

## **An Island Retreat: Sin, Secrecy, and the Offshoring of Sexually Abusive Priests**

A public lecture by Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, University of Toronto

Introductions by Prof. Marie Griffith and Prof. Mark Valeri, both Washington University in St. Louis

Knight Hall Emerson Auditorium at Washington University in St. Louis

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7:00 -- 8:30 PM

### **Griffith:**

Greetings everyone and welcome to tonight's lecture by Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, sponsored by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. I'm Marie Griffith, center director, and I'm delighted once more to see all of you here in this room and also to welcome the significantly larger crowd of those of you who are zooming in from home. So welcome to everyone, both here and there. The question has come to us of why we would host an event on what many Christians deem to be Holy Thursday and the subtext may be why this particular event, since it's bound to be critical of dimensions of the Catholic church's leadership and I just want to respond to that and say that we did not intend to hold this on a religious holiday. With classes in session, other university happenings as normal, and just the challenges of travel schedules, it simply happened. So, upon reflection, I'll also add what holier task is there than shedding light on harms and wrongs that need healing and redress, especially in the institution so many hold dear. So that, in part, is what tonight is about. So, I want to thank all of you, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, for taking time on this particular evening to join us here. We have one final event this semester next Tuesday evening, April 19<sup>th</sup>, we welcome journalist Mark Oppenheimer to speak about his book *Squirrel Hill: The Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting and the Soul of a Neighborhood* and that will also be at seven o'clock in the evening in this same room and also on Zoom. Further information is available out there on the welcome table and on our website and we hope many of you will also join us for this event. And now it's my pleasure to invite my colleague Mark Valeri to the podium to introduce our distinguished speaker. Mark is the Reverend Priscilla Wood Neaves distinguished professor of religion and politics in the John C. Danforth Center and he also serves as the interim director of Religious Studies. Prior to joining the center, he served as the Ernest Trice Thompson Professor of church history at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond. He is a renowned and prolific scholar of the early modern Atlantic world with specializations in religion and social thought, reformation theology and the political history of Calvinism, Puritanism, and Enlightenment moral philosophies. Mark.

### **Valeri:**

Good evening. It is my privilege to introduce to you Kevin Lewis O'Neill. He is the director for the Center of Diaspora and Transnational Studies and professor in the department for the study of religion at the University of Toronto. He has become one of our leading anthropologists of religion in the Americas, known for his ethnographic persistence, theoretical insight, and elegant prose. He has shown us, moreover, what it is for a scholar to plunge into the most troublesome issues of our day with courage and grace, providing wisdom along with academic expertise. I first became aware of his work in the year 2010 when he applied to become a member of the Young Scholars in American Religion program in Indianapolis and I learned right from the start that he was one of the more intense and creative scholars of religion in modern society whom I

have ever known. His work is characterized by startlingly frank and yet judicious descriptions, theoretical sophistication yet an empathetic disposition, critique of current policy without a patronizing moralism. His writings, and I say this without exaggeration, are filled with descriptions of secrecy, and danger, and escape, and violence. They address fraught issues and uncover the worst of our human natures, yet they are self-effacing, or at least self-disclosing, as well. They are humanistic in their approach, a rare achievement for such a heralded social scientist. They are, in a word, humane, and they well deserve our attention. His books, all of them widely reviewed, have earned warm praise and nominations for major book awards, these include *The Art of Captivity: A Study and Exhibit of Photographic Images from the War on Drugs in Central America*, co-authored with Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela, *Hunted: Predation and Pentecostalism in Guatemala: an Ethnographic Study of Drug Rehabilitation Practices by Churches In Central America*, and *Secure the Soul: Christian Piety and Gang Prevention in Guatemala*. In addition, he is the editor of *Atelier: Ethnographic Inquiry in the Twenty-First Century*, a book series with the University of California Press. He is the author, also, of numerous important essays, many of which offer new theoretical readings on topics such as death, national security, Leviness and ethnography, and Catherine Bell. And he is currently working on a project with the provocative title “Evasion: A Study of Clerical Sexual Abuse.” So please, I’m so glad to have you back in your native St. Louis, Kevin, and please welcome him as he shares his talk “An Island Retreat.”

**O’Neill:**

That was very generous, thank you Mark. Thanks everyone for being here, as well as to Marie for the invitation and Debra for organizing the trip and making sure everything has run so smoothly. It’s fantastic to be here in St. Louis, which is, you know, where I’m from. We can do the high school thing afterwards at the reception. But it’s also just great to be in person. This is my first talk in a couple of years given the pandemic, so it’s just lovely to engage. Two things that I did want to mention before starting are just two quick notes. I mean, one, I’ve had a great opportunity to speak with the faculty here at the center, which has involved a number of kind of walks around campus, and for someone who was raised here and grew up, it’s just something to note that the change of this university over thirty years has been profound, I mean, in its stature and its prowess and its ambition. It’s something to note, and it may be happening so, kind of, slowly or quickly that you may not totally realize it, but it is incredibly impressive. Part of that, I think, is an investment in humanities, as we see with the Danforth Center as an important part of this process of growth. The second is just a word of thanks, in a way. One of the joys of giving a public talk is to imagine the audience that you will address, and I genuinely cannot imagine a better audience, both in terms of the Center, and the scholars and what they are engaged in right now, but as well as St. Louis and the incredible center of activism that has been here for so many years. And so, just the opportunity to imagine this talk here has, for me, advanced the project and the ideas in really fantastic ways, so thank you. The project, so as Mark mentions, I’m an anthropologist who has worked for twenty years in Central America, particularly in Guatemala on a number of different themes, mostly around religion and politics, I am currently working on a pair of projects on clerical sexual abuse. Two different book projects. We can talk maybe in the Q and A of how that transition took place; largely it took place because through my ethnographic field work in Central America, I would routinely come across either the survivors of clerical sexual abuse or stories of predatory priests, and those priests came from the United States. It’s a

part of the clerical history of Latin America, is a movement from North to South. And so, from those conversations emerge two projects, one that I'm writing, and that's moving quite quickly, is on a single person named David Roney from the Diocese of New Ulm. He had a prolifically abusive career in Minnesota, was sent to New Mexico for the institutions that I'll talk about today, and eventually ended up in Guatemala for a decade. And so, a very close look at the itinerary of this particular priest, and through that close look, looking at some of the patterns and movements that have typified transnational clerical sex abuse. The second project, related to the first, is more of a global history of clerical sex abuse. And this today is an excerpt from that. In many ways, I think the conceptual fulcrum of what I'm talking about when I'm thinking about a global history of clerical sex abuse. These two projects...This will be an excerpt...I guess just a very kind of quick note, I do address clerical sexual abuse, it's referenced, just for your awareness, there is no description or specific conversation about instances of it. This is a historical account of responses to it, just in case, for those in the audience or those watching at home. The talk itself, for those pacing yourselves emotionally, there are five major parts on the lefthand side: Islands, Sought, Bought, Sold, World. Those will kind of kick in after a brief introduction and they'll be highlighted to tell you where we are in the talk. Otherwise, thank you very much for being here. "It were better they had not been born." Father Gerald Fitzgerald wrote in 1957. Cantankerous on a good day, this hard-nosed Roman Catholic priest was furious, and for good reason. A decade earlier, Fitzgerald had founded a religious order known as the Servants of the Paraclete to assist clerics struggling with alcohol abuse and crises of faith, but his renewal center, which he built atop a rambling expanse of New Mexico desert, soon began receiving priests who had been accused of sexually abusing minors. As the latter began to outnumber the former, Fitzgerald worried about what he should do with the most incorrigible of these men, with those unable to stop, in his own words, "sinning repeatedly with little children." He prayed for the impossible—for God to erase their very existence—but Fitzgerald also pursued what he considered to be the most logical solution to the problem of the so-called "problem priests." Quote, "it is for this class of rattlesnake," Fitzgerald wrote to the Archbishop of Santa Fe, "that I have always wished an Island retreat." Between 1952 and 1968, the Servants of the Paraclete sought, bought, and finally sold, several small islands in the Caribbean for Roman Catholic priests incapable of managing, in the words of Fitzgerald, "abnormalities of sex." They considered one near Tortola, the largest of the British Virgin Islands. Another set off the coast of Curaçao, and a third was a short boat ride away from Barbados. The intention of each was unambiguous—to set these sinners out to sea. "These men are devils," Fitzgerald wrote, "and the wrath of God is upon them." But the pursuit and eventual purchase of these islands also allowed Fitzgerald and his successors to develop increasingly sophisticated techniques of transnational criminal evasion. This began by leveraging regimes with extraterritoriality, littoral enclaves with underdeveloped legal systems and low rates of conviction. But then it expanded into an international network of church-run sex therapy centers located throughout the United States, as well as England, Italy, Mexico, Scotland, the Philippines, France, Vietnam, and multiple sites in Africa and Latin America. My talk this evening details the Servants of the Paracletes' mid twentieth century efforts at offshoring sexually abusive priests in and eventually beyond the Caribbean, exploring how and to what effect the U.S. church sought to secure transnational lines of flight for some of its most prolific

abusers. It's an historical account that encourages scholars and activists alike to rethink the geography of clerical sexual abuse. There is, today, a generally agreed-upon history that Bishops throughout the United States transferred priests between parishes. Reports of similar tactics have also surfaced in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and much of Europe. While this focus on inter-parish clerical transfers has proven effective at demonstrating, to both juries and the general public, some of the church's more pernicious maneuvers, this research has nonetheless been rather parochial in scope, and not just in an ecclesiastical sense. Nearly absent from the conversation is any account of how US priests moved or were moved across international borders to evade suspicion and at times, prosecution. Neither has there been much mention of an island for wayward clerics. And yet the geographical footprint of clerical sexual abuse is as global as the Roman Catholic Church, with entrepreneurial priests such as Fitzgerald routinely traveling beyond the bounds of their own ecclesiastical territories to identify enclaves of ambiguous authority. Thus, a history of the Servants of the Paraclete and its purchase of the Caribbean Island is a first and important step, not just in writing a global history of clerical sexual abuse, but also in rendering the transnational scale of this phenomenon thinkable. Fitzgerald founded the Servants of the Paraclete in 1947 with the best of intentions. Take it upon himself to fill what he considered to be an ecclesiastical void. The Roman Catholic Church at the time made no provisions for priests who proved themselves unable to serve in their role, and said those who lost their way, be it from alcoholism or a crisis of faith, ran the risk of not only falling out of favor with the church but also failing to achieve eternal salvation. This affront to clerical dignity upset Fitzgerald so much that he petitioned bishops to support what he would later describe as the "M.A.S.H. unit of the Roman Catholic Church." With the backing of the archbishop of Santa Fe and some funds from Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, Fitzgerald purchased an expansive plot of land in New Mexico, upon which sat the ruins of a Franciscan monastery and an abandoned hotel. There, Fitzgerald ran "guest priests," as he called them, through a gauntlet of spiritual exercises that would come to be known among clerics as "The Program." The program enjoyed immediate and unanticipated levels of success. By 1950, priests from 35 dioceses and nine religious orders had filled Fitzgerald's center well past capacity. Within this rather motley crew of clerics, Fitzgerald quickly spotted what he considered to be two classes of priests. The first was clearly capable of redemption. Some of them even seemed to benefit from the existential struggles of sin. "Surely, St. Peter was a better confessor by reason of his fall," Fitzgerald once wrote, "and St. Augustin by reason of his former life." But Fitzgerald had far less hope in a second class of priests, a veritable rogue's gallery, whom he described with a wandering constellation of moral judgments. "Aberrations," "defections," and "diseases." Given that their defining characteristic was a proclivity for "sins with the young," Fitzgerald knew that their presence at his center placed local children in danger. Yet he often seemed far more concerned for the wellbeing of the Roman Catholic Church. As early as 1952, nearly a half century before the Vatican would formally acknowledge the problem of clerical sexual abuse, Fitzgerald wrote to a bishop in Nevada to warn his colleague that allowing these men to quote "Wander from Diocese to Diocese would contribute to scandal, or at least the approximate danger of scandal." Fitzgerald thus insisted that the second class of priests should be removed from society, since he feared that "this extreme type will never be converted." The practical logistics of this exile evolved over the years. His first proposal, which proved to be terribly

naïve, was that the desert location of his center in New Mexico would suffice. Part of the place's charm, after all, was what Fitzgerald saw as its rugged isolation. But guest priests, as part of the program, would often hear confessions and celebrate mass at area churches and on the nearby Indian Reservations. Even this limited amount of pastoral contact was enough for some to sow sexually abusive relationships. This prompted Fitzgerald to imagine a slightly more carceral setting, one in which these "unfortunate priests" would be secured "within the protection of monastery walls." But house arrest seemed too rickety a response to such diabolically industrious men, which is why Fitzgerald's imagination then landed on "a mountain refuge far apart from civilization." And though the mountain idea eventually fell away, the notion of a refuge stuck, with Fitzgerald settling on what he thought was a foolproof plan to protect children, punish priests, and avoid scandal: an island retreat in the Caribbean. Fitzgerald, to be sure, was not the only mid-century executive with an interest in the Caribbean. There was, at the time, something of a rush on the region as the British Empire came to an end. The Caribbean's many advantages included proximity to the United States, economies pegged to the pound sterling, and a recognized degree of political stability. But just as appealing was the fact that most Caribbean countries at the time were strapped for cash. Decolonization had prompted several businesses to liquidate and remove their assets from the region. To generate new lines of revenue, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, Bermuda, and Antigua, to name only a few, created tax havens to lure capital back. They offered multinational corporations minimal rates of taxation, the near absence of capital control, and attenuated banking regulations. The plan worked in that these financial instruments attracted capital, but one of the unintended consequences was that the Caribbean soon became something of a laboratory for the development of a wide range of avoidance and offshoring practices. Some better-known examples include free trade zones, extraterritorial markets, and flexible labor laws, but there was also a raft of social experiments that self-consciously took advantage of the Caribbean's widely advertised lack of government oversight. Fitzgerald's island for inveterate priests was one such experiment. His exploitation of the emerging offshore world was oriented in large part towards juridical arbitrage. But this pursuit was also a way for him to make a theological argument about the practical governance of souls. The Roman Catholic Church at the time was also engaged in its own process of liberalization. This tended to center on matters of church and state, with bishops throughout the Americas navigating a thicket of property disputes. But it also included a reconsideration of Christian renewal. In this debate, Fitzgerald proved to be a pessimist. Some sinners, he insisted, could not change, thus the island. But Fitzgerald's eventual successor, a broad-shouldered priest named Joseph McNamara was an unrepentant optimist about psychology's promise to heal, not save, priests from sickness, not sin. It was ultimately this optimism that would not only force Fitzgerald to eventually sell his islands, but would also set the conditions for a worldwide network of sex therapy centers that would diagnose, treat, and redeploy clerics. None of this would have been possible, however, without the pursuit and eventual purchase of Fitzgerald's island. "It is not lust but pride that is the fundamental root of your difficulty," Fitzgerald wrote a priest in 1948. Hobbled by intimacies with the youth, the cleric in question had asked Fitzgerald if he could take up residence with the Servants of the Paraclete in New Mexico. But Fitzgerald would not have it. There was no more room for one: in his letter, Fitzgerald paints a picture of priests occupying nearly every square inch of the

compound. They're crammed into bedrooms, sleeping on patios, and huddled in cabins. But Fitzgerald also seemed to think that the center was too flimsy a setting for a priest with such desires. "It would never do, in view of your problem, to have you here," he explained. The perimeter of the compound had no walls, the doors did not lock, and there were too many children nearby. "All I can suggest to you," Fitzgerald added, "would be to go somewhere you will not be known." But before the priest could follow this advice, by surreptitiously moving throughout his career from parish to parish, Fitzgerald set a clear intention. Quote, "I hope in the not-too distant future to have an island where this particular problem can be dealt with in a manner which is not possible here in a house of this nature." Very little of Fitzgerald's intention for the island appears to have been punitive. He never tried to hide his contempt for these men, for what he described as their "lack of priestly self-discipline," but Fitzgerald seems largely unfamiliar with the writings of Franz Kafka. Nothing suggests a penal colony for priests. Fitzgerald also appears indifferent to Daniel Defoe and his fictional account of self-mastery so complete that it would become a civilizing force. Instead, when Fitzgerald suggests that an island would allow these men to quote "learn the truth of their own nothingness," he uses a language of refuge and retreat in a manner that calls to mind what Roland Barthes describes as anachoresis, a separation from the world that's affected by going back up to some isolated, private, secret, distant place. Classic examples include hermits, ascetics, and monks. But consider Fitzgerald's insistence that given the right setting, even quote "the fallen priest is yet capable of resurrection." For Fitzgerald, the right setting would be an island that could materially but also spiritually wrench men from this world. Truth be told, though, Fitzgerald also wanted out of this world, at least its bureaucracy, and an island seemed as good of a plan as any. He was, without a doubt, a terribly disorganized administrator, a man challenged at a seemingly existential level by the rigors of record-keeping. He certainly had the entrepreneurial pluck to develop the Servants of the Paraclete into a worldwide organization, but his books were a mess. By 1964, the Bishop of Santa Fe emulated the increasing bureaucratization of the post-war economy by ordering Fitzgerald to document the intake of guest priests, compile legible case files, and accurately record the outtake of each man, but none of this seemed to interest Fitzgerald. Instead, he daydreamed of an island absolutely bereft of paperwork where priests only arrived and never left. All the while, Fitzgerald hoped that this island could stave off what he saw as the advance of modern psychology. Its growing popularity among church leaders infuriated him. Routinely rejecting the disease-concept of addiction, Fitzgerald argued that the priests in his care could not be quote unquote "cured" of their problems because these vicious habits were not sicknesses so much as weaknesses. Redemption only comes, he preached, with a bootstrapping kind of devotion. Constructing clerical sex abuse into a problem that only an island could solve, Fitzgerald fixated on what he considered to be a misalignment of the human will. These men were disordered, he insisted. And individuals born of sin can only seek salvation by diligently submitting to the rigors of the Roman Catholic Church. "The will must capitulate to God," he wrote. "The intellect must be captivated by the thought of Him." But the most perfidious of these priests of these priests compulsively shirked their obligations by choosing illicit pleasures over hard-earned piety. Deceived by the devil and thus ensnared by sin, these men did not need a diagnosis nor did they need treatment. Instead, they would only benefit from a distant, effectively inescapable retreat where they could right themselves for the Lord. Thus, psychology

for Fitzgerald was not just bad science but more urgently an affront to the Church's teachings. Quote, "if a priest's compulsions are something he is not morally responsible for, both in their initiation and continuance," he wrote, "then calvary becomes delusion, redemption, worn-out-force." It is no wonder, then, that Fitzgerald imagined this island not only as a refuge for delinquent priests, but also as a beach-head for an unholy war. Fundamentally, he reasoned "the whole concept of the dignity of human entity is at stake." Barthes would certainly have approved of Fitzgerald's battlefield, or at least how Fitzgerald imagined the island retreat, a verdant, unoccupied mass within eyesight of the mainland. Simple, rustic cabins that echoed the ascetic qualities of a monk's cell, and tracks of arable land that allowed priests to pursue a contemplative amount of manual labor. Church bells would mark canonical hours and the start of daily mass, yet the key devotional activity would be perpetual eucharistic adoration. This is the practice of placing the consecrated host onto an altar so that the faithful can prostrate themselves before what Fitzgerald understood to be the real presence of Jesus Christ. There, he writes, "alone with God, exposed as it were to God, the sacred heart of Jesus can work directly on the soul of the priest with the unique attraction of divine law." Yet although Fitzgerald painted a saintly vision of retreat as a merciful solution to a terrible problem, it was also, and would forever remain, a complete fantasy, because the prospects of purchasing such a place proved to be just short of impossible. Fitzgerald wrote to the archbishop of Santa Fe in 1957 about a priest whom he'd like to quote "ship out of here." Unable to quote "handle his oddities and keep him in line," Fitzgerald pined for a quote "place in the West Islands where the Servants of the Paraclete could keep this particular priest out of circulation." Having just planned a missionary trip to Puerto Rico, Fitzgerald suggested to the archbishop that he might purchase an island in the Caribbean quote "where we can utilize the priests who have a problem." The letter seems to suggest that Fitzgerald thought the task to be relatively straightforward, but acquiring an island, he would soon learn, was easier said than done, not least because islands are not made to order. They vary so dramatically in terms of size, shape, and location, that the process of procuring just the right property took years. It also forced Fitzgerald to define more clearly the very priest that he so desperately wanted to isolate. Fitzgerald's idea of an island had always been a vague solution to an imprecise problem until he put boots on the ground. Father Joseph Moylan and Brother Edward Fitzgerald, both Servants of the Paraclete, reporting to the more senior Fitzgerald, landed in the British Virgin Islands in 1960. They spent more than a year serving a parish in Tortola, but they devoted most of their attention toward the search for a proper island. They even bought a boat and a horse to access remote areas, but the real problem was not accessibility so much as stock. Nearly every island in the area had its limitations and nothing seemed sufficient. Pelican Island, for example, could have been an interesting option: it has sheer cliffs that plunge into the sea, but the same crags that effectively turned this haven into a cage also make it exceedingly difficult for supply boats to dock safely with any kind of consistency. Norman Island, a low-lying landmass that inspired Robert Lewis Stevenson to write *Treasure Island* is also bucolic but nonetheless incapable of providing enough crops to sustain a community. Then there was Culpepper Island. This is a lonely rock located in the Atlantic Ocean and too, could have met their needs, but its proximity to Barbados was worrisome. During low tide, one need only to wade thirty meters to reach the mainland. Now, Joseph Moylan and Edward Fitzgerald were not finicky men. They could have lived on any one of these islands

piously keeping canonical hours. But their inability to imagine the priests in question doing the same says something about how they imagined the very problem that they set out to solve. While Gerald Fitzgerald would routinely lament the existence of these priests, calling them vipers and suggesting that they were damned, he and his colleagues also imbued them with such superhuman appetites that sheer cliffs seemed like a good idea. So, too, did the self-sustaining homestead in case the Servants of the Paraclete ever had to abandon the island and the men on it. Most telling may have been the quote “red lights of warning” that flashed for Joseph Moylan and Edward Fitzgerald when they realized just how close Culpepper Island is to Barbados. Even after taking into account the turbulence of the Atlantic Ocean and how dangerous the rocky footing is between the island and the mainland, they could still see in their minds’ eyes priests so blinded by their lust for children that they would battle the coastline for a chance to stalk the streets of Barbados. This vision of the insatiable, unrepentant soul is also why the Servants of the Paraclete scoured the Caribbean rather than Indonesia or even the Arctic for an island. In practice, Gerald Fitzgerald could have sent these priests anywhere in the world. He would soon have renewal centers on nearly every continent from Asia to Africa to Latin America. But Fitzgerald wanted these men to disappear, and in the 1950s and 1960s, the Caribbean offered the opportunity to do just that. With tax havens and free trade zones, for sure, but also with an unsettled sense of jurisdiction. Joseph Moylan and Edward Fitzgerald were aware of Flannigan Island, for example. And it, too, piqued their interest. No more than a half mile long and a quarter mile wide, this rocky outcrop has jagged contours and patches of green grass. But its appeal had much more to do with the fact that the island fell between the claimed maritime boundaries of the British Virgin Islands and the US Virgin Islands. While no one thought that the place existed in international waters, making it subject to a then-vague sense of the law of the sea, it was clear that this confusion over sovereignty would allow the Servants of the Paraclete to take advantage of discrepancies between legal jurisdictions, especially if a government ever wanted to extradite one of their guest priests. In the end, bureaucratic difficulties scuttled the Servants of the Paracletes' attempt to purchase Flannigan Island. Their pursuit of several other islands also met a similar end, but Gerald Fitzgerald was undeterred. For years to come, he would write Bishops throughout the Caribbean asking whether any of them had an island for sale. Many of his requests were openly bigoted, proposing a quote “place for homos,” while others proved to be far more tactical. In one, Fitzgerald laments quote “the extreme spiritual poverty of South and Central America,” and proposes that an island of this kind could serve as quote “a stepping stone to Latin countries.” A gateway through which abusive priests could move from the United States to Latin America. Over time, several bishops responded, and while Fitzgerald would go back and forth with the archbishop of San Juan, Puerto Rico about one opportunity, he eventually struck a claim on a small landmass located just off the island of Curacao within the diocese of Grenada. Home to an abandoned hotel, albeit one damaged by fire, this island cost the Servants of the Paraclete fifty thousand US dollars. Gerald Fitzgerald had always been slow to accept that islands are never as remote as they may first seem, and this is somewhat surprising. For a cleric so concerned with church scandal, his direct correspondence with Pope Paul the sixth openly worried about the public relations threat of what he called “habitual sin.” It’s curious that Fitzgerald never thought that an island for sexually abusive priests might itself become a liability for the Roman Catholic Church, that a journalist might one day stumble upon the island and



publish a story under a salacious headline like “Club Head.” Some of Fitzgerald’s confidence clearly came from a growing consensus about the Caribbean, both within and beyond the financial world. In 1950, the Miami Herald published the first of what would become several mentions of something called “the Bermuda Triangle,” a mysterious stretch of ocean where ships, aircraft, and people vanished without a trace. But Fitzgerald should have been able to see past popular culture to appreciate the Caribbean’s quickly changing social ecology. While Joseph Moylan and Edward Fitzgerald searched for an island retreat, they encountered a growing number of tourists. Captains of industry also routinely outbid them. Little Thatch, for example, is a privately owned island in the British Virgin Islands and it, too, would have made for an ideal setting, but its listing price had jumped to five hundred thousand US by the time Gerald Fitzgerald engaged its owner. Quote “the up in price” caught him completely off guard. It is no wonder, then, that many within the Roman Catholic Church began to consider Fitzgerald to be out of touch, not simply with the Caribbean, but also with the church. The island that his religious order now owned rested atop several assumptions, but none as curious as his belief that he would avert the influence of modern psychology. This “soft science,” according to Fitzgerald, ignored the soul and its immortal core. It also pointed to sickness, rather than sin, as the primary cause of deviant behavior. All of this offended Fitzgerald. “Why save men,” he once huffed, “if what they need is medical treatment?” Fitzgerald, by contrast, emphasized a weakness of will and he organized his renewal centers accordingly. Back in New Mexico, safely ensconced in the desert, he maintained that his program for priests was spiritual rather than psychological, and he staffed his facility as such. Not a single staff member had a graduate degree in psychology, psychiatry, or social work, and his plan for the island retreat would double down on this commitment by placing these troubled cases quote “under the direction of a couple of saintly priests.” Eucharistic adoration would be the fix. Church leadership grew increasingly concerned and the archbishop of Santa Fe eventually wrote Fitzgerald directly. Quote, “I agree with your idea of working quietly and perseveringly with this problem,” the archbishop wrote in 1964. There was no question that Fitzgerald had pioneered the pastoral care of priests and that he had also identified clerical sexual abuse as one of the church’s most pivotal problems. The archbishop also clearly appreciated Fitzgerald; there was real admiration between the two men, but the archbishop needed Fitzgerald to resolve any theological tensions that he might have felt between the care of the soul and a scientific approach to the mind. As Fitzgerald well knew, a vibrant generation of priests had begun to deploy neo-scholastic modes of philosophical inquiry to overcome any boundaries that might have existed between modern psychology and Catholic thought, with a field of ministry called Pastoral Psychology gaining popularity across the United States. The archbishop pressed Fitzgerald to likewise embrace the virtues of science but Fitzgerald wanted none of it, insisting that his island would be a bastion of respect and repair for the soul. This impasse between faith and reason ended up casting Fitzgerald as a literary trope: the shipwrecked man surviving for years on a distant, remote island while the rest of the world moves apace without him. In all subsequent correspondences between them, the archbishop addresses Fitzgerald with a tone usually reserved for those who must be shocked to attention, as if he were a bearded survivor who had been, even if only metaphorically, lost at sea for a time. Because when the archbishop of Santa Fe writes Fitzgerald in 1965, he presents an exceedingly clear set of directives on how to proceed with the island, and then with the Servants of the

Paraclete. His eight orders are unqualified. The second demands that Fitzgerald quote “sell the island which you recently purchased.” Numbers four through seven name his replacements and number eight commands him to report to Rome immediately. The archbishop then repeats himself, quote “to leave no doubt in our minds that we mean what we say and say what we mean.” Turned from castaway to castoff, Fitzgerald must have felt betrayed. The religious order he founded had just been taken away from him because he insisted that troubled priests could find quote “salvation in the mercy of Jesus Christ.” The transition was swift. Once the archbishop of Santa Fe removed Fitzgerald as superior, he installed Father Joseph McNamara, a vocal advocate for lay therapy programs. McNamara’s faith in psychology opens onto a vast history of biopolitics, one far too intricate to address here, but suffice it to say that McNamara quickly began working with local psychologists, hired resident psychiatrists, and by 1976, offered a holistic approach to spiritual rehabilitation that largely mirrored the work of sexual disorder clinics found in secular settings. From afar, this transition from sin to sickness must have read like progress. But it had profound consequences. Understood against the backdrop of the global church and an equally global pattern of sexual abuse, McNamara’s commitment to psychology made possible diabolical levels of deceit, to which the potential liability of Fitzgerald’s island pales in comparison. Buried inside McNamara’s warm embrace, the clinic or the colony was something of a shrug. Why would the Servants of the Paraclete need an island, it asked, when they had the world? Gerald Fitzgerald, truth be told, had as much access to the world in an absolute sense, as Joseph McNamara. The two men just imagined this world very differently. Believing in the power of the blessed sacrament and its capacity to align the human will with the glory of God, Fitzgerald conjured a world populated by two classes of priests: one redeemable, and the other not. One capable of Christian renewal in the desert prairies of New Mexico, and the other not. The world that Fitzgerald imagined also neatly divided into two classes of place: rigidly governed by the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical territory with dioceses and archdioceses obediently structuring a recognizable horizon of accountability. There were those places in Fitzgerald’s world that existed on the grid, so to speak, and those that did not. Given just how much modern psychology offered Fitzgerald in the era of emerging offshore economies, it’s not entirely surprising that he spent so much of his career trying to maroon the second class of priest atop the second class of place; to push sexually abusive men off the grid. Quote “if a priest is willing to accept protection in his weakness,” Fitzgerald wrote the Vatican in 1962, “this aid to salvation in the mercy of Christ should be made available to him.” Joseph McNamara, in contrast, actively deconstructed Fitzgerald’s world of binary oppositions. Through the power and glory of Carl Jung just as much as Jesus Christ, the Servants of the Paraclete under the direction of McNamara quickly came to the conclusion that there is really only one class of priest, rather than two. Even the most predatory of men can be redeployed, he reasoned, because sickness, not sin, prompts psychologists, not clerics, to heal, not save, these unfortunate men whom Fitzgerald once described as suffering from quote “an abnormal abusive nature.” One of McNamara’s defining acts as servant general, in fact, was to hire the psychologist Dr. Johnny Salazar as an alternative to the island. “These priests,” Salazar later noted, “were thinking about just shipping these men off to a Caribbean island.” Salazar clearly did not think much of this plan. “I believe that treatment is the answer,” he insisted, “rather than have a prison for priests on some exotic island.” Implicit in all this posturing was the idea that there really is only one class of place in the

world, rather than two. Nothing and no one is ever entirely off the grid, not even a priest stranded on an island. Yet for all their differences in theology and cosmology, and maybe most especially ontology, Fitzgerald's island fantasy ultimately fueled what is probably best described as "the transnationalization of clerical sexual abuse." The Servants of the Paraclete under the direction of McNamara simply could not have aided and abetted so many sexual predators for so many years on such a global scale, without the initial idea of the island. Fitzgerald's ambition to solve the problem of the problem priests by effectively disappearing them proved attractive to McNamara, but the principal flaw, at least from the vantage of McNamara's world, was that Fitzgerald understood the island as an endpoint, as a dead-end, a full stop. Again, the island for Fitzgerald would be a place in the world where priests only arrived and never left. McNamara, on the other hand, though the island should not be the end of anything but rather a place of new beginnings, of fresh starts. And this meant, for McNamara, ditching the idea of a single island altogether for what would become a worldwide archipelago of renewal centers. These would be places in the world where priests continually arrived and always left. Since the moment McNamara scuttled the idea of Fitzgerald's island, the Servants of the Paraclete have built a patchwork of transnationally networked renewal centers, each reaching toward the next. There was Fitzgerald's original compound located in Jemez Springs, New Mexico, but then the Servants of the Paraclete founded dozens of renewal centers around the world. They have included houses in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Nevis, Minnesota; Gallup, New Mexico; San Diego, California; Burlington, Vermont; Youngstown, Ohio; the British Virgin Islands; Rome, Italy; Santa Cruz, Mexico; Rapid City, South Dakota; Chicago, Illinois; a pair of houses in South America: one in Argentina, one in Brazil; and others in Africa, including Cape Coast, Ghana; another in Dumfriesshires, Scotland; and then more in France; San Bernadino, California; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; St. Louis, Missouri; Dambri, Vietnam; Dittmer, Missouri; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Tagaytay City, Philippines. None of these places were islands. Instead, they became tactical switch points that facilitated the worldwide movement of sexually abusive priests by diagnosing, treating, and then redeploying these men under the pretense of a new clerical placement. As well as through such informal arrangements as mission trips, clerical exchanges, solidarity movements, sponsorship programs, volunteer opportunities, and semi-active retirements. The phenomenon of clerical sexual abuse, as I move towards a conclusion, when understood through the history of the Servants of the Paraclete, has always been as global as the Roman Catholic Church. Its study, however, has been far narrower in scope. Investigative journalism, landmark court cases, grand jury reports, and the occasional social scientific study, all elevated by major motion pictures, document with forensic detail how bishops in the United States transferred sexually abusive priests from one parish to another. It is research that has been so successful, so heroic, that teams of lawyers and activists around the world now pursue similar lines of investigation in their own countries, diligently tracking the possibility that a given bishop from a given diocese might have moved predatory priests between parishes. They routinely find this to be the case. But inter-parish clerical transfer is only a small part of a much larger story of transnational criminal evasion, of endpoints becoming switch points, of an island becoming a worldwide archipelago of renewal centers. The Servants of the Paraclete, for nearly a century, have made it their pastoral mission to create enclaves of jurisdictional ambiguity. Sites that are not entirely off the grid, so much as situated between contrasting grids of legibility and authority,

in order to move sexually abusive men to parts unknown. It is, my research argues, incumbent on the study of clerical sexual abuse, to thus engage those interstitial spaces, with their transnational itineraries, so that switch points might one day turn back into end points.

Thank you.

**Griffith:**

Thank you so much, Kevin. We have about forty minutes for Q and A.

**O'Neill:**

That's a healthy amount of time.

**Griffith:**

We have two students with microphones, and so we ask that you raise your hand and wait for whoever it is to bring the microphone. [INAUDIBLE.]

**O'Neill:**

Sure. Please, sir? That's a good point. That's a good catch.

**Audience Question 1:**

As a retired journalist, I just wonder where all your sources came from. Like quoting archbishop letters. Was there a history of the Paracletes that you were doing or is it all original research?

**O'Neill:**

That's a great question. I'm not sure why this...here we go. Yeah, there is an available, in terms of the bulk of what I'm reporting in terms of reported speech, it comes from a series of letters that are available on [bishopsaccountability.org](http://bishopsaccountability.org), so in some ways, the core of what I'm reporting on in terms of the quotes, come from a developed and accessible kind of archive. At the same time, I should say, and I said a little about this in the beginning, you know the way that I've come to this project on transnational clerical sexual abuse is as an anthropologist of Latin America, and my principal leads and development of an independent archive of this material is in the class of kind of work of ethnography. So, field work in Latin America with incarcerated priests, with communities of survivors that are emerging through interviews, and archival research in terms of the effects that transferred priests have left when they died. But in terms of the kind of backbone of what I'm reporting on today, this is the material.  
Please.

**Audience Question 2:**

I seemed to notice when you were listing the houses that the Paracletes had set up that there was a number of them in St. Louis

**O'Neill:**

Yes, they are.

**Audience Question 2:**

What's with that? And I ask as an altar boy from St. Louis who knows this world well.

**O'Neill:**

Yeah, no, as a fellow former altar boy from St. Louis, what to say? So, maybe a few things. One, hold on. Okay. I mean one is the immediate kind of observation that there has not been enough done on St. Louis as a point of research in terms of clerical sexual abuse, in terms of the kind of attention that has settled on, for very good reasons, whether it's Lafayette, Louisiana, or Minnesota, or Boston. St. Louis deserves that same kind of attention. The Servants of the Paraclete, in terms of its own commitment to the St. Louis area with its institutions and it being headquartered right now in Dittmer, Missouri, that particular history I don't have a total hold on right now. We were talking about this at dinner. And it's not just the Servants of the Paraclete; there are also parallel pastoral therapeutic options in the St. Louis area as well that's not Paraclete. But St. Louis has been, long been, a site where priests are sent for therapy, for evaluation and diagnosis, redeployment, but also, you know my parallel work or earlier work on incarceration uses the language of "warehousing" quite a bit. But placing priests that are not, or no longer can be in a pastoral setting. St. Louis is a prime place for this. It's a roundabout way of saying it deserves a tremendous amount more of research. And also that the landscape that we were all navigating was dotted by people coming in and out of the Paracletes, one hundred percent, for a very long time.

**Audience Question 3:**

I was hoping you could speak a little bit more to the motivation behind this, I guess, the church's desire to rehabilitate or reuse these priests. Is it a desire to not have to train more? Is it this desire to keep it hidden from the public? Where does that come from?

**O'Neill:**

No, absolutely. I mean, so great great question about, you know, what is the motivation for an island so much as what is the motivation for rehabilitation? In other part of the work, you know, this gets into a very strong theological argument. Let me put it this way, so, and this may come out in the Q and A more and more. I address, or as an anthropologist working in this space with previous experience in focusing on organized and semi-organized criminal organizations, I do treat clerical sexual abuse within the framework of criminal acts and think about motivations of institution. And so that puts me in proximity in conversation often with those working on police reform. And that seems like a parallel example, right, so you know you see these parallel arguments of "the bad apple...the bad cop's the bad apple, it's not the institution" and similar efforts to reform an institution that has a deep culture, whether it's violence or abuse or secrecy, and so on. The principal difference, and this I find, as an anthropologist of religion endlessly with some theological training, really fundamentally important, is that the status of a man upon ordination transforms ontologically within the context of the Catholic Church, such that not only is there a hierarchy upon which the sacramental capacity of a priest; the priest's ability to baptize, to ordain fellow priests, to work through the sacraments, not only does that give them an

additional responsibility, but an elevated status. What comes with that, through an extraordinary...I love this church history, it's third century stuff, which really gets me. But we don't, maybe we could if you want to follow, but you don't have to follow. The point here is that that transformation that takes place at the point of ordination is irreversible. Within Catholic theology, once one is....you can't un-priest a priest. Which, in the third century was done for very good reason. It was a very convincing argument. Today, it makes clerical sexual abuse something other than an HR problem. That you are stuck with these people indefinitely. An indelible mark has been made on their very being through the process of ordination. So, some of it is about is a culture of homosociality, of men looking out for each other; but much of it is a deep reverence for each other and each others' status in society, and that's ultimately what motivated Fitzgerald. If you get into kind of the origin stories of Fitzgerald, he himself is really struck by this one moment where he comes across, and this is you know, hagiography well it's for a non-saint, comes across this poor, this indigen who's asking for money and it turns out he was a priest and this offends Fitzgerald so much because of his appreciation for the distinction that ordination bestows upon, the permanent one, it bestows upon an individual. So, an island becomes, or renewal centers become important not just because of a labor shortage, I mean sometimes that's an argument thrown around, but because of a deep theological reverence for, and appreciation for, the permanence of that transformation. That plays out really important in actually both book projects. I think it's...to understand this criminal enterprise, one needs to understand the theology behind that, that permanent transformation. It's critical. Because otherwise, it's well, this is just overall poor management, but it's something more profound.

**Audience Question 4:**

Hi, you mentioned that part of...is this on? Sorry, I couldn't tell. You mentioned that part of the allure of the transnationality of, you know, the islands and these centers was the ability to avoid extradition by the United States government, so I was wondering was there any intervention on behalf of the government and the American judicial system? Was there any suspicion or can we attribute lack thereof to just underreporting or keeping things on the DL by the church?

**O'Neill:**

Sure, I was talking to a faculty member at the center today a great deal about jurisdiction. So, at the core of this offering today, this argument, is a push towards expanding the geographical scope of the study of clerical sexual abuse. Built into that is not just to say that the church had found geographical solutions to this problem. That somewhere else, farther away, is better. But also, that the question of jurisdiction and jurisdictional arbitrage is critically important. So, if we go back to this map of the centers, you begin to see patterning of, again, places that are not entirely off the grid because by the later twentieth century, that's not a possibility. But you are finding places of, as I'm saying, ambiguous authority. And the Servants of the Paraclete to their credit, really cultivated these interjurisdictional spaces of ambiguity and emphasized that. So, it's not just that switch points between, you know, in my own work or larger work, Minnesota to Guatemala, which is fundamentally important as priests' lives became more difficult to sustain and their movement was restricted in Minnesota, either by community pressure or by actions of the police arrests and such. A movement to Guatemala, especially in the '90s, provided

jurisdictionally a tremendous amount more of freedom and movement. And to be able to return to their kind of, their more familiar patterns. Now in terms of is there a history of extradition or judicial intervention? Yeah, I mean, Dittmer, Missouri is a really interesting study. I mean, this place is where priests go and then oftentimes are pulled out by state authorities or even US authorities. So, there's a history of it but certainly not nearly as much as one would have hoped. And that, I think, speaks to... I mean, I think about what does it mean to do a transnational study of clerical sexual abuse, you know, I don't think it's necessarily thinking like McNamara or thinking like the Paracletes, but it's certainly trying to catch up to the church's transnational acumen. What an extraordinarily nimble institution to carve out what one historian called "the lumpiness of jurisdictional authority." That really was disappearing by the late twentieth century... God, and the ability, like Nevis, Minnesota, that's a population of five hundred. The desert prairies of New Mexico, I mean, it was getting more and more populated. But these are strategically located places that are far away, or at least as undercover as possible, forming this patchwork. So, the jurisdictional is really important to the project. Thanks for all these questions.

**Audience Question 5:**

Behind the issue of jurisdiction is really the shadow of legal prosecution and incarceration. Because there wouldn't be the need to worry about jurisdiction if there wasn't a prosecution threat. So, my question is, when did the legal prosecution and incarceration, where along the timeline of Fitzgerald and McNamara does this really emerge as the motivating factor for why this is taking place.

**O'Neill:**

Well, there are now, let's. It's a great question, thank you. There are two questions, or two points. Let me take the first one. So, what comes to mind are two things. One in terms of you're absolutely right, arrest and conviction as threats. I don't know if that's entirely the domain, that fully encompasses the question of jurisdiction but that's absolutely one of the motivating factors. What's important in this space, and not just in the US, but what I see consistently in Central America, what I see consistently beyond the United States. It's never as bright of an encounter between these two jurisdictions, the canonical and the judicial for kind of a shorthand. So, yes there can be arrests and records made, but oftentimes a negotiation of, you see this a great deal in the United States, of a downgrading of an offense, from a felony to a misdemeanor, or, and this is probably the most common where the Servants of the Paraclete come in, a negotiation, and this for me is the most jurisdictionally interesting, where the state, there will be a point of contact with the state, the church will step in and negotiate a movement into, for example, a Paraclete center. Now that, in my interpretation, and I'm happy to talk it out and be proved otherwise. I think that's moving between three different, three distinct jurisdictions that create the possibility of plausible deniability. The church says to the state "we'll take it from here." Why? Because we can move it to a third jurisdiction which is like the psychotherapeutic, which are often in-house like the Servants of the Paraclete. And it's those movements that create this kind of ambiguity in terms of arrest records. So, there has been threat, but uneven threats and examples of arrests, in large part because of this kind of promise of movement. And that's a fairly familiar story.

**Audience Question 6:**

Thank you so much for this talk. I have a couple questions, and I think mostly they're just an invitation to ask you to say more about your larger research. One is that you've spoken about these kinds of global geographies of routes of clerical sexual abuse, but of course, these that you've spoken about are really centered in the US, so I'm wondering if this is, as you see it, kind of the shape of this map of clerical sexual abuse? Or are there many overlapping maps? What would it look like if it was kind of centered in Vietnam or in Poland or something like that? And then, the other question I have is just about, you know, you opened by kind of talking about your own work and meeting survivors, so I'm wondering where kind of, what the global survivor story looks like.

**O'Neill:**

That's awesome. That is a great setup, I like that. Thank you so much. Two really interesting, I mean two things I would love to talk about. So, one, the Servants of the Paraclete does provide us with, you know, a global history of clerical sexual abuse, but it's a global history of US clerical sexual abuse, right, so in the written paper, that's the distinction but it wouldn't necessarily carry over in a spoken talk. So absolutely, this does present a distinct map of transnational clerical sexual abuse but anchored in the US, one hundred percent. With an imagination of places that are "beyond." And obviously jurisdiction, I mean, the kind of claiming of authority, is perspectival and here it is about evading US authority overall. Are there alternative maps to be made? Yes. One hundred percent. I think about in terms of the Latin American context where when I set out, so as someone who's worked in Guatemala for twenty years, ethnographically set out to say, well maybe this a study of US priests who arrived could maybe happen in the northern triangle, which is like Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala. And then just the volume of material returned to me just to a single country because there was just too much. The movements throughout that region: significant. Not with the same kind of developed renewal centers, but along religious order, absolutely. And what's important to understand historically, in terms of just Latin American context, if you'll let me just point something out. But in the nineteenth century throughout Latin America, Mexico, Central America, but throughout, there were processes of liberalization. And liberalization means something very different in these different regions, whether Caribbean, Latin America, US, all means different stuff. In Latin America there was a strong effort to move towards something like democratic governance and a capitalist economy which meant disaggregating church from state. This was a real self-conscious effort, especially in Central America and Mexico. And that principally meant an anti-clericalism, that seized church property, it expelled certain religious orders, and for example, Guatemala by the 1920s had something like 81, 82 priests in the entire country. It was like one priest every forty thousand Catholics. And there was real Vatican anxiety over the sacramental capacity of those priests doing the work they needed to do. There were people living, they were not officially married from the church's perspective, they were not officially baptized. That initiated a movement from north to south instigated by the Vatican to move as many priests as possible, at one point a call for ten percent of US priests to go to Latin America to bolster sacramental capacity. Guatemala then had over three hundred and fifty priests, the vast



majority of them foreign born. So, when doing a history of clerical sexual abuse in Latin America, it is principally about foreign US priests throughout the region. Because if there's a call for ten percent of priests from the US to go to Latin America, and you see this in histories of colonialism as well. The people who are sent away to do the work of empire are the people you don't want around, right? So, it becomes a dumping ground. So, I'm kind of on the fence whether Servants of the Paraclete offer us a global history of US clerical sexual abuse or if there's really any strong distinction between those two, at least within Latin America. The second thing about cross-cultural, like the survivor stories in cross-cultural, that's a really powerful element of this first book I'm writing in Guatemala where priests from Minnesota would arrive at a very rural mission that was supported by the Diocese of New Ulm. I guess just one thing that as an anthropologist really strikes me is that we can most likely agree that sexual abuse is a very culturally specific category. That what counts as abuse is continually changing. Maybe we could agree on that. There are probably some hard lines that we would agree on. But one of the things that I found most both challenging as someone just working with communities in Central America, but then also conceptually, is the comparative angle on this. So, for example, this one priest after he moved to Guatemala adopted an orphan girl and we're in constant conversation, she's part of the research, constant conversation, and we're working with a team of lawyers to get a settlement from the Diocese of New Ulm. And that is, one, legally super difficult but we think it's possible. In terms of the survivor stories, I was really struck as someone translating the survivor testimony how much it's not just words, it is actual concepts. In Minnesota, abuse looks like something. In Guatemala, it looks entirely different. Not even a really as powerful vernacular for it. So those kind of, we talk about jurisdictional arbitrage, it's not just the authorities' capacity to speak the law but also the capacity for people to even recognize things as abuse and abusive which, when you think about from a survivor's perspective, kind of a global history of clerical sexual abuse, it is an incredibly diverse story of shifting categories.

**Audience Question 7:**

Thanks Kevin, this is all just sort of amazing. I'm curious, this sort of goes back to the person's question about why rehabilitate priests, so just thinking about going back into the documents that you're using with Fitzgerald and McNamara, you know, I hear the concern about rehabilitating priests because we've got to pay for them forever, they're always you know, we've got to support them no matter what, in some way financially. And then you also you see this throughout documents, and I'm sure you see it too, is we have to prevent the church from scandal, right. And so, you want these things to stay quiet, you don't want a lot of law enforcement, you don't want publicity because we're trying to protect the church from scandal. What I'm wondering, is, in the documents, how much is there about concern for children and for the actual victims. Because to my mind, having dug in deeply to other documents in this area, it's shocking to me how little interest there is in children and the damage done to children. So, I'm curious if that sort of applies in the documents you're working with.

**O'Neill:**

Absolutely, I think it is fair to say that Fitzgerald does mention his concern, but it's a conflicted concern, I mean it's a hierarchy of values for him. It's not, I mean maybe I'm slightly naïve in my interpretation of Fitzgerald, but there is a real reverence for this ontological distinction bestowed upon the ordained man. I don't see it as, you know, the logic of like "we gotta pay, like it's our responsibility" there's a real again, returning to reverence, and that reverence extends to making sure these priests can serve sacramentally as priests. So why are they hearing confessions and why are they saying mass in nearby churches? It's not for... it's not because of a shortage of labor or we have to keep them working or practiced in this. It is because Fitzgerald was distinctly committed to priests serving as priests and the idea of them not, was I think, an offense to him. Now that then supersedes his concern for children. He knew as well as anyone at this time the threat that his center presented, one hundred percent. So, there is a distinct lack of concern for the children themselves.

**Audience Question 8:**

I just had a couple of things to add. One is I think that part to the notion of being stuck with these guys forever laicization was practically non-existent in the forties, fifties, and most of the sixties. But after that, they kind of encouraged and they asked, I think priests had to ask for it.

**O'Neill:**

There's a whole process.

**Audience Question 8:**

They didn't ask for it, but I think they encouraged it more at that time. And then, one other thing, there was, I think was a Paraclete order, had a retreat center on the banks of the Meramec River and I visited a priest friend there who was being treated for alcoholism and went out there at ten in the morning, we played tennis for a while. He was very careful not to let me on the inside or talk to anybody else, but come 10:30 he said "Oops I've got to go the artist is coming." So, he told me about his schedule. I mean, it was very impressive They had you know they had therapists they had a lot of money was being spent on these guys so I think when the bishop said "We did all we could," in a lot of cases, I think they, at least not for the victim but for the abusing priest.

**O'Neill:**

It's a pretty soft landing, absolutely. These places. And you know I'm most familiar with the quote unquote "program" in New Mexico and that is a fantastically you know from you know it depends what era we're talking about, whether it's McNamara or Fitzgerald, but yeah absolutely, it treads into these from you know art therapy to yoga, I mean it's again, a very soft landing.

The question of laicization is a really important one. Which gets into kind of sacramental theology. Laicization is that one cannot represent oneself as a priest though ontologically one is still capable of administering the sacraments. So, it's more of an institutional distinction and one that, although Fitzgerald really advanced laicization and really advocated for it, to the Vatican, was himself conflicted about it in the sense of it being a real affront to the dignity of a cleric. But it's a helpful kind of perspective on some of these places, thank you.

Please.

**Audience Question 9:**

About ontologically different, they're only ontologically different because we give them the power to be ontologically different. In my opinion, all religious institutions and in particular the Catholic church enjoyed that power. Male power. There are female abusers, but primarily male abusers and as long as we let these institutions get away with assuming that power, then I think that is the problem.

**O'Neill:**

That's great, thank you. No, you're absolutely right about... Yes, you're absolutely right. In terms of... Then, there's this kind of abstract conversation about authority, but no it's 100 percent. I mean it leads into questions of accountability which I think is really helpful thank you.

**Audience Question 10:**

I'm going to say that like you had quoted I don't know if it was Fitzgerald or McNamara but you said like that in justification for an island, that it was like a place for homos as like a bigoted phrase, and I was just wondering how the intersections of like social oppressions function too as like an evasion of social thought and thus an evasion of persecution and how those like overlapping identities avoid persecution in terms of the priests.

**O'Neill:**

Fantastic, thank you so much. It's an absolutely uncomfortable, that's why I apologize, it's an absolutely uncomfortable part to quote from Fitzgerald. We get this kind of casual homophobia it does point to the... in Fitzgerald's era and this has kind of cleaned up in diabolically terrible ways with McNamara, but it does point to the mixing of what we would think are distinct categories. What we would see is there is very much a sixth commandment sense of infraction that Fitzgerald's dealing with. Which he names at times what we would call abuse of children. Though it is a quite capacious umbrella. We don't hear the language of for example pedophilia or paraphilia until the seventies with the Paracletes. Instead, we have, like I say, this wandering constellation of moral condemnation. And it's important to flag in you know, mid twentieth century, 1950s in particular, there is tremendous anxiety, even beyond, maybe even especially beyond the Catholic church, about homosexuality, both as kind of a target of policy and an object of governance, and the Paracletes participate in that. So, there's certainly really important work currently done to dissociate this question of homosexuality and pedophilia, and that's incredibly important, to dissociate that. That kind of, what we would call historical ontology, that kind of vernacular didn't exist there. So, this island is alcoholics, people who've kind of lost their edge as priests, but then also this... people who are in consensual relationships, but they shouldn't because they're celibate, and then it's men having sex with men and then it's men having sex with children. It is a pretty capacious category at that point, or at least, catch-all. But for me as someone engaged in this project... not I'm equally... I mean look, I find this politically compelling, I'm also by default really conceptually stimulated by, not only for example, kind of interjurisdictional distinctions of North, South, US, Guatemala, that's really important, but this question of when these categories start to emerge, and the island as the fulcrum, there's time

before where it's like an island for homosexuals and then afterwards, the kind of diagnostic precision used to understand supposedly the constitution, the kind of person that these priests are...it's extraordinary. That transformation is amazing, intellectually, like in terms of intellectual history. One more question. Sure, do you want to do it? You can do it.

**Audience Question 11:**

Thank you for your research and the talk. I'm with SNAP and in our experience, the Paracletes are continuing to do all of this much more sophisticated, much more subtle, much more under the radar. You mentioned half a dozen or more US cities where they had places. Obviously, they still operate the one here in St. Louis and it seems to be among the larger facilities. South Dakota, Vermont, Chicago, are these other Paraclete facilities still operating? And where do you see the Paracletes going long-term?

**O'Neill:**

Yeah, excellent. So, no I mean, so during the massive wave of litigation in the '90s, many of these places were shut down. So, they're certainly still active in Italy, Ghana, the Philippines, Vietnam, though Dittmer is the hub right now. And real, I mean, we're here in St. Louis, gosh. Dittmer's the hub. But you're absolutely right in terms of sophistication. What I am in the middle of, in terms of sophistication and jurisdiction and evasion, which is the ultimate term that I'm really focused on, I'm really taken with thinking through this move towards bankruptcy and the restructuring of these organizations so that there's a strong disaggregation of liability and assets such that you know, if insurance policies were strained, you know, a decade ago, they won't be necessary in a decade. And that, I think, is the most sophisticated element of this, to have... I think about the relative success of litigation in the US which, in terms of global history...it could only happen in the US. In Guatemala, there's no access, there's no pathway towards that kind of litigation but the success in terms of settlement and recognition is predicated upon a kind of litigious society. It's also predicated upon a certain kind of...the church is a certain kind of corporation that has been and continues to quickly change and, you know, visually, I've been trying to think about how, you know, at one point the church as a target of litigation was this kind of broad institution that could be hit relatively easily and I always kind of come up with the image...I think about the image of the institution turning to the side and just becoming paper thin where it becomes incredibly hard to, for what's known as like judgment-proof corporations to be litigated. And once that totally happens, it's going to be difficult in terms of accountability and recognition, so bankruptcy for me is what's the future. Thinking through ecclesiology by way of bankruptcy law would be, I think, the principal way. But thank you so much, both for your work and for the question.

**Griffith:**

Before we thank our speaker, I just want to thank all of you, again, here in this room as well as on Zoom. We have a number of members of the survivor community, leaders of the survivor community here in St. Louis and we're honored to have you guys with us here, as well as on Zoom. We've had the co-director of Bishop Accountability, Terry McKiernan, who has done so much and has joined us on Zoom for those of you who know Terry. People who have done great

work and it's just wonderful to see more scholarship emerge in this area which I think is also so crucial. We need the journalists, the lawyers, the scholars, the activists, the survivors all speaking out on this. Please join us for a reception where you can continue to talk and have some refreshments, and please join me in thanking Kevin O'Neill.

[Applause]

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