THEOLOGICAL Studies

Article

From Ecclesial Sin to Ecclesial *Han*: Ecclesiology Beyond "A Church of Sinners and Saints"

Theological Studies
2024, Vol. 85(1) 56–77

DOI: 10.1177/00405639231220859
journals.sagepub.com/home/tsj
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Abstract

Debates within ecclesiology on the nature and possibility of ecclesial sin have regained interest in the midst of rising awareness of the church's historical wrongs. Most theologies and metaphors of a sinful church, however, fail to consider the theological identity of the "sinned against" within the church. This article reads Andrew Sung Park's theology of *han* (a Korean concept denoting a complex sense of woundedness) as the underside of sin against Karl Rahner's theology of a church of sinners to point toward a vision of ecclesial han that attends to the woundedness within the church and its healing.

Keywords

Catholic Church, colonialism, ecclesial sin, ecclesiology, han, feminist theology, Andrew Sung Park, Karl Rahner, sinned against

On July 25, 2022, Pope Francis delivered a historic address of apology to Indigenous Canadian people for the ways that "many members of the Church" have cooperated in "projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation"[1]

1. Francis, Address: "Meeting with Indigenous Peoples—First Nations, Métis and Inuit at Maskwacis" (Maskwacis, Canada, July 25, 2022), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/july/documents/20220725-popolazioniindigene-canada.html.

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of Indigenous communities through residential school systems and beyond.[2] The pope's address names the direct, structural, and theological or ideological acts of violence and abuse that Christians have inflicted upon Indigenous people without shying away from terms such as "colonizing mentality" and "spiritual abuse."[3] His speech concludes with repeated pleas for forgiveness, accountability, and justice. While many major news media labeled this address as one in which Francis apologized for the Catholic Church's role in Indigenous oppression,[4] the church—as personified subject—held a different role in Francis's speech itself. Francis attributed anti-Indigenous oppression to "members of the Church" and mentions the Catholic Church itself only one other time in his speech: "In the face of this deplorable evil, the Church kneels before God and implores his forgiveness for the sins of her children. . . . I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous Peoples."[5] Here, the church, personified as a mother of her children, is depicted as a sinless and loving mother who begs God for forgiveness on behalf of her sinful members throughout history.

The ecclesiological metaphors embedded in the pope's apology, as well as many critiques of such metaphors and their limits, are rooted in a longer tradition of debates within ecclesiology. This article situates itself within this longer tradition of theological discourse on the possibility of ecclesial sin and its repentance. Drawing on the theology of the Korean concept of *han*, articulated in English to a western audience primarily in the works of Andrew Sung Park, I turn to the missing presence of the sinned against in existing theologies and popular discourses of ecclesial sin. The concept of han, which denotes the complex and multifaceted experience of woundedness by the victims of sin, poses a fundamental challenge to the existing models of ecclesial sin. It does so by drawing our attention to the often-obscured presence and agency of the sinned against within the church in existing ecclesial discourse. In the pope's depiction of a mother church asking for forgiveness for her sinful children, for instance,

2. For an in-depth history of Canada's residential schools for Indigenous children and the Catholic Church's role in them, see: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Vol. 4: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials* (Montreal, Canada: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2015); and Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002).
3. Francis, "Meeting with Indigenous Peoples."
4. Two examples of news reporting that speak of the pope apologizing for the Catholic Church's role in Canadian residential schools include Nicole Winfield and Peter Smith, "Pope Apologizes for 'Catastrophic' School Policy in Canada," *Associated Press News*, July 26, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-canada-apology-visit-137ad23719603e9d370257f257ec0163; Jonah McKeown, "Pope Francis Apologizes for Harm Done to Indigenous Canadians at Residential Schools," *Catholic News Agency*, July 25, 2022, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/251870/pope-francis-apologizes-for-the-harm-done-to-indigenous-canadians-at-residential-schools.
5. Francis, "Meeting with Indigenous Peoples."

the ecclesial role of the victims of sin—in this case, the Indigenous children who were baptized members of the church—fades into the background. Where do they fit in the intercessions of the church on behalf of her sinful children? How can a repentant ecclesiology, such as that of Pope Francis's apology, that emphasizes the real presence of sinners within the church also remember the ecclesial presence of those whom the church has harmed? Similar questions can be raised when pastors and church leaders employ the phrase "we are a church of sinners"[6] upon the release of clerical sex abuse reports, sidelining the ecclesial presence of the abused, who are the sinned against in this situation. Under this ecclesiology, Indigenous and racialized peoples, as well as the survivors of abuse, who are sinned against by the church, disappear as a possible answer to the question of what or who is church. Applying Park's theology of han and the sinned against to contemporary conversations of ecclesial sin, I insist that ecclesial sin's counterpart, ecclesial han, must be equally emphasized to restore the epistemological agency of the abused, the colonized, and other victims of the sins of the institutional church.

This article proceeds from the premise found in the writings of Pope Francis, Pope John Paul II, and many theologians that the institutional church indeed should repent of its historical and contemporary wrongs, such as colonization, anti-Semitism, and clerical sexual abuse, among other forms of structural and interpersonal sins. As noted earlier, however, both Francis's 2022 apology and the ecclesiology that lies behind its avoidance of assigning sin to the church itself have faced critiques from theologians and activists. Existing critiques of similar papal apologies to Indigenous groups[7] note the many limits of an ecclesiology that dissociates the church's essence from its people and sins of the church from the church itself. As former lead commissioner of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation commission Murray Sinclair (Anishinaabe) maintains in his critique of the June 2022 statement, "the Holy Father's statement has left a deep hole in the acknowledgment of the full role of the church in the residential school

6. Two of many examples of this rhetoric can be found at: Jennifer Brinker, "Mass of Reparation Atones for Sins of Clergy Sexual Abuse," *St. Louis Review*, Archdiocese of Saint Louis, March 28, 2019, https://www.archstl.org/mass-of-reparation-at-cathedral-basilica-atones-for-sins-of-clergy-sexual-abuse-2940; Robin Gomes, "Philippine Bishops Vow to Prevent Clerical Sexual and Other Abuse and Cover-Ups," *Vatican News*, September 3, 2018, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2018–09/philippines-bishops-clerical-abuse-valles-cbcp.html.

7. Critiques of similar papal apologies for historical harm against Indigenous communities from ecclesiologists include: Jeremy M. Bergen, "Papal Apologies for Residential Schools and the Stories They Tell," *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2023): 48–62, https://doi.org/10.55476/001c.66235; Jeremy M. Bergen, "Pope Francis's Apology for Residential Schools Doesn't Acknowledge Institutional Responsibility," *The Conversation*, April 1, 2022, http://theconversation.com/pope-franciss-apology-for-residential-schools-doesnt-acknowledge-institutional-responsibility-180526; Annie Selak, "Pope Francis Apologized for the Harm Done to First Nations Peoples, but What Does a Pope's Apology Mean?," *The Conversation*, April 8, 2022, http://theconversation.com/pope-francis-apologized-for-the-harm-done-to-first-nations-peoples-but-what-does-a-popes-apology-mean-180768.

system by placing blame on individual members of the church."[8] Other Indigenous critiques of the papal apology and visit note the pope's failure to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, as well as how the usage of Latin as the sole liturgical language of public papal liturgies during the apostolic journey may have been alienating and triggering for residential school survivors.[9] My article draws from many of these existing critiques while highlighting a different absence in this ecclesiology: that of the missing presence of the wounded members of the church who have experienced the effects of ecclesial sin.

In this article, I will first introduce the concept of han as an additive theological category that describes the experience of those who are victims of sin. Then, I turn to two categories of ecclesial metaphors used within discussions of the church's sins and holiness as a microcosm of the various sides of this debate about ecclesial sin. The metaphors of the church as holy mother and virgin bride are often invoked in appeals to the church's essential holiness despite "her children's" sins, while the metaphor of the sinful woman is invoked by others to draw attention to how the sins of the church's members are indeed the church's own sins. Together, they form the *casta meretrix* (chaste whore) metaphor, used explicitly in the works of theologians from Ambrose[10] to Hans Urs von Balthasar,[11] to describe the church's entanglement with sinfulness

8. Murray Sinclair, "Statement by Honourable Murray Sinclair on the Pope's Apology," *Last Real Indians*, July 28, 2022, https://lastrealindians.com/news/2022/7/28/statement-by-honourable-murray-sinclair-on-the-popes-apology; also quoted in Brandi Morin, "Why Pope Francis' Latest Apology Isn't Enough," *NBC News*, July 29, 2022, https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/pope-francis-canada-school-apology-isnt-enough-rcna40542.
9. Jane Barter, Doris Kieser, and Daryold Winkler, "Missed Opportunities and Hope for Healing: Reflections of an Indigenous Catholic Priest—Interview with Fr. Daryold Winkler," *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2023): 77, https://doi.org/10.55476/001c.66253. Other critiques and commentaries from Indigenous Canadians on the pope's apologies and apostolic journey include: Niigan Sinclair, "Pope's Statement Remarkable but Means Little," *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 31, 2023, https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2023/03/31/popes-statement-remarkable-but-means-little; Kayla Rosen, "Words Must Be Followed by Action, Manitoba Survivors and Academics Say after Pope's Apology to Indigenous Delegates," *CTV News Winnipeg*, April 1, 2022, https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/words-must-be-followed-by-action-manitoba-survivors-and-academics-say-after-pope-s-apology-to-indigenous-delegates-1.5844563.
10. One of the most comprehensive analyses of Ambrose's theology of casta meretrix is found in Giacomo Biffi, *Casta Meretrix: "The Chaste Whore": An Essay on the Ecclesiology of St. Ambrose* (London, UK: Saint Austin Press, 2000); for a helpful summary of Biffi's position on Ambrose's ecclesiology, see also Jeremy M. Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts* (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 122. It is important to note that Biffi himself advocates for an ecclesiology where sin is by definition external to the church, and reads Ambrose's casta meretrix accordingly. Biffi sees the church as offering refuge to sinners such as the promiscuous Rahab via its forgiveness, but is nonetheless sinless in itself. Other theologians who use the term casta meretrix often have different interpretations of the church's sin and holiness.
11. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Casta Meretrix," in *Explorations in Theology,* vol. 2, *Spouse of the Word*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991), 193–288; the essay is available at https://www.newtorah.org/Casta%20Meretrix.html.

despite its holiness.[12] I primarily engage the writings of Karl Rahner,[13] who notably insists upon the need of speaking of the church as simultaneously holy and sinful, and that the actions of the members are coextensive with the church itself. Rahner's ecclesiology, which is hope-filled and honest, demands that Christians bear "both the figures of the Church as virgin and as woman of sin."[14] Although an ecclesiology that holds both these metaphors of sin and holiness is an important step toward honest recognition of the church's real sins that coexist with the Spirit-filled holiness of the church, I contend that both metaphors nonetheless leave out the sinned against in their imagination of church. The two feminine metaphors, in the end, are not only insufficient for a church with a predominately male institutional leadership, but leave little room for the imagination of the church—as well as of women and people on the underside of power—beyond sinfulness or holiness. The concept of ecclesial han, which attends to the experiences of the sinned against within the church, therefore emerges as an additive category to describe the complex, often neglected intra-ecclesial relations of power and harm that are veiled by a theological paradigm that considers the axis of sin and holiness alone.

To further clarify these intra-ecclesial relations, throughout this article I use the term "institutional church" to describe those who have more decision-making power within the hierarchical structure of the church. This is distinguished from those—such as minoritized communities and many members of the laity—who are members of the church on account of their baptism, but in reality hold little decision-making power in terms of shaping the church's doctrinal and political activity. These terms are sociological descriptors for the sake of clarifying differing ecclesial roles and powers, rather than a theological claim against the unity of the church as an eschatological reality.

Han and the Sinned Against in Christian Theology

The soteriology of Andrew Sung Park introduces the Korean concept of han to remediate the lack of concern in Christian soteriology for the victims of sin. In his 1993 book *The Wounded Heart of God*, Park insists that traditional Protestant and Catholic doctrines of sin have been "one-sided"[15] in that they fail to consider the victims of sin and

12. As mentioned in note 10, the casta meretrix metaphor sees many usages throughout theological history, with different theologians interpreting it to reflect differing views on ecclesiology. While some, like Balthasar, focuses more on the church as both holy and sinful, others are more reluctant to consider casta meretrix a metaphor that indicts the church's capacity to sin in itself. For a more detailed history of this debate, see: Stephen D. Lawson, "The Apostasy of the Church and the Cross of Christ: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Mystery of the Church as *Casta Meretrix*," *Modern Theology* 36, no. 2 (2020): 259–80, https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12522.
13. Karl Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1969), 253–69; Karl Rahner, "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1969), 270–94.
14. Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," 263.
15. Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 10.

injustice in the dyadic relationship between God and the sinner. The doctrinal focus of the church, from the Lutheran concept of justification to the Catholic theology of penance and reconciliation, has historically been on the "forgiven-ness of the offenders,"[16] but there is a profound absence in Christian theology on what salvation looks like for the sinned against, or those on the underside of sin. Against this, Park proposes a rethinking of soteriology that includes "the healing of victims in the picture of salvation." Salvation, Park insists, cannot be—and ought not be—obtained by sinners alone before God.[17] Park's soteriology adds further depth to Pope Francis's statement that "no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together."[18]

Park turns toward han (Hangul: 한; Hanja:恨) as a resource for Christian theology. The complex and value-laden Korean notion of han is not directly translatable into English, but Park refers to it here as, roughly, the "wounded heart" of victims of sin. Han depicts the "abysmal experience of pain" at the depth of human suffering.[19] Different forms of han mark the lives of the worker living under structural exploitation, the survivors of war, the victims of sexual violence, and populations living under discrimination and colonization.

Just as sin and injustice take on different forms and operate at various levels of society, han, as the relational consequence of sin, also manifests itself in different forms. For individuals, han may turn inward and manifest as shame or resignation, or outward into a desire for revenge or revolt. Collective han from collective trauma (here, Park frequently refers to the occupation of Korea by colonial Japan as a foundational moment for his own Korean collective han) may fuel ethno-racial resentment or turn inward into racial lamentation and racial melancholia.[20] These forms of woundedness, often cyclical and intergenerational, demand a new language for salvation beyond a simple dialectic of forgiveness or repentance. While Park appreciates the soteriology proposed by feminist and liberation theologians that centers the victims of structural sin, he nonetheless writes that these theologians too make the mistake of misidentifying han as sin. When feminist theologian Valerie Saiving writes that the sin of women is not pride but the negation of self, Park urges that this negation of self is rather an expression of the han of women—a result of the sin of sexism infringing upon women's bodies and psyche—and not of their sin.[21] Suffering that occurs as a result of the

16. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 91.
17. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 102.
18. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), §32, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.
19. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 15.
20. While Andrew Sung Park himself does not use the term "racial melancholia," a concept that rose in popularity in Asian American studies after the publication of his work, I find racial melancholia to be comparable to Park's description of collective han as a psyche of racial lament. Noteworthy works on racial melancholia that inform this perspective include Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).
21. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 76.

interpersonal and structural sin of others is better understood as han, and not simply another form of sin. Here, the language of han offers more clarity to the critiques of the traditional concept of sin that feminist and liberation theologians are already attempting to offer. In addition to highlighting the impacts of sin, han brings to the forefront the affective nature of human suffering,[22] pointing toward a need for soteriology, too, to engage with the psychological and affective aspects of human embodiment.

Han is not a static category. Park's analysis considers the complex realities of intersectionality and interpersonal relationships in general. At any given moment, a single individual could be both sinning against others and be sinned against by others—there is no simple division in the world between sinner and sinned against as if they were stable and exclusive categories. Rather, the experience of both sin and han mark each individual in her experience of salvation. Han is thus an additive intervention from Park, rather than a mere conceptual corrective. The presence of han in the world and in the church does not negate the reality of sin, nor does the language of han do away with the language of sin in the Christian tradition. Rather, han conceptually clarifies sin's effect on individuals and communities, offering an additional theological language that speaks to the experience of the relational underside of sin.

With the experience of han grounding his theology, Park proposes a soteriology in which the victims of sin are incorporated into a participatory dialectic of healing and reconciliation that empowers "dialogical, dynamic, and compassionate living."[23] He expands the image of salvation from beyond the forgiveness of sin. Salvation is not a gift of justification from the divine to the sinner alone, but a dynamic engagement toward wholeness that requires the participation of both sinner and sinned against. This movement toward divine and human forgiveness of the sinner, and healing of the sinned against, prompts both to come to know the reality of God—who through Christ also shares in the wounded heart of human han—as fully present amid the "*han*-ridden life of the oppressed" in the world.[24]

Park's soteriological question is taken up in liturgical theology by Kristine Suna-Koro, who looks at the Lutheran liturgy of confession and notes its profound lack of concern for victims of sin in its liturgical language that designate all those present as sinners. She asks:

> how are those who are "sinned-against"—the abused, the demonized, the marginalized, the scapegoated, the disinherited, the devalued, the victims of violence, greed, indifference, prejudice, and other people's unresolved pain—invited into the circle of grace and salvation? What kind of liturgical, sacramental, and pastoral space do Lutheran rites of confession and absolution open up for the "sinned-against?"[25]

22. For an excellent text that discusses han in conversation with affect theory and Christian theology, see Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 19–48, 101–16.
23. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 108–9.
24. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 126.
25. Kristine Suna-Koro, "Confession of Sin and the 'Sinned-Against': An Inquiry from a Lutheran Perspective," *Liturgy* 34, no. 1 (2019): 22, https://doi.org/10.1080/04580 63X.2019.1559612.

To assert that some members of the church, such as migrants and refugees who survived the breadth of structural sin, occupy the liturgical space of the "sinned against" is not an assertion of these people's total innocence from sin, but a reminder that ecclesial spaces ought to provide "liturgical hospitality"[26] to those who seek forms of grace beyond forgiveness alone. Suna-Koro's concerns for Lutheran liturgy translate well to the context of Catholic liturgy and ecclesiology, which likewise sees a lack in available theological language to describe both the woundedness and the healing of those who have been wounded by the sins of others. The language of healing for the han of the sinned against provides an additional framework to consider Catholic-Christian soteriology in practice.

Two Metaphors of a Church Entangled with Sin

Drawing from Park's theological intervention, paired with Suna-Koro's discussion of its liturgical and ecclesial implications, I consider how han may be a useful concept for addressing the lacunae in existing ecclesiology's discourse on the church's history of sin and violence. First, I consider how historical imaginations of a sinful and holy church, in various sides of this debate on ecclesial sin,[27] have left little room for the sinned against as church. I proceed by tracing through two main ecclesiological images central to existing imaginings of the church's relationship to the sins of its institutions, leaders, and members. For both sections, I lead with the gendered ecclesial metaphors often used to represent these viewpoints, and note how these feminine metaphors of the church oscillate between those of sexual purity and sexual sin.

Metaphors and descriptors of a church entangled with sin abound, and not all are explicitly gendered. Karl Rahner considers *Lumen Gentium*'s language of a "pilgrim church"[28] to be an important contribution to frameworks that depict the relationship between ecclesial sin and holiness.[29] Other metaphors of church, such as *Lumen Gentium*'s "people of God"[30] and Avery Dulles's "community of disciples,"[31] recenter the actions of church members as constitutive of the church itself, which opens space for more honest considerations of how the sins of church members tarnish the church's identity as a whole. Although these metaphors offer theologians today creative paths

26. Suna-Koro, "Confession of Sin," 25.
27. There are many great texts that offer comprehensive reviews of the theological debates on the question of ecclesial sin. I owe my understanding of this topic to: Brian P. Flanagan, *Stumbling in Holiness: Sin and Sanctity in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018); Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance*, 199–242; Jeanmarie Gribaudo, *A Holy Yet Sinful Church: Three Twentieth-Century Moments in a Developing Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).
28. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), §48, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*).
29. Rahner, "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," 281.
30. *LG*, §§9–17.
31. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 198.

toward new understandings of ecclesial sin and holiness, I do not analyze these metaphors in this article, and focus instead on metaphors whose primary purpose is to give voice to the presence of sin in the church amid its eschatological holiness, most of which take the shape of a feminine metaphor.

Acknowledging that the usage of these metaphors does not always correspond to a sexist intent, I look at the two main models of ecclesial sin and holiness via their commonly used feminine metaphors for two reasons: first, to highlight how a feminized metaphor of ecclesial sin contradicts the reality of a church where sexual abuses, among other sins, are perpetrated primarily though not exclusively by its male clerical leadership; and second, to point toward the missing han of women in these metaphors and their accompanying theologies. My insistence, from a feminist standpoint, is not just that these metaphors themselves need to be abolished out of a concern for misrepresentation of women. Rather, I argue that the ecclesiologies that draw from these limited metaphors likewise reflect a limitation of imagination. This limitation of imagination—specifically, the failure to imagine the sinned against as church—may extend even into theologies that forgo such gendered metaphors out of feminist concern.

Who Is the Church? Holy Mother, Pure Bride

Maternal and bridal metaphors are invoked in theologies that emphasize the church's holiness, with the bridal metaphor symbolizing the church's essential holiness and the maternal metaphor justifying its capacity to contain and forgive sinners while remaining holy. This strand of ecclesiology, which dissociates sin from the church's holy essence, is most prominently found in the thoughts of Charles Journet, who distinguishes between the church "as such," who is holy, and its members, who are sinful.[32] In ecclesial and magisterial documents, similar theologies in Journet's vein are discussed using maternal metaphors.[33] "The Church," *Lumen Gentium* proclaims in order to juxtapose the church with Christ's undefiled holiness, "embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal."[34] *Lumen Gentium* situates the church in a world of sin and tribulations, but carefully avoids claiming that the church itself is capable of sinning by turning to the maternal metaphor. This distinction is further

32. Charles Journet, *The Theology of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 207–16. For analysis of Journet's ecclesiology, see Flanagan, *Stumbling in Holiness*, 147–48; and Gribaudo, *A Holy Yet Sinful Church*, 74–83.

33. While this section focuses on the image of church as virgin and mother in Vatican II and postconciliar ecclesial documents, the dual metaphors have a longer history. This section reads the metaphors via a more critical and contemporary lens, while other feminist theology works have done much to reread these metaphors from their historical context. See Cristina Lledo Gomez, *The Church as Woman and Mother: Historical and Theological Foundations* (New York: Paulist Press, 2018).

34. *LG*, §8.

clarified in the International Theological Commission's 1984 document "Select Themes on Ecclesiology," which states that the "Church experiences the ravages of sin in her members and undergoes the trial of their divisions. The men and women who compose the Church can sometimes present obstacles to the action of the Holy Spirit."[35] That the church's members are sinful and that the church merely experiences such sins remain the central themes of this ecclesiology.

These maternal metaphors are extended in the International Theological Commission's 2000 document *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, which clarifies the theology behind the church's relationship to the faults of the past. The document, written after Pope John Paul II's many apologies for the church's past faults and current social sins, places greater emphasis on the concrete sins within the church than prior magisterial ecclesiological documents. Devoting a section on the motherhood of the church, the document continues to insist that the church as mother "confesses herself a sinner, not as a subject who sins, but rather in assuming the weight of her children's faults in maternal solidarity."[36] By invoking the maternal metaphor, sin is within the church yet not of the church. Yet the church, especially its leaders, can still apologize on behalf of the sinners, the way that mothers guide their children toward penance and reconciliation.

One section after *Lumen Gentium*'s initial use of the maternal imagery, the church's holiness is reiterated using the metaphors of bride and virginity.[37] The document states that despite the "weakness of the flesh" of the church, having been strengthened by God's grace, "she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord."[38] This virginity metaphor used to embody ecclesial holiness is extended further when the document speaks of how the Holy Spirit permits "the Church to keep the freshness of youth" and leads her to "perfect union with her Spouse."[39] The holy church, under this metaphor of a pure bride, remains unblemished in its holiness through the sanctifying power of Jesus Christ, the church's bridegroom. The closing sections of *Lumen Gentium*, which discuss Mary's relationship with the church, speak of the church as "mother and virgin"[40] in unison, nurturing her children in faith while remaining faithful to Christ her spouse.

35. International Theological Commission, "Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council" (1984), §VIII.2, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1984_ecclesiologia_en.html.
36. International Theological Commission, "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past" (December 1999), §3.4, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html.
37. The metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ is not new to *LG*, but is found throughout church history, most prominently in the later writings on Augustine. See: James K. Lee, "The Church as the Bride of Christ," in *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 57–74.
38. *LG*, §9.
39. *LG*, §4.
40. *LG*, §63.

Together, the intertwined ecclesiology of the church as mother and bride frames the church's wrongs throughout history as sinful actions committed by sinful members of the church.

The church as bride is continually sanctified by Christ the bridegroom, just as the church as mother leads her children to holiness. The church as mother feels sorrow—but not necessarily personal remorse or repentance—on behalf of "her" children who have sinned, while acting as an agent of intercession and forgiveness for its sinful members as it continues to embrace their ecclesial presence despite their sins. The church as mother and bride cannot sin, but is instead the sanctifier and the sanctified, both at the same time.

Several contemporary feminist theologians have noted the limits and potentials of these gendered metaphors of church. For Tina Beattie, the dense symbols of church as mother and pilgrim draw on "the most evocative and resonant symbols of birth, identity, desire, intimacy, and belonging"[41] in the church's liturgical life and movement toward hope. However, in its current ecclesial usage, which relies on romanticized ideals of womanhood and motherhood (with no real distinctions between the two), the "church as mother is a dead metaphor."[42] This is especially true when ecclesial documents use maternal language to describe roles from which women are excluded on account of their female bodies, such as when *Lumen Gentium* describes the church's preaching as a mother speaking to her child.[43] Drawing from historical analysis of the metaphor's development, Cristina Lledo Gomez rereads *Lumen Gentium*'s maternal church as a call toward the church as people of God, especially its laity, to become spiritual mothers rather than infants in faith.[44] Compared to these generative potentials of the metaphor of church as mother, the metaphor of church as the bride of Christ—especially in its emphasis on virginity and purity—hold considerably less potential for feminist theologians today.[45]

Taking into account these existing feminist critiques and reclamations of the metaphors, I turn to consider the limits of the theologies of ecclesial sin and holiness that lie behind these gendered metaphors. My argument in this section is that the ecclesial metaphors of mother and bride are invoked in discussions about ecclesial sin primarily to showcase the church's essential holiness in contrast with its members' sinful actions, and secondarily to emphasize the pastoral role the mother church has in interceding for her sinful children and guiding them toward holiness.

41. Tina Beattie, "Transforming Time—The Maternal Church and the Pilgrimage of Faith," *Ecclesiology* 12, no. 1 (2016): 70, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-01201003.
42. Beattie, "Transforming Time," 67.
43. See *LG*, §64.
44. Cristina Lledo Gomez, "From Infants to Mothers: Recovering the Call to the People of God to Become Mother Church in Lumen Gentium," *Ecclesiology* 11, no. 1 (2015): 34–64, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316–01101004; see also Cristina Lledo Gomez, *The Church as Woman and Mother*, 85–112.
45. Susan A. Ross, "The Bride of Christ and the Church Body Politic," *Verifiche* 42, no. 1–3 (January 2013): 230.

This theological treatment of ecclesial sin has several limits. First, a theology that considers the church to be objectively holy in its essence, and sinful only in the sense that its members are sinful, raises questions about what—and where—the church is beyond its historical human community. This essential separation between the holy church's essence and church members' sins fuels a dualist image of the church whose holiness is an abstraction removed from and untarnished by the church in the world. If the church is not fully coextensive with its members and historical actions, then what is the church?[46] Furthermore, if the church in itself cannot be tarnished by sin and only its individual members can, what gives current church leaders the authority to apologize on behalf of historical church leaders and members, or even on behalf of current church members?[47] An accurate reflection upon church history would also reveal that the church's faults of the past extend beyond mere actions of its sinful members who strayed from church teaching. Rather, Christian anti-Semitism embedded in church doctrine,[48] among other doctrinal biases, lie at the root of harmful actions on the part of the church and its members. To insist that the church in itself is free of sin and only feels sorrow for the sins of its members is to ignore that ecclesial anti-Semitism, sexism, and other prejudices have permeated the fabrics of church teaching and church identity.[49]

Taking into consideration the sinned against of the church, this ecclesiology also fails to answer the question of why the church as mother prioritizes the forgiveness of the sinful actions of the church and does not intercede on behalf of the well-being of those who are sinned against. The imagery of a loving mother, whose protection of the weak otherwise serves as a dense symbol of merciful love, is reduced by this ecclesiology to merely serve the function of separating the church's holy essence from its members' sins. Although the metaphor of the church as mother can be reinterpreted to recenter its generative power, as in the works of aforementioned feminist theologians, the metaphor's particular usage in the contexts of theological debates about ecclesial sin falls short of its full potential.

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46. Flanagan, *Stumbling in Holiness*, 151.
47. This critique is raised in Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance*, 66. Bergen's rich analysis of the Catholic Church's Day of Pardon in chapter 4 (pp. 115–50) of the same work also informs my critiques in this paragraph.
48. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Anti-Semitism in Christian Theology," *Theology Today* 30, no. 4 (1974): 365–81, https://doi.org/10.1177/004057367403000407; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996).
49. Jeannine Hill Fletcher's usage of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's concept of "retroductive warrant"—the idea that Christian Scripture and tradition's material outcomes matter in our evaluation of these traditions—guides my thinking. Hill Fletcher describes the legacies of anti-Semitism and white supremacy that is embedded in the Christian theological tradition, and how such legacies demand a reevaluation of certain doctrines in Christianity that were previously unexamined. See Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 104–5.

Not only do these ecclesial metaphors inaccurately depict the dynamics of ecclesial sin, they also paint an incomplete picture of the church's holiness in relation to the realities of sin. When the church's holiness is compared to the virginity of a pure bride as preserved by the Holy Spirit,[50] the Holy Spirit takes on the role of the one who fearfully preserves the church from error and human failure.[51] This depiction precludes other roles of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church's sinful members and historically harmful doctrines that may be more needed in the church today: the prophetic spirit that moves the church toward repentance, the spirit of "dynamic unrest" that discerns the church's response to the signs of the times, and the spirit as the source and object of the church's ongoing discernment of an ever-unfolding revelation. When theologies of ecclesial sin only invoke the Holy Spirit as the one who preserves the virgin bride-like church from sin, the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a church that continues to reckon with sin and holiness is significantly undermined.

Who Is the Church? Sinful Woman, Chaste Whore

While theologies that emphasize ecclesial holiness often employ the holy mother/pure bride metaphor, other theologies that remedy such views give more attention to metaphors of the sinful woman. Metaphors of the church as a sinful woman need not be, and are often not, a separate metaphor from that of the pure bride. Rather, the two together form the casta meretrix or chaste whore imagery. Casta meretrix is used by several contemporary theologians to emphasize the unity of the two images of women as an alternative to the insistence on the church's absolute holiness. The church is simultaneously a sinful woman in need of salvation and a holy woman purified by Christ's forgiveness. Despite its holiness, such theologies conclude, the church is also coextensive with the sins of its members.

Among the most notable defenders of this view is Karl Rahner, whose 1951 essay "The Church of Sinners" and 1969 essay "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II" offer a theological foundation for an ecclesiology that acknowledges that the church itself is both sinful and holy. Rahner writes that it is a shattering "truth of faith" that this sinful church is one with the holy church proclaimed during the creed.[52] Rahner's ecclesiology builds upon his belief that this very church in the world—its histories, its people, its sins, and its holiness—is the church. "If she is something real, and if her members are sinners and as sinners remain members, then she herself is sinful," he writes of the church.[53] The church does not exist elsewhere in the ideal. To make this point in conversation with *Lumen Gentium*, his "Sinful Church" essay invokes the "woman of sin" imagery as one that is affirmed by the Old Testament, the

50. *LG*, §4.
51. This point is found also in Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1961) and echoed in Richard Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82.
52. Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," 260.
53. Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," 260.

Gospels, patristic theologians, and theologians of the Middle Ages as an insight into the church's sinfulness amid holiness.[54] Turning to both the holy mother and sinful woman metaphors, Rahner critiques any spirituality—both those that reject that the church can sin and those that are critical of the church's holiness—that cannot hold together the dual "figures of Church as virgin and woman of sin."[55]

In the conclusion of "Church of Sinners," Rahner offers a rereading of John 7:53–8:11, the gospel story of the woman accused of adultery, as a reflection on his theology of the holy and sinful church. In his rereading, the woman is accused of adultery and is unable to deny it. The predicament of the biblical woman and of the church is a "scandal" with "no extenuating circumstances."[56] Mapping onto the church the story of Christ's forgiveness of the accused woman in the Gospel story, Rahner writes in the concluding paragraph of the essay:

> She is the poor Church of sinners. Her humility, without which she would not be holy, knows only of her guilt. And she stands before him whose bride she is, before him who has loved her and sacrificed himself for her in order to make her holy, before him who knows her sins better than any of her accusers. But he remains silent. He writes her sin in the sands of the world's history, which will soon be wiped out and her sin with it. He remains silent for a short while which to us seems to be thousands of years. And he passes judgement on this woman only through the silence of his love which pardons and absolves. . . . And then he will stand erect and look upon this prostitute, his bride, and ask her, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" And she will answer with inexpressible repentance and humility, "No one, Lord." And she will be astonished and almost dismayed that no one has done so. But the Lord will come close to her and say, "Then neither shall I condemn you." He will kiss her forehead and murmur, "My bride, holy Church."[57]

Invoking the image of an adulterer-prostitute-bride whose sins are eventually wiped away by her loving bridegroom, Rahner returns to the casta meretrix metaphor used to describe the sins and holiness of the church. Although Rahner's theology of a church that sins offers new and necessary language to speak of the contemporary church, his concluding metaphor raises questions about the role that Christ plays in the sinful church in both present times and the eschatological horizon. Rahner acknowledges the gravity and impacts of the church's sins, yet offers only an image of Christ who wipes away these sins "in the sands of the world's history." The swift turn to divine forgiveness of the church as the only mode of Christ's interaction with his sinful church offers little consolation for those who are physically or spiritually harmed by the church's sins.

Overall, those in favor of a more honest ecclesiology that acknowledges the church's historical and ongoing wrongs will find resonance with Rahner's theology. In

54. Rahner, "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," 272–75.
55. Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," 267.
56. Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," 269.
57. Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," 269.

contemporary reflections on the church's harmful legacies, particularly in conversations surrounding clerical sex abuse, the phrase "a church of sinners" is frequently used, regardless of whether Rahner's theology is explicitly cited.[58] An honest recognition of ecclesial sin—along with theological biases and institutional flaws that contribute to such sin—is much needed for a church that continues to reconcile with its violent legacies amid its holiness. Acknowledging that sin is neither external to the church nor merely an attribute of individual members points to the theological possibility of genuine ecclesial repentance. But the conversation must not end there.

Who Is the Church? The Underside of Sin and the Han of the Church

Neither of the above stances on ecclesial sin seem to escape the dualistic feminine metaphors of either a sexually immoral woman or a holy mother/pure bride. Feminist theologians, including Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Susan Ross, have critiqued how the feminine metaphor of the church, coupled with its patriarchal leadership, "serves to symbolically exclude and obliterate real wo/men" and their presence in the church.[59] The metaphor of a church as bride to Christ the groom is not only rooted in a fundamental cultural presumption of women/wives as subordinate to men/husbands (as the church would be to Christ), but also continues to reinforce gender complementarity today.[60] The "chaste whore" ecclesial metaphor also echoes the virgin-whore dichotomy to which women are relegated in the Christian imagination, holding profound implications for the imagination of women in theological anthropology.[61]

No other biblical metaphor of a repentant or forgiven sinner, such as the repentant thief or prodigal son, has been used as widely as the "chaste whore" or the forgiven bride to describe the church of sinners. Whereas the majority of church apologies are for sins of colonization, violence, and anti-Semitism, the majority of theological metaphors that accompany such discussions of the church's holiness and sins remain bound to images of women's individual sexual sins. In the twenty-first-century church that wrestles with the crisis of sex abuse—a predominantly but not exclusively male-perpetrated sin against children and women—and the effects of institutional clericalist sexism, we must ask whether a feminine metaphor of sexual sin can and should continue to bear the symbolic burden of an ecclesiology of sin and holiness.

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58. See note 6 for examples of this in popular ecclesial usage.
59. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "We Are a Church—A Kingdom of Priests: Keynote Address," *Women's Ordination Worldwide*, July 22, 2005, http://womensordinationcampaign.org/ottawa-2005/2014/2/2/elizabeth-schussler-fiorenza-we-are-a-church-a-kingdom-of-priests.
60. Susan Ross, "Bridegroom and the Bride: The Theological Anthropology of John Paul II and Its Relation to the Bible and Homosexuality," in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and Joseph Andrew Coray (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 44.
61. Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985), 61.

I take these existing critiques a step further, beyond the issue of these theologians' paucity of imagination of metaphorical women. In other words, merely removing the gendered metaphors and retaining the essence of these theologies of ecclesial sin and holiness would not be sufficient. I am also not advocating for the total removal of metaphoric language in the theological imagination of church.[62] Instead, I consider how a multiplicity of metaphors for different ecclesial roles may serve to highlight previously obscured intra-ecclesial relations and dynamics of power. Rahner's theology of seeing the church as coextensive with its members' holiness and sins is a necessary yet insufficient step in the church's theological and pastoral journey of confronting its violent legacies and contemporary practices. In this logic, women (and all those on the underside of power) are only able to be imagined as either innocent from sexual sin, or sinners and adulterers themselves—but never victims of the sins of others. Existing theologies of ecclesial sin, whether those that emphasize the church's holiness or those that emphasize the church's coextensiveness with sin, have consistently sidelined the role of these victims of ecclesial sin in their imagination. To echo Andrew Sung Park's critique of traditional soteriology, such theology is ultimately "egocentric and oppressor-oriented,"[63] ending the conversation before the ecclesial role of the victims of sin and power can be considered.

Rereading Rahner's "Sinful Woman" through Han

A theological turn to han allows us to reread existing gendered metaphors of ecclesial sin in a new light that recenters the salvation and healing of the sinned against. Returning to Rahner's closing image of the woman accused of adultery from John 7:53–8:11[64] as metaphor of the church, I argue that reading the story through the lens of han—specifically the han of women—is more fitting than reading it only through the lens of sin and its forgiveness. What Rahner had missed in his reading of the woman accused of adultery is also what Balthasar missed in his monograph detailing the many biblical casta meretrices that image the church's sin and sanctity: that these stories of biblical and imagined women are not solely stories of sin and their forgiveness, but stories of women's han and their healing. Reading these stories of women through han does not negate the reality of sin nor invalidate existing readings of the text. Rather, it highlights the various intra-ecclesial power imbalances and the woundedness that came about as a result of human sin.

62. For a feminist theological justification of ecclesial metaphors, see Elyse J. Raby, "The Potential of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Ecclesiology," *Horizons* 49, no. 1 (June 2022): 49–78, https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2022.41.
63. Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 77.
64. John 7:52–8:11, also referred to as the *pericope adulterae*, is the subject of many debates and biblical scholarship due to its status as an interpolation added later to the Gospel of John. For an excellent comprehensive textual history of the *pericope adulterae* and its later liturgical usage, see Jennifer Wright Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

One-dimensional readings of the passage that focus only on the woman as sinner ignore the multidirectional interpersonal and therefore intra-ecclesial relationships that are present in the text. As biblical scholar Gail R. O'Day notes,[65] many interpretations of John 7:53–8:11 have been heavily influenced by Augustine's homily, which interprets the woman and Jesus as "a wretch and Mercy (*miseria et misericordia*)."[66] This Augustinian interpretation is echoed by Rahner's ecclesiological reading of the text. Such readings ignore the "triangularity of the text: that is, Jesus has two sets of conversation partners" in this text. By ignoring Jesus's conversation with the crowd of men in the text and focusing only on Jesus's forgiveness of the woman, the woman's story risks being isolated from other characters and the larger social context.[67]

The situation in the passage, contrary to Rahner's reading, is not a manifestation of sin and its natural consequences, but an event where a vulnerable woman is at risk of being killed by those who hold more sociopolitical and ecclesial power. Jesus appears to the woman when she is threatened with death by a crowd of men who accused her of adultery. The man involved in the same adultery is nowhere in sight and remains unmentioned in the crowd's accusations.[68] From the perspective of han, salvation for the woman in this situation is not mainly forgiveness, but Jesus's assurance of her survival and safety. Jesus's presence interrupts the violence to be perpetrated by the crowd against the woman, heals the woman from her shame, and saves her from imminent death. Jesus heals the han of the sinned-against woman accused of adultery and serves as a counter-witness to the (ecclesial) power structure that victimizes others in the name of just retribution for sin.

John 7:53–8:11 thus offers not one, but two, ecclesial images. The woman accused of adultery is indeed the church, as are Rahab, "Mary Magdalene the Sinner,"[69] and all the biblical women who are frequently invoked in the casta meretrix metaphor. But these women's stories are not stories of the sins of the church to be wiped away by Jesus the bridegroom, but rather, the han of and within the church.

The crowds and authorities in John 7:53–8:11 likewise compose an image of the church. The church is imaged by them as a powerful structure that has the both the desire to uphold law and justice, but also has the potential to inflict harm and death upon others. Jesus's salvific presence in this situation offers a new possibility of

65. Gail R. O'Day, "John 7:53–8:11: A Study in Misreading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 4 (1992): 634, https://doi.org/10.2307/3267436.

66. Augustine, "Homily XXXIII," in *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John and His First Epistle* (Oxford: John H. Parker, 1848), 1.477.

67. O'Day, "John 7:53–8:11," 636–38.

68. For a feminist critique of the missing men in biblical accounts of women accused of adultery, see Gail Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman Power and Sex in the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 148.

69. Here I quote directly from von Balthasar's "Casta Meretrix," where he misinterprets the figure of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. For a feminist critique of Balthasar's treatment of biblical women as prostitutes, from which this article draws, see Tina Beattie, "Sex, Death and Melodrama: A Feminist Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *The New Catholic Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 177–98.

freedom to these men, allowing them to "walk away from judgment and condemnation to the possibilities offered by acquittal and life."[70]

Rahner's reading of John 7:53–8:11 as an ecclesial metaphor misses that *both* the crowd of men and the woman are metaphors of the church. Together, they form a complex image of a church entangled with both human sin and han, its relational effects of woundedness. The structural sins that the men embody, the han of the accused woman, and the personal sins of all people are the church's very own sins, wounds, and holiness. A reading that calls to attention the han of the accused woman does not undermine the reality of sin (including the sin of the woman herself), but further emphasizes sin's real consequences on the sinner, God, the church, and the sinned against. Such a reading expands on the meaning of *Lumen Gentium*'s description that sin wounds the church, just as it expands upon who and what is constitutive of the church itself.[71]

This section began with critiques of various existing metaphors of the church for its limitations, but does not end with critique alone. It is ultimately a call for an expansion toward imagining the church using multitudes of imperfect ecclesial metaphors—rather than a rejection of these imperfect ecclesial metaphors all together—to speak of the intertwining presence of sinners and sinned against within a holy church.

Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Han

Ecclesial han draws our attention to the missing theological presence of those located on the underside of ecclesial sin: the victims of abuse, the colonized, the Indigenous, those enslaved by Catholic religious communities, and many others. In the same vein that the church's essence is not shielded from its members' sinful historical actions, the church also experiences the han of its members as the woundedness of the church itself. The heart of the church, a theology of ecclesial han proclaims, is coextensive with the woundedness of its most vulnerable members.

Speaking of a wounded church does not downplay the historical wrongs of the institutional church and its individual members, but instead recognizes the theological primacy of the sinned against *as* church. This recognition serves as a counter-witness to the worldly logic where those who have the most power within the church represent the face of the church. Just as the poor have a preferential option in the eyes of God, there too needs to be an ecclesiological recentering of the vulnerable, the oppressed, and those lacking in institutional power. This renewed emphasis on the underside of sin of and within the church—along with an honest recognition of ecclesial sin—reprioritizes the sinned against at the center of the institutional church's concerns.

An emphasis on ecclesial han is also not a claim that there are members of the church without sin, or members of the church who will always be the sinned against. While this article focuses on the church's historical wrongs where certain members of the church sin against others on account of race or other identity factors, ecclesial sin

70. O'Day, "John 7:53–8:11," 638.
71. *LG*, §11.

and han are also present in the ordinary life of the church in interpersonal and social relationships. This includes familiar forms of harm and exclusion within ecclesial spaces on account of race or gender, but also includes other everyday interpersonal conflict and harm. Sinners and sinned against are not permanent labels of identity, but fluid descriptors of relationality as members of the church move through complex relationships with one another. An ecclesiology that tends to the han of the church recognizes the members of the church need not just forgiveness by Christ through the church, but also other forms of grace such as the healing of broken relationships, the mending of social divisions between rich and poor, and the openness to justice that enables reconciliation.

To speak of ecclesial han as the wounds of the church is also not an attempt to glorify the victimhood and trauma of the church's most vulnerable members. Throughout much of church history, ecclesial practice and theological discourse often glorify the suffering of the vulnerable as a sign of their closeness to God, or laud forms of suffering caused by structural violence as a praiseworthy personal sacrifice for God on the part of the socially vulnerable. It may be easy for a theology of ecclesial han to follow the paths of these theologies and laud the suffering of the abused, the colonized, and the sinned against within the church as forms of suffering of the church that draws the church closer to God. Instead of allowing for a theology of ecclesial han to instrumentalize the sufferings of the ecclesial body, han and sin must be recognized as both ecclesial and sociohistorical realities.

Furthermore, ecclesial han is not just passive victimization and suffering, as Andrew Sung Park's delineation of the many manifestations of han beyond the English word "suffering," a word with heavy theological connotation, reminds. Just like the concept of han has collective, individual, passive, and active forms, ecclesial han manifests in divergent ways in different Catholic populations. For Catholics of color, racial trauma impacts them on a collective level as they experience structural racism both within and beyond their church communities. For the Indigenous Catholic communities whose story began this article, ecclesial han may look like the soul wound, an Indigenous psychological concept denoting the compounding effects of colonization on the Indigenous community's "soul, psyche, myth, dream, and culture."[72]

Ecclesial han at the individual-psychological level may look like religious trauma, a concept developed by sociologists and psychologists to refer to a broad range of traumatic experiences with one's religious community, religious dogma, or divine being that diminish one's capacity for participation in religious life.[73] The ecclesial han of religious trauma may manifest in terms of self-hatred, cynicism, distrust and

72. Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 26.

73. Michelle Panchuk, "Distorting Concepts, Obscured Experiences: Hermeneutical Injustice in Religious Trauma and Spiritual Violence," *Hypatia* 35, no. 4 (2020): 608, https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2020.32.

hatred of religious authority, and disaffiliation.[74] Although the US Catholic Church hierarchy today often speaks of the rising rate of religious disaffiliation in the United States and Europe as a sign of modern secularism, the framework of ecclesial han turns instead to the layered ecclesial sin and han that contribute to the choices of individuals, many of whom experience themselves as sinned against by the church, to disaffiliate. In his research on deconversion from Catholicism, J. Patrick Hornbeck describes anger, hurt, betrayal, shame, and grief as some of the key emotions experienced by those who choose to disaffiliate.[75] Religious disaffiliation and resentment at the church, under this light, are not simple pastoral problems caused by the secular world to be solved by church authority through evangelization. Rather, they are experiences of the fractured church in itself that demand theological attention[76] and genuine repentance of ecclesial sins and the healing of "the wounded heart" of the church. From Indigenous soul wounds to religious trauma of those who disaffiliate, examples of ecclesial han abound. These and other examples of ecclesial han deserve more theological attention in future research.

The question of ecclesial holiness remains. Under this ecclesial image which so emphasizes the church's own woundedness and sin, can we still proclaim the church as holy? Ecclesial holiness is not found in the church's sequestered pure essence, shielded from the historical church located within human history—a holy sinless mother who can only weep for her children's sins, following *Lumen Gentium*. Nor is ecclesial holiness simply the result of Christ's sweeping forgiveness at the end of times, following Rahner. Echoing my earlier insistence that the sufferings caused by ecclesial han are not manifestations of the faith and holiness of the church, I am likewise hesitant to claim that those who remained in the church despite experiencing abuse or violence are exemplars of long-suffering holiness.

To speak of a holy church today is to recognize the divergent and dynamic ways that the Holy Spirit works in various levels of the church. The holiness of the church is not an essence that is preserved, but a living holiness that grows when right relations between sinner and sinned against are reestablished. To speak of a holy church today is to speak of those who seek healing for themselves and their marginalized communities, the openness to reconciliation, the repentance of sinners, and concrete works of reparations done by the church in light of its legacies of violence. To speak of a holy church today is to speak of the fact that what is impossible and even scandalous in

74. Caryle Murphy, "Half of US Adults Raised Catholic Have Left the Church at Some Point," *Pew Research Center*, September 15, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/09/15/half-of-u-s-adults-raised-catholic-have-left-the-church-at-some-point; for a theological account of Catholic disaffiliation, see Tom Beaudoin and J. Patrick Hornbeck II, "Deconversion and Ordinary Theology: A Catholic Study," in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013).

75. J. Patrick Hornbeck, "Deconversion from Roman Catholicism: Mapping a Fertile Field," *American Catholic Studies* 122, no. 2 (2011): 4.

76. This echoes Hornbeck and other theologians' call for "theologically affirmative" accounts of deconversion. See Hornbeck, "Deconversion from Roman Catholicism," 24.

human society is made possible by the Holy Spirit in the church: that the church still remains as an ecclesial body, oriented toward eschatological wholeness, despite its woundedness by sin and han. The church's holiness—the church's radical otherness as the Body of Christ and not a purely sociological institution—is present in the very paradox of impossible communion between sinners and sinned against in the same ecclesial body, as each are moved by God's mercy in different ways toward healing and wholeness.

Conclusion: Beyond a Church of Sinners and Saints

The concept of ecclesial han, despite its usefulness in shedding light on the lacuna of the underside of ecclesial sin, finds its limits at the limits of the church. Ecclesiology cannot go where it does not belong. The urgency of ecclesial repentance and reparations for ecclesial wrongs against non-Christians, especially the Jewish people and non-Christian Indigenous people, cannot be overstated. However, the relational consequences of ecclesial sin in such situations cannot be quickly swept under the concept of ecclesial han without inadvertently subsuming non-Christians into the church's identity. Reconciliation and healing of the relationship with these communities require a larger and different theological conversation. This article's suggestion of the concept of ecclesial han speaks mainly to those who are baptized members of the church, including those whose historical conversion to Christianity occurred under conditions of colonization, and how their ecclesial agency can be reasserted in conversations on ecclesial sin and the church's need for repentance.

Ecclesial han addresses the historical lack of imagination regarding the church's multidimensional relationship to Jesus Christ. By extension, it provides additional language to our theological imagination of women's bodies and all bodies located on the underside of structural power, reminding us that their theological and social experiences often lie beyond a simple binary of sin and holiness. As much as contemporary theological clarifications of the possibility of ecclesial sin are crucial to the church's further acknowledgment of its complicity in historical and contemporary wrongs, an image of church as both sinful and holy—but nothing more—is not enough. Ecclesial han must be recognized as the wounds of the church itself and be incorporated into theological discussions of the church's participation in structures of sin. A recognition of ecclesial han enables ecclesial conversations to center the healing of and justice for victim-survivors, thus preventing these conversations from devolving into self-centered defenses of the church's reputation of holiness despite scandal and sin. The heart of the church, under this light, does not need to be safeguarded from the impacts of human sin, for it is already wounded by sin as its most vulnerable members have been. It is my hope that this new ecclesiological image raises different theological and pastoral questions as the church continues to exist in the world as both sinner and sinned against.[77]

77. I am grateful to Steven Battin and Todd Walatka for their generous willingness to read and discuss multiple previous drafts of this article, as well as to the editors and the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript who provided valuable feedback.

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