gendered domestic violence and the gendered symbolic violence experienced by women priests?

Whilst I refer to symbolic violence within the interviewees' stories, it should be noted that the women themselves were not always inclined to describe their experiences of the institution in such negative terms. Interestingly, a study by Robbins and Greene (2018) found that women clergy did not readily identify events as sexist until they had the opportunity to revisit experiences in discussion. I also found naming sexism was not straightforward for the interviewees. Rachel, a retired priest, declined to tell anecdotes from a period in her career that was painful, explaining that she wanted to contribute to institutional healing and not re-tell bad experiences that would 'shame the Church'. Some interviewees, however, did not seek to protect the image of the Church and were candid about painful events. These were conversations in which the institution came across poorly. Even so, many of the stories of relationships were told in a positive way, though following further analysis I found they contained numerous examples of symbolic violence that neither myself as researcher nor the interviewee could see at the time of the telling and some interviewees might be surprised at how I interpret some stories in this way.

Symbolic Violence in the Context of the Church

I turn now to examples of where I see symbolic violence within the stories of the women priests in my research, to show how such acts are often seen as benevolent but are

reminiscent of some categories of domestic violence highlighted in the Duluth model. Several interviewees describe the negative material impact of the two integrities on women clergy, such as being ineligible to work in certain parishes, or being given poor references by male clergy who do not support women's ordination. Whilst these stories illustrate the visible implications of the Church's differentiating structure, the descriptions about the more complex relational interactions with male clergy who do not accept women priests reveal a hidden impact on women priests' lives that I interpret in Bourdieusian terms as symbolic violence. Such relationships are ostensibly supportive and cordial, even loving, and yet through them, women priests are systematically denied their subjectivity as priests and constructed as differently human to men, particularly in relationship to God as priests.

A question that my research raises is the extent to which women priests accept the structural context in which they work, and the emotional labour required of them at the relational level. Jan Rehmann (2013) explores Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, suggesting that it relies on the tacit consent of the dominated group. Some of the stories in my research might support this idea, as interviewees communicated their reluctance to be in conflict with the Church or with individuals over the issue of women's ordination. I have wondered why the debate over the viability of the two integrities seems to have lost traction, and Rehmann's point might explain the lack of overt agitation amongst women priests (reminiscent of the question of why women stay in harmful relationships). However, there are also examples in my interviews of resistance and subversion on the part of women priests. I prefer to see symbolic violence as a type of enchantment that is not so much about giving permission to be oppressed but about actions that are thickly obfuscated by language of love and good intentions, by the call to the Church, and by the supportive nature of relationships with male clergy who oppose women's ordination.

Symbolic Violence and the 'Lovely Man'

Individuals in the Church who reject women's priesthood are not acting outside accepted norms but are aligned to legitimised beliefs in an institution that upholds acts perceived to be in good theological conscience, regardless of the harm to female subjectivity. My research adds nuance to this by identifying ways individuals who oppose women in the priesthood are perceived as good, warm, and 'lovely'. One interviewee explained that her spiritual mentor did not accept women's priesthood, a view unchallenged because of the warmth of his character; 'I just accepted his teaching. If asked, his view was that women couldn't be ordained. Lovely, lovely man. And I never questioned it because he was such a lovely man and to me, he radiated God's love. I never had any reason to question it.' The 'lovely man' who does not accept women's priesthood was commonly discussed by interviewees, who articulate anger in principle about being undermined as women priests, though individual male clergy often escape significant challenge because of the collegiality offered. Another interviewee offers a similar perspective: 'I respect them [male colleagues who oppose women's ordination] because they are not misogynist, they are not aggressive with it, they are not antagonistic, they are not deliberately making divisions along the way and they are doing their best to treat everybody the same.' Along these lines, several women priests have told me that they are grateful for the support and encouragement offered by male clergy who do not accept women's priesthood and these male colleagues are seen as good friends, making it difficult for symbolic violence to be detected and challenged.

The positive relational experiences discussed by my interviewees are part of a continuum that can be described as 'ambivalent sexism' (Glick and Friske 2011). At the hostile end of

this continuum, women are subject to overt rejection – such as the refusal to employ a women priest in some parishes. At its benign end male clergy affirm a woman's call to ordination, whilst denying the legitimacy of female priesthood. There is also remorse communicated by male clergy who reject women as priests over the split structure of the Church. This ambivalence confuses some women priests about the nature of their relationships with male colleagues. One interviewee was cynical, suggesting there was a concerted effort on the part of male clergy who are not accepting of women priests to develop good relationships as a survival strategy for themselves; maintaining supportive relationships reduces the likelihood of protest against the structure. But the expressing of grief and regret by those who are against women's ordination presents a blurring of responsibility. One interviewee told me a close male colleague, who did not agree with women's priesthood, cried with her when the proposal for women bishops was first voted down and agreed it was a terrible blow. Such expressions of regret by a perpetrator are a common part of the cycle of abuse in intimate relationships, but ultimately are unlikely to signal a change in behaviour. Male clergy may be regretful that women priests suffer injustice in the Church's structure but may not be moved to challenge their own beliefs; the dissonance between these men's relational work and the symbolic violence wreaked by their adherence to structural separation is an area worth researching further.

Symbolic Violence and the Power to Define

A significant act of symbolic violence is the naming of women as non-priests by individual male clergy, mirroring the institutional arrangement that strips women of their priesthood. Sheila, an Anglo-Catholic priest, told me she was pleased to be asked to act as deacon (an assistant role without the powers of a priest) for a male colleague who did not recognise her

as a priest because of his theological position. The symbolic violence for this interviewee is imperceptible; by agreeing to this one-off role, for her, it was an opportunity to show that she was unperturbed by his views on her status. However, this story is reminiscent of the power the male can exercise in the domestic setting whereby he imposes ideas and beliefs about gender roles, the power of individual male clergy to disregard the priest's status if she is a woman is fully underlined in this interviewee's story. Another interviewee, a priest who aligns herself to the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church, describes how she is surrounded by male clergy she believes see her as a fake priest, but who are never openly hostile – they remain at the gentle end of the ambivalent sexism scale: 'the men in my deanery are not affirming of women's ministry. Although they are never unkind to me, I know that they think that what I'm doing is made up almost.' This power to decide what is ontologically viable in the priesthood and what is not, is given to male clergy by the institution of the Church, in contradiction of itself, overriding the ordination ritual. There is no mechanism to declare a man a non-priest, although the above interviewee wishes there could be an equivalent way to challenge the ontology of male priesthood in return. This is, however, a one-way theological street.

Interviewees shared stories that flesh out Bourdieu's (1998) proposal that symbols and rituals themselves act as props for male domination. Several stated that male colleagues believed women priests deconsecrate the altar when they preside at the Eucharist ritual; the rigorous arguments over the protection of this ritual from female pollution are found in a small, but privileged body of doctrinal literature (see Baker 2004; Podmore 2015; Kirk 2016, for example). This pollution discourse is experienced by one interviewee, Polly, who internalises messages about how she is perceived by clergy who do not accept women's priesthood. Her femaleness is constructed as damaging to the sanctity of the altar; 'I

celebrated the Eucharist, the Forward in Faith [the umbrella organisation for clergy who do not accept women's ordination] people would never set foot in there because I'd tainted the altar.' The understanding absorbed by Polly that the female is perceived as polluting is a remarkable example of what Mary Douglas (1966 [2002]) proposes; women are handed powers of 'involuntary witchcraft' (p.36). The notion of a woman priest deconsecrating the Christian altar is a manifestation of the fear of female witchery, or as Julia Kristeva (1982) puts it, the uncontrollable 'radical evil' of the feminine. The use of such symbolic violence aims to protect the androcentric ritual and the masculinised part of church space.

Perhaps the most striking stories in my research are about clergy and congregants refusing to accept the bread and wine at a Eucharist ritual presided over by a woman priest, an act that can be perpetrated by individuals in any part of the Church structure and is therefore difficult to avoid. Refusal to accept the Eucharistic symbols from a woman priest undermines her belonging in the priesthood, her subjectivity, the validity of her ordination, her authority as a priest and affirms that she is differently human to the male priest. I argue this act is a display of pure abjection, a recoiling from the difference that women represent that is 'forever associated to unholy, disorderly, subhuman, and unsightly phenomena' (Braidotti 1997, 64). Refusal of the Eucharist from a woman is not just a male act; women congregants also choose not to partake in the ritual if it is led by a woman priest, and this chimes with hooks' (2004) discussion about the patriarchal woman who not only supports male dominance but finds ways to exercise her own power in the same mode.

Karen is a priest who identifies with a middle-of-the-road position in the Church and describes how male colleagues absent themselves to avoid female-blessed sacraments, or at the very least refuse to honour the female participation in the ritual: 'There are some who

will not accept the Eucharist if one of the women is presiding. For the most part, they'll consent to be in the room. Some will excuse themselves from the room altogether [. . .] So, it's still alive and well.' What strikes me about Karen's story is how a theological and ontological understanding of the Eucharist is translated into a bodily show of distaste (which is humiliating in its visibility) that frames women in the ritual situation as communicators of something polluting. The active rejection of women priests – their abjection – continues to generate monstrous difference in women in the priesthood, structurally systematised by the two integrities, but which can be experienced in all parts of the Church.

Alice is another interviewee who has experienced this ritualised rejection. As an Anglo-Catholic, the violence is intensified because it robs her of an ontological status as a priest that is connected to the ontology of the Mass. She experiences this act of symbolic violence through her feelings, or through the 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004), which dovetails with Bourdieu's idea that symbolic violence can be perpetrated in the realm of emotion. This is a significant point, since those who refuse to accept the bread and wine from a woman do so (presumably) out of theological and doctrinal conscience, which is privileged over how a woman priest is left feeling. Alice describes her experience thus;

> I can feel it in the way people behave towards me, even kind of unconsciously, not that anyone has been outwardly unkind to me, but there's still a couple of people who don't come to the altar when I'm presiding. They won't receive communion from me. I notice it.

Refusing bread and wine consecrated by a woman priest is an act which may seem like a quiet assertion of individual conscience, but I argue it maps on to categories of abuse identified in the Duluth model; it supports a fixed system of gender that gives power and

privilege to the male, it continues the discourse that women are differently human to men, it tells a woman she is not who she says she is, and it emotionally abuses through public humiliation.

Symbolic Violence in Institutional Discourses

The institutional messages around women's ordination are similar to the relational experiences described above, in that their aim is to propagate harmony and aid the understanding of incompatible beliefs. Mutual flourishing is part of a set of guiding principles developed by the Church (see Cocksworth 2018) that explicitly instruct clergy to support the parity of esteem between positions. All theological arguments have validity; clergy who remain at odds with women's ordination are given the space and respect to thrive in their Church ministries (and careers). The difficulty with this discourse is that the negation of women's priesthood is one of the positions that flourishes at the expense of women's full belonging in the priesthood.

The attempt at mutuality gives rise to politically fraught moments that feed an environment in which women priests are problematised, rather than normalised. For example, John Sentamu, at the time the Archbishop of York, was required to publicly defend his position in a row over accommodating the anti-women's ordination views of Bishop Philip North, who would not be consecrated alongside Bishop Libby Lane (the first woman to be made bishop) and did not wish to be consecrated by a bishop who had ordained or consecrated a woman (Troup Buchanan 2015). This argument was widely publicised, and it highlights how the Church's approach to accommodation and mutuality is not focused on women achieving full belonging in the priesthood, but on ensuring conditions are generated to allow those who oppose women's priesthood to maintain their position.

Ultimately, mutual flourishing relativises the complaints women priests have about their negation and silences women who wish to name certain positions as sexist. The discourse of mutual flourishing is a significant example of symbolic violence, since it allows those who do not accept women as priests to be framed as victims themselves, vulnerable to oppression and prejudice because of their beliefs. The explicit protection of the male who does not accept female priesthood insinuates the woman priest is the guilty party. This is a common theme in abusive relationships and often victims are accused of abuse by perpetrators as a deflection strategy. To avoid conflict, women priests often take on the role of peacekeeper, as one priest told me, 'priests should try and be peacemakers, servants and peacemakers.' Whilst this interviewee suggests all priests have this duty, the nuanced messages within mutual flourishing ask women priests to put aside the discomfort of the denial of their status as priests to allow the Church to give succour to belief in an exclusively male priesthood.

The discourse of 'good disagreement' (see Groves 2014) that acts in harmony with mutual flourishing is also problematic. The institutional guidance here is an attempt to create differentiation between acceptable and unacceptable protest, drawing from Christian ideals. Again, the aim of good disagreement is to generate an environment in which difficult conversations can take place, where opposing views can be aired constructively; an example of its use can be found in preparations for discussions around sexuality (Church of England 2016). I argue that this discourse is also a disciplinary mechanism. Failure on the part of women clergy to adhere to good disagreement – that is, if they express anger, if they protest publicly – risks being named as perpetrators. This was made clear when women clergy in one diocese publicly protested the appointment of a bishop known for his stance against women's ordination – the commentariat in the Church labelled these women as

dissenters and bullies who inflicted pain on both the institution and the bishop, who himself was framed as emotionally and institutionally vulnerable (Ashenden 2017; Davis 2017; Storkey 2017; Sentamu 2017). Absent from the reportage of this story was an exploration of why women clergy felt the need to protest and why they expressed hurt and anger. The failure to provide context for the protest feeds the imagery of protesting women clergy as perpetrators, inflicting damage on a vulnerable man (see Ashenden 2017). Leveraging the principle of good disagreement can turn legitimate protest within the Church into impious, disloyal, and unchristian behaviour thereby discrediting the concerns of women priests and disrupting their ability to speak.

The institutional discourses I describe above contain an element of blame-shifting – a strategy of the abuser identified within the Duluth Wheel. The perpetrator places the responsibility for their harmful actions on to the victim. bell hooks (2004) and Jessica Taylor (2020) discuss this blame-shifting as part of the pattern of male violence, highlighting how it blurs the perception of who is the perpetrator and victim, in itself an act of symbolic violence. The drawn-out process of achieving women's ordination is damaging to women's collective and individual self-esteem because of the blame placed on women who campaigned (Furlong 1991; Francis and Robbins 1999), and in my interviews, it seems that women priests continue to feel blamed. One interviewee, in describing the way her bishop handled his refusal to ordain her, explains: 'You know why he's had to take that step and *it's our fault'* (my emphasis). Monica Furlong (1998) has noted that the structural arrangements themselves encourage women to feel that the 'whole difficult situation was their fault' (5). The discourse of guilt is fostered institutionally by the establishment of the two integrities which supports the position that women's claims to the priesthood are an assault on tradition. One Anglo-Catholic interviewee is angry about the way women priests are framed

institutionally and questions the language used: 'As if that position [the anti-women's ordination part of the structure] has an integrity. As if they are the keepers of the tradition and we are the evil destroyers, usurpers.' Women as destroyers can be a deliberately cultivated trope. Warner (2015), a commentator against women in the priesthood, frames female priesthood as the causal factor in the tearing of the fabric of communion with the universal Church and as the unravellers of the weft and warp of the Church's tapestry, regarded as a 'very ominous' situation (8); women's priesthood is based on destruction and women themselves are the perpetrators of this destruction.

Conclusion

Symbolic violence, because it is hidden, is often absent from discussions about violence against women, both in institutions like the Church and in domestic settings. My intention in the above discussion has been to explore some of the stories of women priests through the lens of Bourdieu's concept to reveal acts of symbolic violence perpetrated against women priests within the Church of England. By comparing these events and acts with the categories of abuse in the Duluth Wheel of Power, normally used in domestic settings, I have begun to establish a two-fold argument; firstly, that the institutional differentiation between male and female clergy in the Church gives rise to symbolically violent treatment of ordained women, much of which remains hidden within relational warmth; and secondly, that there are connections between iterations of Christian constructs of gender and gendered violence. I have fleshed out hooks' (2004) general claim that religion perpetuates and encourages male violence by showing that the female is framed as differently human within the Church's symbol system. Whilst the Christian Church might name domestic violence as a social ill (Levitt and Kimberley 2006; Sevcik et al 2015; Zust et al 2018), what

needs to be addressed is the gendered symbolic violence that can take place as a direct result of religious beliefs about gender. What we need to remember about symbolic violence is that it can go unrecognised and is often wrapped up in kindness that hides oppression, or more significantly in the case of women priests, the kindness perceived in male clergy in their relationships with ordained women whilst simultaneously accessing the power to name women as non-priests.

I have argued that institutional discourses such as mutual flourishing and good disagreement are symbolically violent because they orient blame to the woman priest and discourage her from challenging beliefs that harm her subjectivity. I have also argued that the root of the symbolic violence experienced by women priests is the construction of the female as differently human to the male. An androcentric belief in the exclusive representational value of the male to a masculinised divinity receives legitimisation from the institution of the Church, and so these beliefs are imposed on women priests in their daily lives through micro-acts of symbolic violence. The status of women in the symbol system and their relationship to the divine becomes a matter of individual conscience rather than a matter of justice. As in the Duluth Wheel of Power, the individual male priest can decide how gender works in the priesthood and is able to impose these beliefs on any woman priest in the Church by naming her as non-priest.

I agree with Bourdieu (1998) that we should not separate the material and the spiritual when examining masculine domination and so we must take seriously how the spiritual is used to express differences between men and women that allow one to wield power over the other. Bourdieu goes on to propose that the private domestic sphere is not the only realm in which masculine domination is perpetuated, and we must also look carefully at the

institutions of state and how domination is reproduced through structures. I draw on this for my argument that institutionalised Christianity – specifically in my research, the Church of England – supports and legitimises gendered symbolic violence that feeds into other types of gendered violence enacted through social processes and interactions. I have highlighted how Bourdieu (1998) also suggests rituals and mystical boundaries can be used as a way of reproducing masculine domination and I have explored how the ritual of the Eucharist is seen as needing protection from female pollution. Such protectionism gives rise to the most harmful acts of symbolic violence, using pollution discourses to humiliate and denigrate the woman priest. These acts exemplify the Bourdiesian no-entry sign for the female, which also serves to define, at a deeper level, women as differentiated, a few degrees away from the male who universally represents both humanity and the divine. This is the core act of violence against the female; that she is made to be differently human, does not and cannot represent the divine, or be represented by the symbols of the divine.

Finally, given the premise of my argument, I would also challenge the way the Duluth model places male privilege as a spoke that seems to confine the reproduction of oppressive gender roles (men do not do domestic work and women's roles are focused on servicing men) in a separate category of abuse. Male privilege, seen in Bourdieusian terms as universal masculine domination underpinned by religio-cultural reproduction of this power, must, in my view, be shifted to the hub of the wheel, rather than being artificially separated from other sets of behaviours. I also argue that symbolic violence should be included as a spoke, to reveal the hidden and gentle violence that Bourdieu sees as a playing out of masculine domination. Using the magnification offered to us by the priesthood, it seems to me that the privileging of the male is deeply embedded in the Christian symbolic, and this supports masculine domination in other social contexts. Part of the response of the Church

to male violence against women should be, then, to acknowledge the symbolic violence perpetrated against the woman priest and then to swiftly eliminate the tools and the structures that encourage, legitimise, and reproduce this violence. The two integrities must, in my view, be seen as a mechanism of symbolic violence and be dismantled.

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