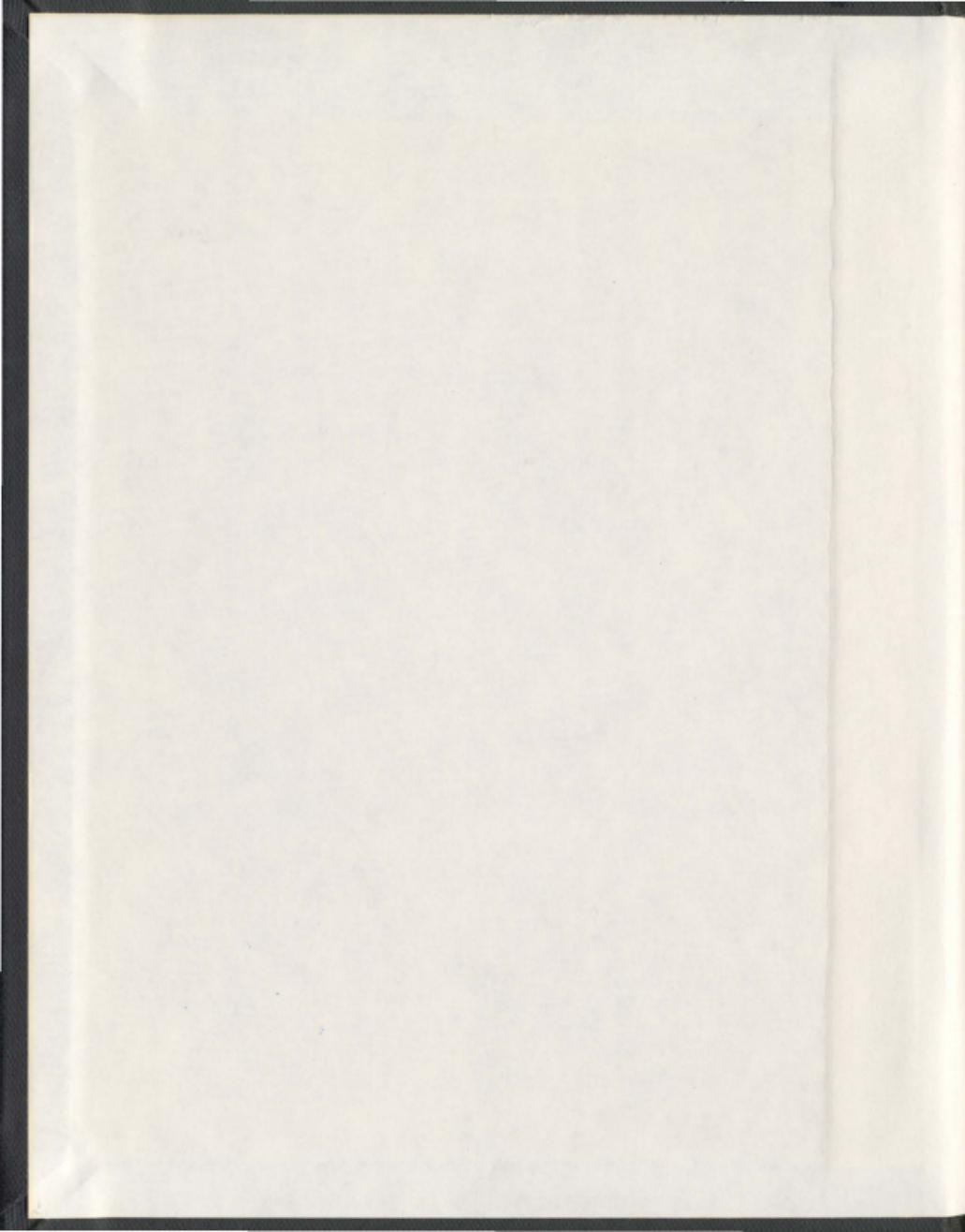
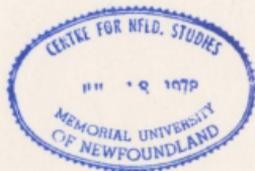


COUNTERCLERICALISM:  
VERNACULAR COMMENTARY ON THE POWER OF THE  
CATHOLIC PRIEST IN ATLANTIC CANADA

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Counterclericalism:  
Vernacular Commentary on the Power of the Catholic Priest in Atlantic Canada

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

March 2012

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St. John's

Newfoundland

**Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of priests in Atlantic Canada (focusing on Newfoundland, Cape Breton and New Brunswick), drawing on legend, personal experience narrative, and popular culture as presented in oral tradition, archival sources and popular fiction.

Using the discipline of folklore, but with an awareness of the contributions of history and anthropology, it explores both positive and negative depictions of the priest's role as religious and cultural leader, community icon, hero and villain. The thesis argues that these complex folkloric representations express a nuanced "counterclericalism" that extends the concept of "anticlericalism" as developed by anthropologists and historians, and that communally accepted counterclerical narratives create a venue for discourse on the nature of power in general.

I propose that the term counterclericalism is better suited to the folkloristic study of vernacular expressions of criticism of clergy, suggesting that the term "anticlericalism" be reserved for other uses.

### Acknowledgements

I will start at the very beginning and thank my extended family and friends for graciously including me in their lived religion, calendar customs, and rites of passage. These events have influenced me and exposed me to the religious diversity in my own family and community which has undoubtedly aided me in this work.

From an academic perspective, there have been numerous people whom have influenced and assisted me. In the initial stages, Dr. Diane Goldstein worked with me extensively and was instrumental to me securing SSHRC funding for this project, for which I am very thankful.

A number of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore faculty assisted me by talking to me about my research, forwarding articles and comments, or just generally being supportive. Among that number are Dr. Philip Hiscock, Dr. Martin Lovelace, and Dr. Paul Smith.

Portions of this research were presented at several conferences. Chapter Two was delivered at the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in 2009 and the American Folklore Society in 2005. Versions of Chapter Three were presented at the Folklore Studies Association of Canada in 2008 and the American Folklore Society in 2009, and was published in *Ethnologies* (McDavid 2008); during this process I received many helpful comments from the editors and reviewers. An earlier draft of Chapter Three was presented at the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in 2007 and I am thankful to Dr. Bill Ellis and Dr. Diane Goldstein for their valuable comments at that time.

During the completion of this work I received a number of grants to complete the work and to attend conferences and disseminate knowledge. This research was funded by Social Science and Humanities Research Council scholarship from 2003-2006, a Mary A. Griffiths Bursary for Folklore Fieldwork from the MUN Folklore Society, the David Buchan Memorial Bursary for conference travel, an American Folklore Society student travel stipend, and a MUN School of Graduate Studies SSHRC proposal grant.

Throughout the course of my research I stubbornly refused to leave the workforce, and some employers were more forgiving than others of this choice to do both. I appreciate the efforts of Dr. Richard MacKinnon, Dr. Pauline Greenhill, and Dr. Peter Narváez, as well as the Centre for Newfoundland Studies and the Cape Breton University Press, for working with me because of my abilities and research interests, rather than regarding my academic pursuits as an unfortunate personality quirk! These individuals would probably never suspect it, but they really contributed to my ability to think positively and complete my thesis. Support came from other unexpected places, and I appreciate the efforts of Dr. Rod Nicholls, Dean of Arts and Dr. Dale Keefe, Dean of Research, Cape Breton University. Both encouraged me (verbally, but also, in the oh-so-important financial regard) to present my research, assisted me in making connections with the wider community, and encouraged me to finish this work.

Three archival institutions were instrumental in assisting me in finding valuable resources, and I would be remiss not to mention the staff of Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive, the Archives and Special Collections division at Memorial University's Centre for Newfoundland Studies, and the Beaton Institute, Cape Breton

University for their efforts throughout this research.

There are a multitude of friends to thank because they sympathised, emailed, shared complaints, or just listened throughout the course of writing. They know who they are. I am thankful to all those who did not "write me off" as I changed fields of employment, or became a mother, or seemed like I would never finish my thesis. My thesis advisor, Dr. Diane Tye, was a constant source of encouragement and rationality during this time, not to mention an exceptional role model. She consistently went "above and beyond" the call of duty and was a truly wonderful mentor.

I could not have completed this work without the participation of my mother and the help and support of my family. I am eternally thankful to my husband and colleague, Ian Brodie, for his patience and understanding throughout this Sisyphean task. I also appreciate the help of my son, Jackson. Sure, he had no idea what he was supporting, but he was there on a daily basis for encouraging hugs, and had long naps which is enough to be thankful for. At the very least he motivated me to be finished writing so he would never remember this stage of our lives!

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## I. INTRODUCTION

I nervously clutched a cup of tea as I stood with a group of peers at a professional development workshop. It seemed the workshop's setting of a church common room aided people's memories and they had begun sharing narratives about past experiences with priests. I was morbidly fascinated... and nervous. I was nervous for many reasons; as a child of an "ex-Catholic," I had heard personal experience narratives about priests before. And, I was conscious of the fact that, as a lapsed Protestant, I had no real reason to participate in this "story circle" and I felt socially awkward, although the folklorist in me realised that *something* was going on in this informal talk. A joke was told, then a legend: several motifs were sprinkled through the narratives.

I knew that I wanted to work with these narratives, but had no idea where to start. Could they be classified in some way? Being a bit of a traditionalist, I started identifying genres that were used in this form of communication. I also started to search them out elsewhere. I initially heard these narratives in Newfoundland, and wondered how extensive they were. Did they exist in other places, and if so were the genres culturally bound? Would different genres predominate in different places? I also wondered what functions these stories and events served, and I reflected on what theoretical stance one could take in examining them. These questions were the springboard for this thesis.

I soon found that my theoretical approaches and methods would have to vary according to the genre, locale and group in which the narratives were located. Other disciplines rather than folklore (namely history and anthropology) had taken up the concept of anticlericalism, and I began to question what folklore could bring to the

examination. What were my particular strengths in undertaking this project; what did I bring to it as a researcher? These questions underline this thesis as I outline previous scholarship about anticlericalism in history and anthropology in this chapter and propose the use of folklore genres and theories that shed light on narratives about priests throughout the work.

Historically the centrality of the priest in the religious, social and economic life of Atlantic Canada is undisputable (see Andrews 1987; Balawyder 1973; Beaton-Planetta 1977; Nemeč 1993, 2005; Nilsen 1996-97). Throughout the region, traditions of coded expression have emerged to voice disapproval and to contest clerical use and (or, perhaps more appropriately, misuse) of power. In this thesis I look at vernacular commentary on clerical power in three distinct regions within Atlantic Canada: Newfoundland, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and Northern New Brunswick. Historical, political and demographic differences, combined with residents' individual and group identities – ethnicity, socio-economic position and gender – shape Catholics' experiences of organised religion in this region. These experiences in turn result in expressions that critique their churches' doctrine and continually (re)negotiate the priests' role in their lives and communities. Historically, these types of expressions have been called anticlericalism.

*i. Anticlericalism: A Problematic Term?*

There are obvious differences that distinguish anticlericalism as a definition, a sentiment, and a theoretical approach or standpoint from which to address historical events. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1991) shows the term "clerical" in usage as early as 1592, predating the term "anticlerical" which appears in 1845. Clerical is defined as

“of, pertaining to, or characteristic of the clergy,” while clericalism means “clerical principles, clerical rule or influence.” There can be a negative connotation to the term clerical; one 1864 example quotes its usage in describing an event as “a living protest again clericalism.” A lack of standardization of spelling of anticlerical is evident and several forms appear: anticlerical, anti-Clerical, and anti-clerical. These variations also exist for anticlericalism (anti-Clericalism, anti-clericalism) starting in 1886. In an example from 1898, the *OED* cites J.E.C. Bodley, “Free-thinkers contravene the basis of their own profession in erecting anti-clericalism into a dogma.” One can also compare the term clericalization meaning the “action or result of making clerical or placing under clerical rule.” In its usage notes we find quotes from the *Catholic Weekly* (1907): “such clericalization of ordinary political events is ... undisguised mischief making.”

Over time, anticlericalism has replaced the use of clericalism in the negative sense. The Catholic Church itself has used the term anticlericalism, as well as the term clericalism, in order to discuss its perspective on issues within its areas of concern (Hind 1908; Pius XI 1925; Weber 1911). Religious publications frequently have mentioned the “problem” of anticlericalism, and it has been used by organized religion to refer to those who did not accept the power of the religious structure.

## ii. *The Historical Approach*

How has anticlericalism been used by academics? In his foreword to *Anticlericalism in Britain 1500-1914*, a collection of historical essays edited by Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe (2001), Keith Robbins attempts to clarify the term and some of the problems with its usage. Robbins discusses the ambiguous meaning of the term

anticlericalism, as well as the difficulties in determining its instigating source:

In fact, the editors and authors, from their several standpoints, have all been grappling with what 'anticlericalism' should be taken to be. It becomes clear that it is a shorthand term which embraces a considerable variety of attitudes and opinions. Are the clergy the objects of hostility/ridicule because, irrespective of their personal qualities, they are conspicuous representatives of 'the Church' and, as such, in certain contexts, part of an oppressive 'Establishment'? Or, considered personally, are they stigmatized because they are fat, jolly and 'worldly' or because they are emaciated, feminine and ascetic? Is the conflict around 'clericalism' an aspect of Enlightenment battle to dislodge Christianity from the modern world or is it a struggle within Christianity itself, sometimes between 'laity' and 'clergy,' concerning the nature and necessity of 'priesthood.' (Robbins 2001:xii)

As I discuss throughout this section, academics use the term anticlericalism to explore expressions against the Church, as well as local priests as a symbol of the Church, and a full spectrum of personal behaviours of the priest which the parishioners view as abhorrent. Within various disciplines (such as religious studies, history, and anthropology) anticlericalism as a term is more or less a catch-all, and has been interpreted differently depending on the discipline or the context in which it is being discussed. Furthermore, it is rarely clear whether anticlericalism is really "anti-Church" behaviour, about religious doctrine with the priest bearing the brunt as the church's representative, or if the expressions are directly "anti-priest," dealing with a full range of "unpriestly" behaviour. Finally, if the expressions are anti-priest, are they against a specific priest or against priests as a group, as Robbins says "the nature and necessity of "priesthood"? Most academics working within this area are continuing to negotiate these questions, and most publications include a certain amount of "fleshing out" of the term. In discussing the terminology it should also be noted that while British historians use

anticlericalism to refer to expressions against Roman Catholic priests or the Catholic Church itself, the term is also used in some instances to discuss attitudes in High Anglicanism (Aston and Cragoe 2001). The discipline of history has provided us with documentation and analysis of the social and political effects of anticlericalism as manifested in major events, such as riots or destruction of priests' property (Magraw 1970:171). Historians have not been as concerned with precursors to public manifestations of anticlericalism. Most, although not all, deal with anticlericalism as a regional or national issue during key periods such as the Reformation, and not communal or personal expressions.

Historians have few measures of anticlericalism on a small scale, or how and if it exists as an everyday expression before a major social event. In *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), Peter Burke provides a fairly representative picture of popular depictions of priests circa 1500s-1800s.<sup>1</sup> In "Heroes, Villains and Fools" he discusses the role of the priest as both a hero of the people and a villain, although there are more examples of the latter than the former:

In other kinds of sources [from those which depict saints as heroic], however, a rather different image of the clergy can be found. Friar Tuck, the merry friar who enjoys fighting and loves his dinner, is only one of a number of sympathetic but unheroic priests. Two Austrians, 'Pfaffe Amis' and 'Der Pfarrer vom Kalenberg', were medieval tricksters-figures who were still popular in the sixteenth century. Their Tuscan equivalent is the 'merry priest' of fifteenth-century Florence, *il pivano arlotto*, 'a poor country cleric', as he describes himself, barely able to read his missal, and loving wine, women, and jests at the expense of both clergy and laity. (Burke 1978:156)

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<sup>1</sup> Burke uses popular in the English cultural studies sense, to denote folk and popular culture, i.e. not elite culture.

As Burke points out, often these priests are shown to be pathetic, "sympathetic but unheroic" he goes on to state:

The weaknesses of the clergy do not always receive such a sympathetic portrayal in popular tradition; they are often presented as villains or fools, as ignorant, proud, greedy, lazy, and lusting after other men's wives. These points are made with particular force in the popular literature of the German Reformation. Pamphilus Gengenbach's *Totenfresser* (1531) shows a pope, a bishop, a monk and a nun sitting round a table carving up a corpse. This is of course an attack not only on the greed of the clergy, but also on the doctrine of purgatory. It would be better to look at a less revolutionary decade, if we want to see popular anti-clericalism in its normal form, expressed in anecdotes, play, or even popular art, like the eighteenth-century Staffordshire figure of the tithe pig chasing the parson. The motif of clerical covetousness is a recurrent one; think of the rich and grasping abbot who is punished by Robin Hood (Child 117), or the story of the priest who won't bury the dead unless he is paid in advance (Motif-Index Q.286.2), or the priest who refuses a small bribe because he will only sell his soul to the Devil for a large one (J.1263). Even more popular is the image of the cleric as seducer. There are Russian statuettes in wood and earthenware of a monk carrying on his back a sheaf in which a girl is hidden, and the clerical seducer is often the butt of sixteenth-century French farces. Friars in particular are mocked in this way in Italian stories from Boccaccio to Bandello, stories which are probably literary elaborations of folktales, like that of Frate Auberto disguised as the angel Gabriel (*Decameron*, day 4 No 2). (Burke 1978:156)

Burke cautions that "less revolutionary decades" are better for the examination of popular anticlericalism, perhaps pointing towards the potential for further exploration. Although Burke focuses on some of the social roots which encourage anticlericalism, such as the perceived greed of the clergy (whether those appetites are for money or sex), he also discusses problems with Church ideology such as purgatory, once again showing a blurring of the distinction of critiquing doctrine and having problems with a specific priest's power. Finally, Burke also illustrates some of the other overriding sentiments of the time "To be learned was abnormal, so a learned man must be a magician [...]" (Motif-

Index D 1311.7.1)" (172). Certainly, this mistrust and suspicion of the clergy because they are often more educated than their parishioners is also shown in other contexts as discussed in Chapter Two. The priest was exceptional because of his education, as well as other factors such as his control over the sacraments and proximity to God. Although this exceptionalism is often not the case in most modern societies, it is arguable that this distinction occurs in areas of rural Atlantic Canada, where some communities still suffer from a lack of access to post secondary education, as will be discussed further in later chapters. Burke draws on the popular sources of Europe to support his proposition that anticlericalism is well documented in the popular culture of that time, and indicative of larger scale issues. He points towards the possibility of anticlericalism preceding "revolutionary decades" as we will explore throughout. Counterclericalism may be a precursor to anticlericalism, however, this fact, while hinted at, is generally ignored by academics.

I understand anticlericalism not to be a vernacular term, but rather, one used by the dominant power to accuse those who oppose its authority. In this thesis, I argue that the term counterclericalism is a more appropriate term for individual or community-based expressions which circumvent the dominance of the local priest. Counterclericalism, as I describe more fully later, provides the basis of, and historical background for, but does not necessarily burst forth into the public contestation that characterizes anticlericalism or a more generalized expression of anti-Catholicism (Aston and Cragoe 2001). Anticlericalism is a very explicitly defined term (although its exact meaning must be derived in context), historically applied by the Church to problematic parishes or

parishioners, while counterclericalism attempts to address the ambiguity of expression. In part, the term counterclericalism draws on Antonio Gramsci's term "counterhegemonic" (1992) which has been adopted by folklorists to discuss power dynamics and socio-economic status, especially as it relates to individuals or groups who act out in some way against dominant groups or ideologies (Narváez 2008; Ó Giolláin 2000). Anticlericalism is counterhegemonic behaviour. Issues of marginality, gender and power dynamics often are hand-in-hand with discussions of counterhegemony, all of which lend themselves well to this work.

Counterclericalism and anticlericalism are distinct; I propose that the discipline of folklore provides the necessary framework to build upon the foundation provided by historians' and anthropologists' groundwork in the study of anticlericalism. With an awareness of the definition of anticlericalism, counterclericalism is defined by traditions of ambivalence and resistance which counter the dominance of clerics. Differences between vernacular terminology and academic terminology create complexities leading historians (and sometimes anthropologists) to adopt the term "popular anticlericalism" although some of these expressions could more appropriately be called "folk anticlericalism" or "vernacular anticlericalism," or, to use the term I suggest, counterclericalism.<sup>2</sup>

By drawing on theories, approaches and methods of historians and anthropologists to these materials, and adding folklore theories which support the study of counter-

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<sup>2</sup> The British use of the term "popular" in cultural studies is problematic, in that it encompasses both folk culture (vernacular expressions) and popular culture (media, etc) and tends to mean expressions which are not part of "elite" culture.

hegemonic marginalized groups, I hope to add to the body of knowledge about this area of expression. The importance of these beliefs and narratives is that they provide an outlet for concerns otherwise unexpressed in vernacular religious culture and comprise a cultural critique of priestly privilege and behaviour. Lawrence Taylor notes, "priest stories, and the beliefs and behaviour associated with such clergy are [...] collective representations on the nature of religious power" (1990:164). Other faiths have dialogue about the power of religious figures (Aston and Cragoe 2001), but for the purpose of this study I focus on Roman Catholic expressions about priests.

Counterclericalism has nothing to do with anti-religiosity or anti-Catholicism. Instead, it is often a means for Catholics to "deal" with any incongruities between their local priest and religious ideals. Even priests may engage in behaviours which critique other priests or religious tenets, however, these expressions are not the subject of our inquiry, as we examine the power dynamic between parishioners and priests that these expressions illustrate. Parishioners that make counterclerical comments may actually be very staunch supporters of their faith; it is possible that their comments come from a sense of having earned the right to critique their religion. As explored throughout this work, most counterclericalism is expressed by devout Catholics who feel that their priest does not fulfill his post adequately. For example, counterclerical expressions, such as jokes, or narratives can express a parishioner's irritation with the priest for his attitudes on marriage, when the priest is not married himself (Sánchez 1972: 54-55). Or they could point towards a family or community feud with the local priest, caused by his refusal to administer services or the sacraments (O'Shea and O'Shea 1993:7) or perhaps heavy-

handedness in financial matters (Taylor 1995:102-144) or control over secular aspects of day-to-day life (Caplan 1996: 11). These illustrations suggest that even when the priest fulfills religious responsibilities he may disappoint his congregation, or at least some members of it. A larger body of narratives is devoted to the priest who has character flaws: such as the alcoholic, abusive, or avaricious priest. Counterclerical expressions can reflect personal, familial, occupational, regional, or national interests, as will be outlined in the following chapters. They can exist in the mainstream, or they may be a more private matter. They can take on a variety of forms from casual jokes and observations to fully developed complex narratives. Most importantly, they are performed by Catholics critiquing their own priests (or religion) as insiders, not those of other religious groups making statements about Roman Catholic faith. These are esoteric (Jansen 1959) vernacular understandings of anticlerical or counterclerical expressions; however, in scholarship, as a theoretical interpretation, or "keyword" term, anticlericalism takes on other meanings.

While anticlericalism is one of many interpretative frameworks of history and movements, and it is not necessarily a theory onto itself, it has been used primarily by historians to reinterpret key historical periods and events, and in the 1960s and 1970s, by anthropologists to interpret ethnographic data. Typically, the regional foci of historians and anthropologists studying anticlerical events have been different; although there are exceptions, the majority of historical studies are centred in Europe and anthropological studies in South America. The study of anticlericalism has been a significant aspect of vernacular religiosity for European scholars, but although it is often a topic in the popular

press – as I examine in Chapters Two, Three and Five – similar scholarship on subtle forms of religious resistance to clerical authority is less apparent in writings on North American vernacular religion (apart from the work of Racine 1972 on Québécois anticlerical themes in literature, and Vecoli 1969 on anticlericalism among Italian immigrants to North America). Reasons for the contrasting European emphasis and North American neglect of anticlerical issues are complex, but could stem largely from respective differences in the contemporary and historical social roles of the clergy in each place. Badone (1990a), Taylor (1990; 1995) and Riegelhaupt (1984) suggest that European anticlericalism is a result of the political role of the European clergy as both socially and economically elite. Riegelhaupt discusses the power of the priest as resulting from “an intersection of religious authority (universal to Catholicism), a specific local agrarian social structure (the absence of a local or landed elite), and a particular political system (a pro-clerical authoritarian state)” (1984:98-99)

Anticlericalism in North America is neither in strict parallel to, nor a direct transference of, many of the European forms which have been studied. North America has never really had what Riegelhaupt called a “pro-clerical authoritarian state,” and has instead historically maintained a purported separation of church and state with a variety of ethnic groups in each area and religious pluralism. For example, on the West coast of Cape Breton, circa 1890s, the majority of the area was populated with Mi'kmaq, Acadians, Scots and Irish, although other ethnic groups were also present. Catholicism dominated the area, but Protestant sects existed, and Baptist missionaries had already made their presence known in the area. Anticlericalism may be counterproductive when

Catholics are in the minority; in this case Catholics may choose to focus on the protective aspects of the Church rather than the oppressive ones. It is a questionable use of effort for parishioners to feel oppressed by their church when they also feel oppressed by the anti- or non-Catholic government, or are in a religious minority.

Models for the study of European anticlericalism cannot be simply transposed into the study of North American anticlericalism (although there may be similarities to European anticlericalism in particular regions, like areas of Newfoundland and Quebec, due to their Catholic majorities), but counterclericalism exists throughout the country. Counterclericalism in Atlantic Canada is not manifested as it is in Europe or South America. Instead of major uprisings and public displays, we may find a "slow burn" of counterclericalism, with periodic "flash fires" of directed anticlericalism against a particular priest or the Catholic Church. In general, this study explores issues and events, both historic and current, which have created counterclerical sentiments and expressions. It also explores aspects (such as socio-economic status and gender) which led to the marginalisation of specific groups. These became compounded by parishioners' feelings of exploitation and suggest a climate for counterclerical (and potentially anticlerical) expressions.

It may first appear puzzling that parishioners could express aggression towards their church via their priest, yet maintain a presence in the church. Historians emphasise the importance and necessity of the Catholic Church in the day-to-day life of those who were members. Although these expressions may have "peaks" and "valleys," historians show they are fairly consistent. For centuries, the Catholic Church helped its members

mark rites of passage, and controlled ceremonial space. It also typically identified itself with the history of the community, through its social and cultural contributions. Even the physical presence of a Roman Catholic Church on the landscape was often dominant. Although far removed in time and place from this current study, some of these historic accounts continue to ring true.

In "The Conflict in the Villages: Popular Anticlericalism in the Isère (1852-1870)," Roger Magraw cites a public display of anticlericalism:

In rural areas rumours of the restoration of the tithes were rife. Many clergy were physically threatened. In Bourg d'Oisans peasants cut down the clergy's woodlands. A police report noted that 'through fear of seeing themselves stripped of their property [the peasantry] regret that they did not kill the nobles and the priests and dream of revenge at the earliest possible opportunity.' (1970:171)

Magraw argues that the parishioners' key concern was loss of money and property, and he also identifies a split between local and national anticlericalism. These two types of anticlericalism which co-exist yet are present in different classes or geographic areas are not specific to France in the 1800s; as we will see later in the chapter, anthropologists in the 1960s and 70s had similar findings in other countries. Magraw writes:

At the national level the main causes were briefly the clergy's nostalgia for legitimism, its political and social conservatism, its highly unpopular ultramontanism during the Italian question and its pretensions to dominate primary education. [...] *But at the communal level it is perhaps unrealistic to imagine that rural populations with a very limited range of political interests shared the opposition to the 'intellectual obscurantism' of congregational education, or the sympathy with Italian unification or republication intellectuals.* (1970:174-5, italics added for emphasis)

Although Magraw touches on vernacular expressions of anticlericalism, his focus is on large scale demonstrations of these sentiments, characterized by open hostility, voting,

and church walkouts. Despite these rather public demonstrations (or actions with public outcomes) it seems that locals were encouraged by the distribution of newspapers and brochures, which caused them to act (2001:226). Magraw identifies these forms as the result of expressions, although he states that "The roots of anticlericalism" were "in squabbles which in themselves are of a nature so parochial as to appear unimportant" (1970:174-5). He illustrates the importance of these previously disregarded forms:

[...] if one traces the courses of these innumerable petty disputes it becomes obvious that *by a logical sequence they progress towards the sort of issues which comprised the national politics of the Third Republic. A municipal council, at odds with the curé over the expenses for the re-roofing of a church, instinctively protests when the curé starts a campaign of propaganda for a congregational school.* [...] (1970:175)

Magraw identifies that these seemingly unimportant expressions informed the national politics of the time, furthermore these contributing expressions were continually generated as "The opportunities for friction within the village were infinite" (1970:175).

Theodore Zeldin, for example, calls for an examination of the content of confessions from the 1800s to determine the extent of the impact of this religious rite on parishioners' lives. In the introduction to his *Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education and Morals in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* he discusses the role of the Church in local customs:

It may appear that after 1789 and after Napoleon, the Church had become a department of state, that is had lost its old dominance, that faith in its teachings diminished and that it should not be considered of primary importance. But Madame d'Agoult was right when she wrote: 'The Catholic church still rules, not, to be sure, over the mind or the heart of French society, but over its habits. In a country in which principles are so weak and passions so changeable, is not command over habits really command over life itself?' (1970b:10)

In his own contribution to the collection, "The Conflict of Moralities: Confession, Sin and Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century," he puts forward several areas which may have contributed to anticlerical sentiment in 19<sup>th</sup> century France:

The first is that the confession is an institution the study of which could reveal a great deal to historians and social scientists; and that it is an institution which has taken on a variety of forms at different periods and in different regions of France and of the world [...] It would be useful to contrast the French situation with the Greek Orthodox one, where there is far less anticlericalism and where confession is made not to the village priests but to specially authorized monks with a reputation for holiness, outside the village community. (1970a:47-48)

The priest's control over the sacraments, as well as his ability to withhold them, or his inability to fulfill his role in delivering them can be a major point of contention. Zeldin's call to social scientists to explore these issues shows a keen awareness of their connection to anticlericalism. He goes on to describe some problems with the priest's execution of the sacrament of confession:

The second hypothesis is that the rigour of the inquisition in the confession and the severity of the sanction may have some relation to the spread of anticlericalism and the decline in the church attendance. Much has been written about the interference of the clergy in political disputes but very little so far about the effects of its probing into people's lives. However, in France it seems that the tenacious survival of Jansenist rigorism in certain areas, and its propagation well into the nineteenth century through Bailly's widely used seminary textbook and other works, did produce a clergy who were particularly repressive in dealing with sin and with pleasure. Sexual behaviour may have been an important subject of dispute between the priest and his parishioners, in a way which has not hitherto been realised. (1970a:49)

Zeldin calls for an examination of the effect of the priest on folklife and custom, citing examples in which the priest's actions had localised and personal impact on parishioners. The impact of particular orders of priests— as well as their perception of issues such as

sexuality—on individuals, communities and regions has been under-explored. Although not an obligation, save for prior to receiving first communion, confession (the sacrament of Reconciliation) is often felt to be a requirement for ongoing personal piety and participation in communion, hence the frustration if it is withheld, performed poorly or generally manipulative.

Finally, Zeldin alludes to a gender difference in religious practices and outcomes, specifically how they relate to the family unit.

The third suggestion is that these problems of anticlericalism can be used to shed light on the development of the family. Michelet's hostility to the confession is linked with his concern for the emancipation of women.<sup>3</sup> But he makes it clear that he is anxious not just to liberate women from clerical oppression; he also wants to strengthen the family and in particular the power of the husband in it. The confessor appeared to him as the great enemy or rival of the husband. Now in the nineteenth century the idea was frequently put forward that parental authority was on the decline; and it may be that hostility to the confessor and anticlericalism was some form of rearguard action to safeguard or preserve this authority. (1970a:50)

The idea that the priest is a threat to the man of the family, and that the woman is more responsible for the religious education of her family and is perceived to be more pious, is something other scholars take up as well that I will explore later in this chapter.

About the complicated relationship between a woman and her priest, Zeldin also states:

The best-known attack on the confession as an instrument of clerical domination was made by Michelet in 1845. He objected above all to its use on women, who, he assumed, were the part of the population which principally submitted to it. Through it, he said, the Church obtained control of women, and this was the vital basis of its power. It was the priest, not the husband, who controlled a man's wife. As her confessor, the priest

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<sup>3</sup> Zeldin refers here to J. Michelet, author of *Le Prêtre, la femme et la famille* (1845).

received her in church, alone, at fixed hours. In addition, as her spiritual director, he visited her at her home whenever he pleased. He asked her questions on matters about which she would never dare talk to her husband. As spiritual director he demanded to know not just her sins, but everything about her, and in this role he was not obliged to keep her secrets. He might postpone absolution to wring information out of her, facts about her husband, the name of her lover. Husbands no longer used fear as an instrument for keeping the love of their wives, but priests did: the priest 'always has the stick of authority in his dealings with the wife, he beats her, submissive and docile, with spiritual rods. There is no seduction comparable to this.' The wife is isolated; her will and personality are destroyed. Families are divided. 'The home [becomes] uninhabitable.' A man cannot express an opinion without the certainty that his wife (and daughters) will contradict him, and report him to the curé. Michelet protested on two grounds, in the name of the family and in the name of morality (1970a:15)

The ability of the priest to control entire families through the women of the household in this way is not typically a modern concern. However we do see this as an issue in the not-too-distant past, especially as women relied on the Church for social services (see the discussion of Mount Cashel as well as the depiction of women in Newfoundland novels in Chapter Two).

Delivery of the sacraments, the treatment of women in Catholic Church, and the Church's stance on birth control continue to be contentious issues. In "The Conflict in Politics" Austin Gough cites reports made by Natalis Damay to the French minister of justice:

Women were driven to the common crime of infanticide, [Damay] reported, by the public opprobrium roused by priests against unmarried mothers, and by the lack of any proper legal machinery to compel men to pay adequate maintenance. In cases of homosexuality he pointed out that French law was kinder than Canon law: there were no prosecutions if the acts were 'in private, without coercion, and did not concern minors' (1970:166)

Even recently, in Atlantic Canada, priests controlled the family unit through the allocation

of annulments and dispensations for marriage and the reading of the banns (Tompkins [n.d.], circa 1970). This marginalization of women and homosexuals through sanctions imposed by being the religious head of household, or by Canon law in the case of homosexuals helps, to explain why historically anticlerical expressions may have taken different forms based on sex and gender. Other academics have also explored the influence of Catholic priests on women's decisions (Orsi 1996) specifically about healthcare (Joyce 2002) marriage, and bodies (Bowman 1985).

Historians have documented anticlericalism, and have shown an awareness of events and situations which precede public displays of anticlerical sentiment, for example, citing the number of laypeople reported for insulting clergy (Haigh 2001:20), and church minutes which address records of dissenting votes and arguments about burials (Cragoe 2001:189). They note problems with the definition of the term anticlericalism (Knight 2001:159-161), and attempt to outline its nuances (such as "masculinist" anticlericalism, directed towards a perception of clerical dress as feminine, clerical lifestyle as homosocial, and other such commentary McLeod 2001:208). Typically, anticlericalism revolves around abuse of power, the priests' control of the sacraments, and economics. Historians initially examined grievances with Church doctrine and major social upheavals as anticlerical expressions, documenting a long history of various public expressions. They identify that anticlericalism as found in other faiths (e.g. Anglicanism) but explore the fact that a dynamic is in place different from that of Roman Catholic expressions. Beyond providing foundational work for the study of anticlericalism, they also provide several areas for further exploration: they examine

issues such as gender and how that might contribute to anticlericalism as a whole; they show an awareness of regional variation of anticlerical expression; and they suggest interrelationship of what they call anticlericalism and "popular anticlericalism." These directions are explored in this work.

### iii. *The Anthropological Approach*

Anthropologists have built upon historians' work and also furthered the study of anticlericalism. Most anthropologists cite Joyce Riegelhaupt as the first scholar in her field to study anticlerical practices and name them as such. Riegelhaupt conducted fieldwork in Portugal in 1960-1962 and made return visits in 1964, 1968, 1971 and 1976. In her article "Popular Anti-Clericalism and Religiosity in Pre-1974 Portugal," Riegelhaupt draws on the work of two anticlericalism historians, José Sánchez (1972) and Theodore Zeldin (1970a, 1979), but no similar works from other anthropologists, providing further evidence to her place as the first in her discipline to address these issues.

Riegelhaupt identifies several issues of interest to folklorists. She is the first, and one of the few, academics to look at anticlericalism as a belief. Folklorists such as David Hufford (1982; 1989) have long been interested in the construction of belief and the prospect that many beliefs are discounted because they fall outside of mainstream understanding of official religion. Riegelhaupt states:

*Anticlericalism was in itself a belief.* Among the villagers, however, it existed apart from any rationalistic questioning of faith. Yet, given the organisation of Catholicism, access to faith and the required rites and rituals was only possible through the priest. Thus, for many São Miguelitos participation as a Catholic became unattainable and no other

positive belief system was available. Their 'anticlericalism' was intrinsically related to their unwillingness to submit to the priest's hierarchical power, secular and religious. Saints may be appropriate mediators to God and patrons to communities, but on earth, "priests are not saints." (1984:112)

Riegelhaupt addresses this concept of anticlericalism as belief and suggests that it is constructed through a juxtaposition of perceived lack of piety of the priest with the necessity of a priest for sacraments. Earlier, I addressed Zeldin's concept of this problem, providing his examples of gendered expressions of "popular anticlericalism" based on piety, and the concept that some parishioners feel they are more pious than their priests. Like historians, anthropologists have explored anticlericalism's links to gender, pointing out that historically women have been seen as being responsible for the moral development of their families. Anthropologists suggest that the woman's religious role in her family is very important: "Women who were anticlerical were often much more conflicted, since their domestic roles made them responsible for the ritual well-being of their households" (Riegelhaupt 1984:110).

Like historians, Riegelhaupt defines the way in which she is using the term anticlericalism, as well as how it has previously been used, but she also discusses the different strains of anticlericalism present in her research. She identifies the Church as the object of most anticlerical sentiments, even if the priest is the initial recipient of the expression. She identifies two separate streams of anticlericalism, one directed toward the Church doctrine, and one toward the specific priest, although she cautions that anticlericalism which appears to be against the priest may actually be against the Church.

It is necessary to distinguish negative attitudes and actions directed toward the institutional Church and by extension its agents (the regular and

secular clergy) from those negative attitudes that focus directly on the position of the priest. Historically, it has been hostility directed against the favored institutional role that the Catholic Church has played in a given State that has most mobilized anticlericalism. The Church's influence and power in economic and political spheres was challenged and the clergy, most often the regular clergy and the hierarchy, became the focus of anticlericalism. (1984:96)

Much as soldiers in a war take bullets for their country and are rarely, if ever, differentiated from each other, or separated from their country's beliefs and expressions, Riegelhaupt argues that priests are on the front lines of the Church and as its representatives are often the recipients of aggression. She identifies the political role of the Church as the primary cause of anticlericalism among parishioners.

Frequently, opposition to the worldly role of the Church included hostility to Catholicism as a religion. Here, too, the clergy were attacked as agents of a most pernicious institution, not only because of their misuse of economic and political power, but equally importantly because of their role as disseminators of an unacceptable ideology. It is not always possible to distinguish between those who opposed the Church's power in 'secular' affairs from those who opposed the very institution of religion since these often over-lapped. However, we should analytically recognize a distinction between an anticlericalism that is fundamentally "anti-Church" because of the Church's institutional position in a given state, and the broader anticlericalism that is equivalent to "anti-religion." In each of these dimensions, however, the attacks against the clergy are part of a larger attach on the Church as an institution. (1984:96)

Riegelhaupt argues that despite the fact that there may be different types of, or different reasons for, anticlericalism, the Church itself is the root cause. Even if the comments are localised to one priest in one diocese, the parish response could be "why did our Church saddle us with this priest," or "why did the Church not find this priest unsuitable before this?"

Anticlericalism that was motivated by political or economic issues usually

referred to the larger Church structure, but anticlericalism that was about priest's attributes, whether personal or religious, was about their local priest. Riegelhaupt explains:

Another set of concerns focus directly on the behavior of the parish priest and do not seem to question the larger socio-political institutional structure within which the secular clergy acts as local emissary, although the issues, namely, the priest's political and economic activities, can be traced to the larger structure. Finally, and again not always clearly separable from the above, are a range of anticlerical criticisms that are explicitly directed against the way in which a local priest handles his religious duties and that often appear to question the sacerdotal structure of Catholicism. In both of these "anticlerical" attitudes, the priest, qua priest, is the target, not the institution of the Church nor religion. It is within this general range of anticlericalism – the antagonism of parishioners to their local priest—that this discussion shall focus. (1984:96-97)

Riegelhaupt links these two strains to José Cutileiro's (1971) definitions of anticlericalism: "'Elite anticlericalism,' he argues, was concerned with the larger structural questions of Church/State relations and explicitly against the economic and political power of the Church" (1984:97). Cutileiro finds that "popular anticlericalism" – comments against the priest – is more predominate. One could easily jump to the conclusion that villagers are not as educated about national or institutional politics and therefore not able to make "elite anticlericalism" comments, but more likely, as postulated by both authors, due to the political control of the church, villagers chose not to implicate themselves in a crime against local government (1984:98). Addressing the problems with this terminology, Riegelhaupt notes: "Although the terms 'elite' and 'popular' may not be the best, the distinction between anticlericalisms which arises from an ideological position and an anticlericalism which is focused on everyday events is important" (1984:113). Riegelhaupt seems to recognize that there is variation in the types

of anticlericalism, but notes some dissatisfaction with the available terminology and the negative connotations of the term "elite."

Although anticlericalism is not a mainstream area of anthropological study, *Religious Orthodoxy & Popular Faith in European Society* edited by Ellen Badone (1990b), provides several articles on it from the anthropological perspective, including Caroline B. Brettell's, "The Priest and his People: The Contractual Basis for Religious Practice in Rural Portugal," Ruth Behar's "The Struggle for the Church: Popular Anticlericalism and Religiosity in Post-Franco Spain," Badone's own "Breton Folklore of Anticlericalism" and Lawrence J. Taylor's "Stories of Power, Powerful Stories: The Drunken Priest in Donegal."<sup>4</sup> Similarly struggling with terminology, Taylor draws the following distinctions between types of anticlericalism:

Anthropologists studying local religious life have considered talk about priests mainly under the rubric of "anticlericalism," and have understood such verbal acts to be manifestations of the distance and hostility between "folk religion" and "orthodoxy." Following historian Bossy's (1970) seminal treatment of the social objectives of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Riegelhaupt (1973, 1984), Brettell (this volume), and Badone (this volume) have seen anticlerical remarks and stories as an expression of local resentment of and resistance to the anticomunal campaign of the Catholic church which began with the sixteenth-century Council of Trent. From this perspective the local priest is an outsider representative of the ever-extending hegemony of the institutional church. To this political perspective Brandes (1980) and Gilmore (1984) add a psychological consideration of the extremely sexual form of anticlericalism that seems to characterize at least some of the Mediterranean culture area. (1990:165-166)

Taylor seems to focus more on the differences between this anticlericalism and

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor's article and his subsequent book, *Occasions of Faith: An Anthropology of Irish Catholics* (1995) are in a different context but one close in association with Atlantic Canada, as many of the early settlers and priests originated in Ireland.

that with which he is familiar. He identifies Irish anticlericalism as minimal:

While Ireland is by no means devoid of "anticlericalism" in several of its modes, it does not seem to play anything like the central role it does in Portugal (Cutileiro 1971; Reiglehaupt 1984), Spain (e.g. Brandes 1980; Gilmore 1984), or Italy (Silverman 1975). In my experience Irish priests are far more typically praised than damned, and while individual clerics do run into opposition on particular issues, Irish priests are awarded a general respect and even veneration that would be the envy of their Mediterranean colleagues. As for the "stories" as such, only a tiny percentage of those Ó'hEochaidh collected or that I heard, by any stretch of the term, could be called "anticlerical." Yet the stories about drunken priests, as is evident from the opening example, are at least ambivalent, and the nature and roots of that ambivalence require exploration. (1995:166)

The fact that expressions of anticlericalism in Ireland are not prevalent and are not made manifest as in the Mediterranean context is not surprising, as the context is different and the histories of the Church in these regions are quite distinct from each other. Taylor's work and that of other anthropologists highlights cultural differences that no doubt affect expressions of anticlericalism. Parishioners' ambivalence to a priest is still not supportive of him or the Church. In a public academic lecture on the topic, Taylor stated that an elderly lady in his Irish research group decided to stop going to mass after Vatican II when the Church's stance on abortion and birth control did not change (2004). And citing similar fieldwork in Newfoundland, Thomas Nemeč stated that even lack of Church attendance on one day could be understood as an anticlerical statement in rural Newfoundland (2005). It is also worthy of note that both Nemeč and Taylor expressed a certain trepidation in talking about anticlerical expressions, both in wanting to represent their participants fairly and protect their privacy, and in Nemeč's case, due to fear of personal and professional repercussions this exposure might bring. While anthropologists like Taylor and Nemeč point to the ambivalence in these expressions, neither fully take it

up. Resistance, nuanced language and behaviour are frequently explored in folklore, and the discipline provides some potential frameworks for exploring this material further.

Anthropologists further define and struggle with the terminology put forward by historians, and they provide folklorists with modern studies of anticlericalism in various contexts, from an ethnographic approach not unlike our own. They recognize the importance of narrative and folklife as related to anticlericalism and although they may not explore them directly they do indicate the need for further study (Taylor 1995). They identify gender issues as important in the study of anticlericalism, and address the nuanced language and beliefs that comprise anticlerical expressions. Although they may not fully address these issues, they also touch upon the idea that anticlericalism is a tradition of belief, rather than an anomalous occurrence. Finally, some also identify the fact that there is something related to, but distinct from, anticlericalism in their fieldwork that should be explored further.

#### *iv. Priests in Folklore Scholarship*

Priests have been given more than a passing treatment in folklore scholarship, although anticlericalism has not been overtly addressed. The presence of public expressions about priests in published sources is minimal compared to the wealth of material in archives and "in the field" (K. Jackson 1952:127). There are diverse reasons for this, from trepidation about publication of findings (as in the previous examples with anthropologists), to the politics of representation. Potentially, the redefinition of the study of religion among folklorists (such as Goldstein 1995; Hufford 1982; 1989; Lawless 1988; Primiano 1995) has affected the communication of research. New concepts such as

autoethography are used to balance the charge against the unbiased ethnographer (Behar 1996), the "tradition of disbelief" and the acceptance that we all have beliefs of some sort (Hufford 1982), new terminology for the study of religion, such "vernacular" versus "folk religion" (Primiano 1995), and emerging theoretical approaches, for example, the experiential approach (Hufford 1989) have been the subject of research in the last three decades. Furthermore, it was not until the development of the study of occupational folklore (Jones 1984, 1985, 1991; McCarl 1985a, 1985b, 1988a, 1988b) that folklore on the borders of (or within) institutions began to be studied seriously, opening up another avenue for folklorists who study religion. It seems the line between vernacular religion and organised religion is still intact, with folklorists only recently studying the latter (Lawless 1988). Folklorists, though, have long been aware of the power of the priest, and his role in the community, and the body of material related to priests.

An examination of folkloristic conceptualizations of counterclericalism can begin with Stith Thompson and Vladimir Propp. The motifs and roles that they establish as modes of operation for priest characters in traditional tales are still found in modern narratives as I examine in Chapters Two, Three and Four. In his *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-1958), Stith Thompson lists one hundred and twenty-five motifs under the headings "Priest," "Priests," and "Priesthood." The motifs about priests include many like the following, the majority of which are negative:

- Greedy Priest Reincarnated As Feeding Insect, Q551.5.1.3
- Seduction By Priest During Confession, K1339.6
- Sharing Wife With Priest, J1919.6
- Priests Ignorant Of Latin, J1741
- Bishop Forced To Ordain Ignorant Priest, U41
- Resuscitation By Priest, E121.5 (S. Thompson 1955-1958)

In general, as a character the priest figures prominently in legend; for the most part these narratives are supernatural legends, historical legends or morality tales with a similar complex of motifs and themes. Sean O'Sullivan's *Folktales of Ireland*, for example, provides a legend called "Cromwell and the Friar" in which a priest is depicted in a fight against the devil; this legend includes both historical and supernatural elements and was collected alongside folktales with a variety of secular themes (1966:236-240)<sup>5</sup> (See also Glassie 1985; Jackson 1952; Lysaght 1991; Ní Fearghusa 1994-95; Nuttal 1999; Ó Héalaí 1996 for other legends about priests collected in similar contexts).

Stith Thompson notes that the priest can often be an incidental designation given to a player in a legend. He writes "many of the old fabliaux in which the actors may belong to any trade or profession, or none at all, have frequently been retold as happening to the priest..." (S. Thompson 1946: 212). The priest character is one that exhibits a certain morality or striking lack thereof. Although Thompson notes that priests are sometimes nurturing or heroic, much more often they are seen as having sexual, farcical, and vindictive characteristics. The priest can be a stock character in Märchen and other narratives; for example many tales end in marriage with a priest presiding (although any clergyman could be present). The priest can serve a small purpose by being bumbling or evil. With the introduction of the priest into the narrative, the actions of that character are often easy to anticipate, and the priest is a ready stock character that lends himself to various roles from the merry priest to the fool to the heroic priest (Burke 1978:156).

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<sup>5</sup> As an historical legend, no tale type is associated with "Cromwell and the Friar," but relevant motifs include M306 "Enigmatical Prophecy," M301.5 "Saints (holy men) as Prophets," Q211.5 "Suicide Punished" and R11.2.1 "Devil Carries Off Wicked People."

Vladimir Propp's seminal work the *Morphology of the Folklore* (1968) is an examination and comparison of Russian folktales which emphasizes the use of tale roles and functions of the dramatis personae, resulting in the creation of a structural tool for the analysis of folktales. According to Propp's structure, the priest operates in a variety of ways: his role can be a "helper," or a "villain," for example, and potentially even a "hero." The priest then emerges as an ambiguous character in folklore, and only when considered contextually can one discover his motivation. This ambiguity is perhaps one reason why the priest is often a subject of narrative, in that narrative allows for the discussion and debate on the nature of priests, as well as an opportunity to discuss a particular priest.

As I explore throughout, ambiguity is an issue in modern narratives as well. Diane Tye argues that the role of local characters in Nova Scotian communities was often purposefully ambiguous (Tye 1989). Narratives which feature local characters allow individuals to negotiate shared meanings together and to clarify cultural expectations for acceptable behaviour. Similarly, as I show below, the ambiguity of the priest role allows not only for discussion of a particular priest, but debate on the nature of priests and church structure and doctrine more generally. Significantly, the role of priests and doctors in legends is almost interchangeable; both are persons of position, authority and definite role; a person in a public position of authority, or person who represents a moral core or position of power (see Galanter 2005; Legman 1968).

It bears stating that religious figures other than priests appear far less often. For example, in Thompson's *Motif Index*, "Nun," "Nuns" and "Nun's" have thirty-five

motifs, only about a quarter of the entries devoted to priests. These motifs have similarities to those found in the priest narratives, but some represent a sharp contrast. Although they are religious figures, nuns are seen as vulnerable to male power. For example, motifs depict the chastity of the nun or her victimisation, while other motifs depict a sexually inappropriate nun or, in contrast, a sexually naïve nun.

Maggots In Nun's Sores Become Jewels, V222.15  
 Refuses To Look At Man, T362  
 Sees Jesus After Prayer, D1766.1.2  
 Nun's Illegitimate Child, T640.1  
 Aids Capture Of Ravisher, Q244.2  
 Falsely Accused Of Adultery, K2112 (S. Thompson 1955-1958)

Finally, there are also those motifs which depict a deeply religious or pious nun, while piety and religiosity without satirical implications are strangely underrepresented among priest motifs.

Folklorists have included material with these themes in their collections, but they have done so often by virtue of not *excluding* it. Rather than the focus of in-depth exploration, folklore about priests has been marginal to many collections and fieldwork. That said, folklore contributes a documented history of vernacular expressions against priests, as noted in the *Motif-Index* and elsewhere, in various geographic regions and in a variety of genres.

Cross-culturally, legends told by Catholics about priests appear in folklore collections, often collected by folklorists during the course of other fieldwork. For example, Henry Glassie's *Irish Folk Tales* (1985), Reimund Kvideland and Henning Sehmsdorf's *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* (1998), and Gerald Thomas's *The Two Traditions: The Art of Storytelling Amongst French Newfoundlanders* (1993) all contain

beliefs and narratives featuring priests. The narratives about priests might be presented alongside others with limited contextualisation, and linked to the narratives they are presented with due to mode of collection (same fieldtrip or informant) or region in which it was found (Glassie's *Irish Folk Tales* is a good example of this).

Legends about priests straddle genres of legend research; unlike most legends, they deal with notions of both organized and vernacular religious belief. The priest has a certain prominence in supernatural legends, possibly due to his connection with the transference of his parishioners' souls from this world to the next, or his role as spiritual protector (regardless of whether or not he is efficient in meeting this responsibility). Patricia Lysaght discusses this in "'Is There Anyone Here to Serve My Mass?': the Legend of 'The Dead Priest's Midnight Mass' in Ireland" (1991), as does Jacqueline Ní Fhearghusa in "The Devil's Son as Priest: Distribution, Form and Function of a Story on the Borderline between Folktale and Folk Legend" (1994-95) and Deirdre Nuttall in "The Devil and the Parish Priest in Newfoundland Folklore" (1999). Historical legends as well as supernatural legends and beliefs about priests are explored more thoroughly in Chapters Two and Three.

Indeed, within popular culture, the priest is a predominant character in depictions of hauntings, possessions and the devil, most famously in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973) but also in *Amityville Horror* (S. Rosenberg 1979) and other horror books and films: his use in these instances may be to provide a thread of credibility to the narratives. That said, the priest is more often present within popular culture due to his roles within rites of

passage, primarily presiding over weddings in films.<sup>6</sup> Localised popular culture, or what I call vernacular popular culture (following Narváez 1995; 1997; 2002) is more central to this study. Narváez discusses vernacular music, but analyses commodified expressions in small-markets. In turn, I apply this approach to other popular culture expressions, such as popular novels in Newfoundland. It has been established that folklore and popular culture are quite closely linked, and this phenomena has been called “the folk-popular culture continuum” (see Narváez and Laba 1986). This is expanded upon in Chapter Two.

The priest can be a central character in personal experience narratives (e.g., Rankin 1945). I would argue that these narratives form the bulk of oral tradition about priests in Atlantic Canada; the repertoire of one woman – my mother – is the subject of Chapter Four. People define themselves through their lived experiences and often tell narratives that include those in authority, whether as a form of gossip or as a warning, to educate others, talk for talk’s sake, to poke fun and air grievances, to state opinions, or to offer up something for debate (Corbin 1996; Goldstein 2004; Tye 1989). They may also use this time to discuss what they feel are inadequacies in social systems or inappropriate behaviour by those in power. Sometimes the stories are told as part of a fact-finding mission, as a means to gather information before action takes place. Expressions about priests can be explorations of faith, statements on inadequacies, and a way to create avenues of debate as documented in folklore scholarship (Hart and Hart 1976; Lysaght 1991; Ní Fhearghusa 1994-95; Nuttall 1999; Taylor 1995). Folklore’s unique approaches

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is many of these stories that culminate in weddings are based on traditional storytelling (McDavid and Brodie 2005).

allow for the exploration of these many forms.

v. *The Atlantic Canadian Context*

One might wonder what relationship this previous scholarship has to the current work. Priests have, or have had, unimaginable power, especially in rural or “insular” Atlantic Canada. As anthropologist Thomas Nemeec says of the situation in Newfoundland, “The parish priest was situated at the very apex of the social scale. By virtue of his spiritual role and unique intermediate position between his parishioners and God, he held a social position above that of anyone else – the merchantocracy included” (1993: 147). Eileen Condon’s 1992 Master’s thesis on Confirmation in Newfoundland also shows the importance of the priest’s performance in rites of passage in Atlantic Canada, and several fictional books produced in Newfoundland and discussed in Chapter Two depict the cultural relevance of the priest.

Despite cultural, social and geographical differences, Riegelhaupt’s findings concerning São Miguel in the 1970s show clear parallels with Atlantic Canada.

In São Miguel, the priest was an ‘outsider,’ an agent of the State. Rarely seen in the village streets, São Miguel’s priest was, from the villagers’ perspective, simultaneously a minister, a businessman, a patron, a policeman, and a man, institutionally forced to deny his manhood. He was the favourite subject of gossip, anecdotes, and at the same time a source of fear. (Riegelhaupt 99)

The ambiguity surrounding expressions about priests stems from the fact that from the time of early settlement to the present day, although rarely specifically documented, priests had a very complex role in the region. They had education and links outside their communities, and they were depended upon to act as facilitators for all manner of

religious rites and to act as an intermediary in both the sacred and secular realms. Priests wielded tremendous power in both the public and private sphere, in both formal religious matters and informal community events. Priests were often very political and the success of a community's endeavours was affected by its priest, for good or ill. In more modern times, one might think that in a post-Vatican II world, cause for concern about priestly power would be less of a concern; however, this seems not to be the case.<sup>7</sup> In Chapter Two, we see a group of actor-comedians who grew up in a pre-Vatican II world and continue to create art which reflects on this time. In the case of Chapter Four, when we look at my mother's narratives, we see an individual who left the Church around the time of Vatican II. For Catholics such as my mother, the changes brought in at the time of Vatican II raised several issues: it removed the traditional/mystery aspects of the Church she had grown accustomed to, it made changes but the changes were not radical enough, and finally, by making changes the Church implied it was able to change, thereby having the opportunity to be more inclusive or to incorporate critiques previous to those changes.

Despite the potentially positive changes of Vatican II<sup>8</sup>, there have been new critiques about the priests and the Church, and continuing forms of criticism that were not impacted by the changes made in the 1960s. In recent years, vernacular depictions of the priest have been more critical in light of convictions of sexual abuse among clergy.

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<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of the expressions presented in this thesis are from individuals that were born before Vatican II. A potential for further research is to approach people born after this time period and interview them about their experiences with priests. In casual conversation, however, I have found that potential participants relate family narratives about priests, and thus still draw on material about priests that predates Vatican II.

<sup>8</sup> The documents of Vatican II can be seen here on the Vatican's webpage: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/)

Historically, the power dynamics which may be created by the local priest or Church, or the Catholic religion itself are rarely publicly challenged in Atlantic Canada, in comparison with other countries, as we will explore in Chapter Two. Social negotiation is a large part of day-to-day life (Tye 1989), and informal rules and folkways dominate many interactions, creating a dynamic where the priests' power dominates. Many homes have "front rooms" reserved for visits from the priest where they display their items with the highest value (Pocius 1986:284; 1991:239-250). In Atlantic Canada the priest is still a greatly respected figure who is rarely challenged.

I initially chose the context for this study for several self-serving reasons: I was located in Newfoundland when it began; I am originally from New Brunswick; and most recently have been living in Nova Scotia. Not only was I proximate, I felt it was the regional culture I had the best grasp on, which I thought would assist me in a nuanced project such as this one. Early on in the research stage I decided to go beyond my initial plan to have the study focus solely on Newfoundland as I recognized the benefits of examining the Atlantic Canadian context, as I believe having a study of this nature focussed in only one locale would not provide the depth necessary to explore the myriad of forms counterclericalism takes, and may further marginalize participants by suggesting these forms are unique to them. Although I survey Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Cape Breton in this work, due to the availability of materials, there are decidedly more examples from Newfoundland as will be explained in Chapter Two. I feel that broadening the base of this work was an intelligent choice: far from being a distinctly Newfoundland phenomenon, I demonstrate that it is across Atlantic Canada, and during the course of

research I encountered examples of anticlericalism from elsewhere in Canada, in addition to Vecoli's work in Quebec (1969).

However, due to the 1989 Hughes Inquiry into sexual abuse at the Mount Cashel Orphanage, people are the least surprised to hear that counterclericalism, and anticlericalism, exists in Newfoundland. Construction began on the Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1898. The orphanage was staffed by the Irish Christian Brothers and extended its caretaking to wards of the state in the 1950s. In 1989 public pressure, prompted by allegations of abuse against Rev. James Hickey caused a Royal Commission (named the Hughes Inquiry after Justice Samuel Hughes) to be struck to examine the role of the Church and police force in covering up allegations of physical and sexual abuse which were brought forward as early as 1975 (Winter Report 1990:2). There was not enough evidence to charge the Church and police for obstructing justice, but nine Brothers were convicted and sentenced with sentences ranging from one to thirteen years in prison. In February 2009, however, it was announced that the Church would be liable for compensation to Rev. James Hickey's victims (CBC 2009). Periodically, it is indicated in the media that there are more victims of these priests, or perhaps more victims of other priests that have yet to come forward (CBC 1999). This is explored in Chapters Two and Five. Despite the ease of locating anticlericalism and counterclericalism as a response after allegations of abuse, these expressions are also found in communities without a history of charges of sexual abuse by clergy (for example, in Chapter Two we will discuss the community of Mabou, Cape Breton, where a counterclerical legend exists without any connection to sexual charges). Counterclerical

expressions are usually confined to small groups, for that reason, the methodological approach of this study is to examine narratives found in folkgroups throughout Atlantic Canada.

Each province of Atlantic Canada has an interrelated, but unique, history. The fact that these provinces have had complex settlement (and resettlement) histories (such as waves of immigration due to economics and religious persecution) as well as limited government services helped to empower the priest's role outside the church and to elevate his status. Historically the lack of local government and the limited level of higher education led to the priest's role as a moral authority, legal proxy, and literate advocate. I suggest these factors as potential points which influence the priest's power and which unofficially become points of concern or contention for parishioners, therefore contributing to anti- or counterclericalism.

Atlantic Canada also boasts ethnic diversity with indigenous peoples and waves of immigration which continue to the present day. This study considers three distinct groups: Scots in Cape Breton, Irish in Newfoundland and Acadians in New Brunswick. My choice of these groups over others is documented in each chapter as well as in the conclusion, but for the most part it centres on ethical concerns, access to individuals, and access to historical documentation of the religious history of the specific ethnic groups. At the time of this research, there was no research on anticlericalism in English Canada, and very little in French-speaking Canada; this study does not include an extensive survey of French materials.

It is possible that shifting demographics of the Roman Catholic Church had an

impact on expressions of anticlericalism. When the Church had the largest demographics and was not under outside pressures (from other religions, missionary work, or internal changes) anticlericalism (or even the more localized counterclericalism) seems to have been latent. Historically, a question about religion has appeared on the Canadian census since 1871, but the census has only appeared every five years. The 1861 Censuses for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick do have religious data. The population of Nova Scotia in 1861 was 330,857, with Roman Catholicism as the largest denomination, with a population of 86,261 (followed by Presbyterians and Baptists). Cape Breton had a population of 20,866; Catholics numbered 10,609, over fifty percent. Presbyterians were the next largest denomination in the area, with 5,928, followed by Church of England with 2,089, while Baptists and Methodists each had approximately 800 parishioners. These figures are included in the total population of Nova Scotia, but highlighted here for clarity and also to show the regional diversity. At the same time New Brunswick had a population of 252,047; once again Catholicism was the largest denomination, with 85,238 parishioners. The second and third largest churches, respectively, were Baptists with 57,730 and Church of England with 42,776.

The data for Newfoundland are slightly different, because confederation with Canada did not occur until 1949 and thus until that time it was not conducting its census on the same timelines as its soon-to-be compatriots. In the 1857 census, the first for Newfoundland, it had a population of 124,288; Catholicism was the largest denomination, with 56,895 parishioners. The second and third largest churches, respectively, were Church of England with 44,285 and the United Church (later categorised as Methodist in

1921) with 20,229. These data are reflective of collection methods in operation at the time, and include Labrador as a region of Newfoundland. Despite Catholicism being in the plurality in Newfoundland overall, and in many towns and villages as well as the city of St. John's, there were still a number of areas where Roman Catholics were in a distinct minority. For example, the census data for 1945 show White Bay, Green Bay, Twillingate and Fogo (among others) with small numbers of Roman Catholics.

In *The First Thousand Years: A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Canada*, Raymond J. Lahey, then the Bishop of the Diocese of St. George's, Newfoundland, highlights the major events in the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church with significant focus on Atlantic Canada.<sup>9</sup> He draws attention to how most of the early explorers were Catholic and had priests on their expeditions. He cites the fact that, beginning with the baptism of Mi'kmaq chief Membertou in 1610 and moving on to Father Pierre Maillard's residency with the Mi'kmaq (1735 to 1762), the entire Mi'kmaq nation (located in Atlantic Canada) converted to Catholicism (2002:11-12). There was an attempt to establish the Jesuits in Acadia from 1610-1613, but funds promised from a benefactor failed to materialise, causing the project to fail (16). The first resident English priest in Atlantic Canada was Father Anthony Pole, who lived in Ferryland, Newfoundland from 1627-1629 (17). As of 1674, most of North America was within the Diocese of Quebec (32). In the late 1600s and early 1700s, Abbé Saint-Vallier was responsible for establishing parishes throughout Atlantic Canada: "As vicar-general he

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<sup>9</sup> Much of this thesis was written prior to the charges laid against Bishop Lahey in October of 2009: these are discussed in Chapter Five.

had established a mission near Woodstock, New Brunswick in 1686; as a new bishop, a parish at Placentia, Newfoundland in 1689; a parish at Louisbourg, Cape Breton in 1714, and in 1720, one on Prince Edward Island” (33).

As Lahey notes, the early Church struggled to get footholds in the various territories, and other provinces seemed to suffer due to the lack of government organization: what we now know as provinces were often lumped together, and the governing bodies changed as the French and English lost or gained control of various areas. The Church itself struggled with its appointments, and as populations boomed new dioceses needed to be created, and people petitioned for priests. It was inevitable that the bishops or priests would be objectionable to some under their jurisdiction, mainly due to their cultural background.

The significant ethnic divisions in the Catholic population of Atlantic Canada, (primarily Irish, Scottish, Mi'kmaq and Acadian), meant that providing priests, whether as missionaries or training native-born men, was a constant battle. There are accounts of areas having priests who did not speak the language of their parishioners. This is not inconceivable as English, French, Gaelic and Mi'kmaq were all in use in some areas. Lahey notes that the Bishop in 1821 was successful in part due to his ability in three of these languages (2002:49). Chapter Three, which examines the life history and legends surrounding Father Kenneth MacDonald, touches on these issues and gives examples of the size of parishes assigned to these early priests.

In Newfoundland the story of settlement is different from the “Maritime” provinces addressed here because many people travelled to the area seasonally for the

fishery: "By 1735, the governor declared 'Irish Papists' the largest group in the colony. But although they numbered several thousand, they totally lacked clergy" (2002:43). In 1784 Newfoundland became a separate diocese, and in 1796 Bishop O'Donel was consecrated, becoming the first bishop. Initially, Catholics were persecuted in Newfoundland, although in 1832 they received "full civil rights" (43). This history of religious intolerance to Catholics in Newfoundland may have contributed to some of the folkloric forms of expressions examined in Chapter Two.

The French-Catholic population of Acadia faced deportation in 1755. Lahey states that at least five priests were exiled with them, but several fled with parishioners (41-42). In 1759, three of these French priests who had relocated to New Brunswick took the oath of allegiance to England. As discussed in Chapter Four, most of the Acadians were expelled from Nova Scotia in 1755 and some left on their own accord in waves afterwards, many of whom resettled in New Brunswick. By 1815, there were 8500 Catholics on mainland Nova Scotia, with 7000 more living on Cape Breton Island; the regions were distinct colonies at that time (45). Two dioceses were created in Nova Scotia, the first in Halifax, which was primarily ministering to the Irish, and the second in Arichat (later moved to Antigonish) which was primarily Scots. There was resentment at the time as the creation of the Arichat diocese in 1845 was due in part to the appointment of a Scottish bishop to Halifax, William Fraser, who wished to minister to the Scots of that area and Cape Breton. In the present day the fact that the location of the diocese which Cape Breton falls under is in Antigonish (mainland Nova Scotia) continues to be a sore point (F. Jackson 2009). It is worthy of note that these dioceses, in Arichat (later

Antigonish) and Halifax were also divided on ethnic lines, the former being Scots and the latter, Irish (Lahey 2002: 45).

Catholicism is the most widely practiced single religion in Canada and Atlantic Canada. The Statistics Canada information for 2001 (the most recent available as new census data is restricted for a number of years) states that there are 12,936,905 Catholics in all of Canada, constituting 44% of Canadians. The other categories of religion supplied in the questionnaire from Statistics Canada included: Christian Orthodox, Christian not included elsewhere, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Eastern Religions and Other Religions. The number of Catholics in each province is 328,700 in Nova Scotia (representing 37% of religious affiliation in the province), 187,440 in Newfoundland (37%), and 386,050 (54%) in New Brunswick. Conversely, there are 8,654,850 Protestants in Canada (29%), 438,150 (49%) in Nova Scotia, 303,195 (60%) in Newfoundland, and 263,075 (37%) in New Brunswick. Those reporting no religious affiliation are the next largest group, numbering 4,900,090 (17%) in Canada, 106,405 (12%) in Nova Scotia, 12,865 (3%) in Newfoundland, and 57,665 (8%) in New Brunswick.<sup>10</sup>

In the Statistics Canada's *2001 Census Consultation Guide*, in the section titled "Religion: Recent Trends," several facts are pulled from data drawn from the 1991 census. Although Protestants are the second largest religious group in Canada, they are composite groups and numbers often fluctuate between them;

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<sup>10</sup> All percentage statistics have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The Protestant denominations made up the second-largest religious group in 1991, accounting for 36% of the population, down from 41% in 1981. Most of the decline occurred within five of the six largest Protestant denominations, countered by an increase of 29% in the Pentecostal denomination. (Statistics Canada 1997:76)

While the numbers of Protestants are high, they do not represent one religious group, mores, or religious teachings but rather a range of beliefs. Despite being the second-largest religion, they do not have the unified belief systems and tenets that Catholics have within their membership.

Despite the crisis of faith occasioned by the sexual abuse inquiry in Newfoundland, "Catholic remains the largest religious group in Canada: as a whole, Catholic represents 46% of the Canadian population, down slightly from 47% in 1981" (Statistics Canada 1997:76). It is difficult to determine what affected this 1% decrease, however, despite any attitudes or changes in worldview related to the Inquiry, it seems that it did not immediately have extensive impact on declarations of Catholicism in census reports. Similarly, the Statistics Canada "religiosity index" report (Clark and Schellenberg 2006) indicated that Atlantic Canadians have the highest degree of religiosity in Canada. Religiosity is determined by Statistics Canada through use of "... the four dimensions of religiosity – affiliation, attendance, personal practices and importance of religion" (3). These categories are given a number related to the participants' answer which corresponds to a spectrum, these numbers "can be combined into a simple additive 'religiosity index'" (3). Despite the high rates of "religiosity" in Atlantic Canada, in Canada overall, "Church attendance is much lower than affiliation. In 1994, 86% of all Canadians reported a religion, with 40% attending church regularly, that

is, at least once a month" (Statistics Canada 1997:76). The statistics also show us that throughout Canada "The percentage of individuals without a religion is growing: only 7.3% of the population indicated "no religion in 1981; by 1991 the proportion of the population reporting no religion had risen to 13%" (77). Despite public opinion to the contrary and the lay interpretation of the impact of allegations of sexual abuse, it seems that Atlantic Canada maintains a high degree of involvement in religious groups despite an overall trend towards no religious affiliation in Canada, numbers which almost doubled in a decade.

*vi. The Present Work: Folkloristic Approaches and the Concept of Counterclericalism*

As established, the majority of current anticlericalism scholars are historians, with some anthropologists using the term contextually. The term was never central to folklore scholarship, for a variety of reasons, perhaps due in part to the fact that there is a philosophical commitment within the discipline not to "critique" worldview, beliefs, and religious systems. Although folklorists have not made counterclericalism the focus of their full-length studies, folklore has theoretical approaches which are well suited to an examination of counterclerical expression and power dynamics. For example, these expressions are typically in the form of commentary circulated among small folkgroups. Because the field of folklore has contributed much to the study of informal conversation, communication in folkgroups, gossip, jokes, legend and all manner of narrative forms, it provides a natural underpinning for this study. Likewise, expressions about priests come from a variety of oral and non-narrative genres.

The tools and methodology developed within folkloristics can contribute significantly to an understanding of anticlericalism (and the predominate form of folk expression, counterclericalism) as a wide-spread phenomenon. Likewise, folklore scholarship has only recently (by which I mean in the last thirty years) begun to approach topics which are on the border of belief and organised religion (see Fish 1982, Santino 1982). Because folklore has historically looked at communications in the margins and/or outside large populations, a study of Roman Catholic narratives might not have previously been considered an appropriate focus for a folkloristic study. Conversely, dealing with organised religion can be problematic as one negotiates "official" and "vernacular" religion. Yet, my previous experience of collecting materials in a university campus made me realise that folklore can reveal much about the ways in which individuals' lives are both enriched and constrained by the institutions that they are part of and that shape them (McDavid 2002). Narratives about priests show a similar contradiction: although Catholics may live in harmony with the teachings of their church, they may take issue with their church's representative for many reasons (Primiano 1985). Folklore on the boundaries of institutions is rich source material, created in adverse circumstances with political opinions at its crux.

From the perspective of folklorists, the concept of anticlericalism being a belief, as raised by Riegelhaupt (1984), is noteworthy. David J. Hufford's article "Traditions of Disbelief" talks about beliefs that are not tenets of official creedal faith, but which in fact challenge organised belief. These traditions fulfil a role within certain groups, and expressions of disbelief do actually illustrate a worldview and a context for interpretation

(1982). In my experience, Catholics frequently tell personal experience narratives to other Catholics, perhaps as a way of reaffirming Catholicism, or delineating the axis of one's faith in a new religion-based circumstance; for example, to define one's belief as devout but not one of blind devotion. Goldstein talks about "performance competence" in her study of AIDS narratives (2004), and perhaps that is also going on in these legends; as Catholics show their knowledge and experience, they rely on narratives to clarify their current views in a socially acceptable context. Members of the group may tell these narratives as a way to negotiate authenticity, reaffirm "groupness," and control insider/outsider status. For example, when I hear these narratives shared by Catholics, as a non-practicing Protestant, I am decidedly in the minority, and perhaps people are clearly stating that for me when they shared these narratives. Others, such as my mother, as discussed in Chapter Three, may use these narratives for self-justification, as a way for positive self-talk about why they are no longer active in their church. They may prepare narrative "blocks" that they share depending on the audience they find themselves talking to (Lawless 1991).

Narrative can be used as a means of articulating anxieties, concerns and critical perspectives not easily articulated in other generic forms. Collections edited by Radner (1993) and Greenhill and Tye (1997) on "coded" messages in narrative, as well as works by Narváez (1986) on resistance, and Hebdige (1979) on counterhegemonic narratives, illustrate the complexity of narrative and its link to strategic cultural articulation. Themes of resistance surface in narratives through the subversive coding potential of legend, folktale and joke. This thesis builds on this long standing interest in resistance and

subversive practises in vernacular religion (Primiano 1995; Lawless 1988), new religious movements (Magliocco 1998) and "traditions of disbelief" (Hufford 1982).

In the local context, it is important to remember that immigration to Canada was, and continues to be, often related to quests for religious freedom, and that many early settlers, both Protestant and Catholic, came to Canada to escape attitudes against their religion, whether the official practices of governments or the unofficial attitudes of regions or communities. This lack of religious security in the new country, and the continual struggle for the Catholic Church to become organised and "fully staffed" (O'Shea and O'Shea 1996:6-7) due to "shortage of priests and difficulty of recruitment" (Lahey 2002: 45) and petitioning for bishops (43) may have contributed to a lack of formalised debate against the clergy or Church. Many immigrants faced discrimination in their new country, "Newfoundland Catholics still faced official discrimination; they did not receive full civil rights until 1832" (Lahey 2002:43). But as later chapters explore, narratives about priests did not begin to appear in the mainstream until the Church became more established and Catholics were in a better position to critique their religious representatives.

Historians routinely explore the study of anticlericalism, but within their discipline they have emphasized social movements and events rather than smaller scale everyday expressions. In situ, anthropologists have addressed the priest's power, but often in passing to the central interests of their fieldwork. They also tend to research in an ethnographic context, which is not dissimilar from the way a folklorist would approach material, but they do keep the "types" of anticlericalism distinct and seem, in general, to

avoid ambiguous material. The expressions at the heart of this study are usually subtle and ambiguous, at least compared with large organised protests and riots as explored by historians. It looks at forms of more subtle counterclericalism in three different contexts that are diverse but share similarities. Furthermore, these narratives are indicative of ongoing issues; all cover an extensive time period but are still deemed relevant (which I extrapolate because they are actively being transmitted), passed on generationally, public and private, dormant and active, sometimes public anticlerical but typically private and counterclerical. Perhaps Henry Glassie states the potential contribution of folklore to history best:

One boon tradition holds for history is that it would help historians handle the massive matter of continuity, perhaps guiding them to discriminations among the disparate occurrences jumbled under the rubric of change. For another thing, the big events, the instances of raucous conflict that punctuate the tale, would return to human scale and grow in interest if they were imagined as times when traditions—distinct styles of volitional, temporal action—met, merged, recoiled, or hardened into antagonism. (Glassie 1995:396)

Glassie's idea that these times of "raucous conflict" that "punctuate" history are times when traditions "hardened into antagonism" lends itself well to the interpretation of the fine line between counterclericalism and anticlericalism. Using this mindset, the potential for folklorists to aid in the interpretation of expressions about priests is boundless.

Turning first to Newfoundland, mainstream books and television have helped to give voice to current attitudes, although they may also have helped mould public perceptions. The popular culture of Newfoundland is the subject of the next chapter, where I explore the role of the "St. John's elite" in the expression of anticlerical sentiments and their intersections with locally-based vernacular expressions of

counterclericalism.

I then explore expressions of counterclericalism found in three diverse ethnic groups in Atlantic Canada. The chapters, each with a distinct regional focus build on each other as they move from the Newfoundland context which depicts a broad cultural understanding and acceptance of counterclericalism and anticlericalism in a variety of forms, to the Cape Breton context which examines the legends which are localised and are primarily concerned with one historical priest, to the New Brunswick context where one finds the personal experience narratives of one individual. With a closer and closer focus, chapters move from regional to communal to individual expressions, illustrating the nuanced nature of counterclerical expressions. The chapters point to the fact that counterclericalism – rather than anticlericalism – is the term that should be used in the study of these expressions, but also that these expressions do exist and are worthy of examination despite their previous marginality to the historical study of anticlericalism and their lack of an in-depth treatment by folklorists.

*vii. Overview*

Chapter Three examines a legend from rural Cape Breton about a priest from the late 1800s. Grounded in a Scots-Catholic community, this chapter looks at the legends surrounding this particular priest as well as how these forms of legends and jokes are replicated in other sources, essentially examining these as local variants of forms found elsewhere. While there are vernacular expressions about priests in general, most forms of counterclericalism (often in strict contrast to anticlericalism) deal with the *named* priest.

In this case several folkgroups (communities, occupational groups) participate in legend telling about Fr. Kenneth MacDonald of Mabou, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

Chapter Four is the most personal. In it I explore the personal experience narratives of my mother, who was brought up Catholic and educated in the denominational school system. She was born to an Acadian father and raised in Northern New Brunswick, introducing another ethnicity from which to explore counterclericalism. This chapter also applies some of the principles of autoethnography. There are four reasons for including this chapter: I had hoped to provide an in-depth look at one individual's personal experience narratives about priests; I wanted to provide balance to the other chapters which have more male-centred narratives; I was familiar with my mother's narratives and in many ways they are what helped me to connect the legend telling event I witnessed to a larger body of legends; and I wanted to expose my religious upbringing and any biases that I may have in my approach to a work grounded in Catholicism. In Chapter Five, I review the main points of each chapter and suggest directions for future study.

First, however, I turn in the next chapter to Newfoundland counterclerical expressions that are primarily anchored in Irish-Catholicism. This chapter examines archival documents, reassesses fieldwork of other folklorists who have conducted research in Newfoundland, and looks at the vernacular popular culture and its representation of priests. It also examines news events of the past two decades, as no topic of this nature would be complete without addressing these issues. Chapter Two provides a broad approach, surveying a variety of folkloric forms over a fairly large time

period, spanning from the 1960s to the present day. Using these sources, the chapter looks at how expressions moved from counterclericalism in folk culture to anticlericalism in popular culture. Charges of sexual abuse laid against clergy in 1989 (and an ongoing presence in the legal system until February 2009), has led to more acceptable popular and commodified forms of anticlericalism among some Newfoundlanders; this chapter also explores how some expressions crossed or blurred genres over time and how the content and context developed accordingly.

## II. 'SLOW BURNS' AND 'FLASH FIRES': THE PRIVATE BECOMES PUBLIC IN NEWFOUNDLAND

I remember first talking about my research interests in graduate courses at Memorial University and being "heckled" by a fellow student who happened to be from Newfoundland. As the semester progressed, and we discussed my topic for the term paper—which was a survey of historical legends about priests—this student made increasingly contentious comments. She laughingly called priest "bastards" and reflected on them "diddling little boys" much to the disruption of the class and the chagrin of the professor. Finally, on the day of presentations I asked her to kindly stay silent while I presented my findings, a courtesy all the other students had received: I confess I may have not been quite this eloquent at the time. This student, a middle-aged person raised Catholic, had been involved in Church-related activity in later life. Her comments were explosive, and uncontrollable, and in retrospect, totally understandable. She was angry, but she was not the only angry voice in Newfoundland.

In *Unholy Orders: Tragedy at Mount Cashel*, journalist Michael Harris quotes a woman at a public gathering held by the church after the news of the inquiry into the sex abuse scandal in Newfoundland broke:

The most eloquent insight into how men of the cloth had been able to perpetrate such monstrous crimes against their parishioners' children and get away with it for so long came from a woman whose cultural eyesight was 20/20. She laid the blame for the tragedy on the traditional role of the priest in outport Newfoundland, which she said was as close to God as you could get without playing a harp. Expressing a feeling shared by many of Newfoundland's 205,000 Catholics, she told the meeting: "If a child was born without an arm, people said it was because the mother had said something against a priest. That was nonsense, but a priest with that kind

of shield could get away with anything. We are victims of our own heritage.” (1990: 19)

This anger, combined with the cultural critique it motivates, is at the centre of post-Hughes Inquiry discussion. The largest issue to confront Newfoundland Catholics and the Catholic Church itself in recent years has been the allegations of abuse at the Mount Cashel Orphanage. But the social commentary that erupted during and after the lawsuits, the Hughes Inquiry and subsequent trials was not without precedent; rather, expressions burst forth from the private sphere into the public sphere, and consequently, their content and context changed.

In this chapter I argue that although the manifestations of anticlericalism in the public sphere and popular press became more explicit in the period from the 1970s (in CODCO’s revue theatre) to the present day, it was predated by vernacular counterclerical expressions that can be traced back to at least the early 1960s, and possibly further, well before the Hughes Inquiry. I trace the trajectory of these folk and popular expressions through an examination of Newfoundland traditional culture collected by folklorists, archival records, revue theatre, joke cycles, popular books and newspaper coverage. I treat the material chronologically (although there is some overlap) and trace the cultural expressions in periods of latency and explosion, suggesting that this displays a “slow burn” of counterclericalism which often erupts into a “flash fire” of reactionary anticlericalism.

Because of the Inquiry, Newfoundland became an obvious place to look at counter- and anticlericalism. It is one of the few places with a documented history of this in folklore forms (as Memorial University has a folklore program, researchers, and an

archive) and a localised popular culture (due in part to the fact that Newfoundland is both culturally distinct and geographically removed from the rest of Canada, and has always produced a substantial amount of its own popular culture). Because of this unique situation of documentation of counterclericalism, which typically goes unnoticed due to its genre and style of transmission, followed by an Inquiry which was bound to stir up anticlericalism, we are able to chart a course of expression and show the fine lines between counterclericalism and anticlericalism.

Prior to the Hughes Inquiry or the charges of 1989, one does not find these types of public criticisms in the public domain of the mainstream press. Anticlericalism, in the present day, has become a normative standpoint and is depicted as predominate in popular literature written by, and directed towards, Newfoundlanders. It can be suggested that anticlericalism has become commodified: I would even argue that it has undergone a cultural revival.

In his 1988 article "The Mummers Song in Newfoundland: Intellectuals, Revivalists and Cultural Nativism," Gerald Pocius discusses the cultural revival of mummering in Newfoundland as a form of identity fuelled by vernacular culture, local popular culture and the "St. John's elite," the intelligentsia of the Newfoundland's capital. The catalyst for the revival was a 1983 release of "Any Mummers Allowed In?" (frequently called the Mummer's Song) by Simani, a song about the tradition. Although a St. John's theatre troupe appropriately named "The Mummer's Troupe" had initiated the revivalist trend in 1972, Simani's song disseminated the revival to the general public in St. John's and beyond. Pocius argues that mummering has become a cultural touchstone,

although, realistically, by 1983 it was largely a cultural artefact of a bygone era, a practice that occurred in some areas of the province, but was not found throughout it. Although this revival is one that most Newfoundlanders would characterize as positive, playing as it does into Christmas traditions and notions of family and community, it also led to the commodification of mummering studied by Smith (2007) and Tye (2002).

I believe this same model can be applied to the different, albeit negative, context of counter- and anticlericalism. The sex abuse inquiry clearly gave Catholics the opportunity to criticize their priests without fear of social sanctions. Open line radio shows are a common means of communication in Newfoundland (Lovelace 1986) and they provide an important public forum, as did local public meetings held by churches (Harris 1990). But when what had previously been an important realm of discourse in the private sphere moved into the elite and popular culture a flurry of popular books by local authors appeared (see W. Johnston 1985; Kavanagh 2001; O'Flaherty 1989). Jokes about priests eventually died out and, once the daily news feed was over, conversation tapered off. The manifestation of popular culture which was built on the folk traditions of legend and folkspeech became mainstream, acceptable and financially viable, as I discuss towards the end of this chapter. Anticlericalism in Newfoundland is now widespread and accepted. At the Wonderful Grand Band show held at the St. John's Arts and Culture Centre in November 2009 to mark the re-release of the 1980s television series, references to priests and Mount Cashel and the Inquiry continued to pervade and provide creative fodder for humour. Today, in Newfoundland, few eyebrows are raised at plays and novels that deal with the subject, because of its ubiquity, and a folk revival of Newfoundland

anticlerical themes has been taken over by an artistic class.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to establish the historical context and religious composition of Newfoundland. According to census data, the number of people identifying themselves as Catholic is high. As a single denomination, Catholics constitute the plurality of Newfoundlanders if one does not subsume Protestant denominations into one category. The 2001 census (the last for which religion statistics are available) records Newfoundland's population at 508,080, with 187,440 affiliated Catholics and 303,195 Protestants (representing a range of denominations from Anglican to Salvation Army). As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars of anticlericalism tend to study European, rather than North America contexts. However, the traditional subsistence-based economy and political role of the church in Newfoundland is arguably similar to that of Portugal, Spain, Italy and France and these can be used comparatively. Scholarship on Newfoundland religious culture has frequently commented on the elevated social status and authority of the parish priest (Nemec 1993:147; Remiggi 1977:204).

Abject poverty and the continual dominance by the settler at the hands of the merchant and the priest are common fodder for anthropological and historical works which focus on Newfoundland.<sup>12</sup> These works point to underlying socio-economic factors

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that charges against priests have not been laid elsewhere, or that critical creative works on the subject of priests has not been produced outside of the Newfoundland context. The Mount Cashel Inquiry, however, is the most widely-known case in Canada. The fact that this case involved an institution, and what seemed to be decades of inaction in response to complaints, made it all the more newsworthy. Other clerical charges and popular culture treatments of priests outside of Newfoundland do exist and are more thoroughly addressed in Chapter Five.

<sup>12</sup> Many merchants operated as the sole employer in the village, typically having company stores and creating a situation which has been referred to as indentured servitude. For a discussion on the role of the merchant and the history of Newfoundland fishing settlements, see Harris 2008, Nemec 1993; Alexander

in the history of Catholicism in Newfoundland and in the history of clerical abuse. The line of separation between church and state has been quite blurry. It shares with Western Europe a history of a highly visible church openly playing a social and political role, but it has faced its biggest threats to institutional religious authority in the last twenty years from both the charges of sexual abuse and the movement to a nondenominational system of education after one hundred and fifty years of religion-based schooling.

The victims of Catholic Brothers and priests were thrice marginalised: as Newfoundlanders they were marginalised by Canadians; as children they were marginalised in society; as “poor” or “unwanted” children from the Mount Cashel Orphanage they were marginalised from the comfort of traditional family. The social status of these children is something that bears mentioning: rather than simply orphans in the traditional sense of the term, the orphanage also provided services for a number of youths whose families were unable to support them for periods of time due to lack of employment or appropriate compensation for work.<sup>13</sup> In some cases, children were placed in the orphanage for periods of months or years, and removed periodically as their families could afford to support them.<sup>14</sup> The social support provided by Mount Cashel for families, especially those headed by widowed or unwed mothers, was high: however, critics could say that the Church’s beliefs about access to birth control assisted in

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1977, 1980; Ommer 1990.

<sup>13</sup> The impact of the local American military base and the children born as a result of temporary relationships could also play a part in its social function. The film *Seven Brides for Uncle Sam* (1997) discusses the impact of the American military bases on local society and culture, Leo Furey’s novel, *The Long Run* (2004), also alludes to children from these unions in Mount Cashel.

<sup>14</sup> Relayed to me in private conversation, by a source wishes to remain nameless. (See also O’Brien, 1991, *Suffer Little Children: An Autobiography of a Foster Child*).

perpetuating this cycle of dependency and clerical dominance.

*i. Private Counterclericalism: Pre-Inquiry Examples: 1960s-1970s*

The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) legend index attests to the long history of folk expressions directed against priests in the province. The index has numerous entries concerning priests under the category of "Religion and Holy Places." The following is a brief sampling of these legend motifs, types and themes.

Based on over forty legends found in the MUNFLA index, categories of priest legends can be created, although often these categories overlap with one another. Essentially, most legends deal with the priest whether defending the faith against a blasphemer or Protestant, delaying someone's death so a relative could say goodbye, as a miraculous healer, cursing others much like a "witch," in supernatural contexts as ghost performing their last mass or in opposition to supernatural beings, or unsuccessfully attempting exorcisms. At first glance, this broad group of legends does not include some tales we may have come to expect in post-Inquiry Newfoundland; there are no legends of an explicit sexual nature, perhaps due to censorship of collector or informants. Other content may seem to be incongruent with organized religion because the priest is behaving in what may not be considered a religious manner; one must identify certain elements of vernacular religion in which these practices are permissible. For example, if the storyteller believes in ghosts it is not sacrilegious or inappropriate for the priest within the legend to appear as a ghost.

In the legends the priest is often looked at as a defender of the Roman Catholic faith, or even symbolic of the faith. A Protestant is often depicted as an adversary of the priest. Although the priest may have supernatural powers in these instances, he is using them for the benefit of the community and most probably because he is executing the perceived will of God: in fact, some legends point towards him as a conductor of God's power or one who foresees God's will.

Priest puts Protestant man in trance in order to hear Catholic wife's confession.  
(Northern Bay, Conception Bay. 73-61:23-28)

Protestant man slapped his behind at a priest in a 1883 riot, priest cursed him to remain that way. (Harbour Grace Parish, Conception Bay. 73-61:17-22)

Priest gave a warning when Protestants nailed yellow flags to RC houses that they would have their own share before the year was over. The men returned from sealing to find yellow quarantine flags on their doors and their families dead or dying.  
(Bay Roberts, Conception Bay. 73-61:35-39)

Priest warns blasphemer that face will be contorted; it is (by God).  
(Mobile. 69-008E:57)

Man nailed rat to church door. Priest declares that the person will be plagued by rats, the man who did it took ill and was plagued by rats until he died. (Harbour Grace or Bay Roberts. 73-61:40-43)

These legends correspond with internationally recognized legends and motifs. For example, the *Motif-Index* (S. Thompson 1955-1958) mentions "Priest Makes The Omen Come True" (J1624). And Kenneth E. Nilsen's "The Priest in The Gaelic Folklore of Nova Scotia" identifies a number of variants of these legends in Gaelic Scotland post-Reformation; for example, "... Fr. Owen was attacked at the altar and taken to prison in Aberdeen. He prophesied that the arm of the man that struck him would rot and have to be amputated. This indeed came to pass" (1996-1997:172). On the subject of blasphemy,

Nilsen recounts two tales: "... a man in Carinish, North Uist, who, after having spoken blasphemously of a wooden statue of the Holy Trinity in the local church, suffered a severe injury," and "...the power of a priest's entreaty to strike dead a blasphemer" (173). Nilsen has several more examples which could be categorized into this type such as, "... a Protestant covers his mouth to hide a laugh about a drunken priest. The hand sticks to his face. In yet another, a priest curses five houses in which poteen was made. Not one of those houses is standing today" (179). Again, the priest's ability to curse the Protestant by making his hand stick in a derogatory position is present.

The dark side of the priest's curse seems usually to be offered as a solution for social order, a defence of the faith and a reasonable punishment for the crime being committed. These types of statements about the priest's curse help contextualise John Widdowson's statements that the use of the threatening figure often implies the community has some belief in the power of that individual (315, n. 21). These curse legends of the priests are balanced by the legends of cures administered by priests. The priest is often depicted as one who can heal and even delay death.

Priest keeps man with no heartbeat breathing and talking for three days to see his son. (Carbonear. 73-61:12-16)

Priest keeps child alive until father returns home at mother's request. (Unknown locale. 66-6E:FSC)

Nilsen states "...I was often told that the priests had the power to cure illness if they wanted to use it" (1996-1997:178). The *Motif-Index* notes both the general category of priest "As Helper" (N846.2) and the more specific "Resuscitation By Priest" (E121.5) which emerges here. One Newfoundland legend offers an explanation: when a priest is

ordained, he can ask God for one special gift – this explains the priest’s ability to heal (Unknown locale. 74-166:18). From the numerous legends which are attributed to the priest’s supernatural abilities, it seems that this idea was widely accepted, or at least, part of the folk tradition that was neither proved nor disproved.

In general, while a supernatural “gift” is seemingly positive, this is still a discussion of the priest’s power and his supernatural abilities – what he possesses that makes him more than human and therefore something fearful.<sup>15</sup> However, the priest is often seen as a person with supernatural links who uses his power for good. By far, the largest numbers of narratives deal with his curative and miraculous properties:

Priest cures possessed woman and this prematurely ages him to a stooped grey haired old man. (Carboney, Conception Bay. 73-61:29-34)

The curative priest appears in a number of legends which deal with tuberculosis.

Priest agrees to cure a man with TB if he will turn from his sinful ways. When the man goes back to his ways the priest won’t cure him a second time and he dies. (Carboney, Conception Bay. 73-61:44-60)

Priest tells man that he won’t die of TB. The man recovers and claims he was cured by the priest. (Carboney, Conception Bay and St. John’s. 73-61:90-92)

Tuberculosis was regarded as a plague in many aspects: in *Dublin Tenement Life* (2000), Kevin Kearns outlines many similar stories of the priest’s involvement in the fight against it. The *Motif-Index* also notes the priest who “Keeps In Container Relic Which When

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<sup>15</sup> Several things are worthy of note in this category. The priest as healer, while a motif in Irish folklore, is not as popular as the legend of the priest’s dislike for the local healer (no doubt as they struggled with them for community status). Pádraig Ó Héalaí writes about one such Irish legend in “Priest Versus Healer: The Legend of the Priest’s Stricken Horse” (1994-1995). Essentially, here the priest does not like the healer but finally goes to her after he fails to cure his own horse, and the healer cures the horse, thus ending their rivalry. (The relationship of the priest and his horse is also a recurring motif in many legends, and later the priest and his car, which may point to parishioner’s concerns about conspicuous consumption). For more discussion of these tensions, see also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 1997.

Kissed Renders People Immune From Pestilence" (J762.1). The role of the priest in sacred and secular health beliefs, whether striking a person with illness or curing them, is a predominate theme.

Saying mass, along with performing the last rites, are two of the main obligations of priests, the others being administering the sacraments of baptism, confessional, matrimony, penance, anointing and communion (Carmody and Carmody 1990:175-188), so it is no surprise that there are many legends surrounding these areas. The supernatural motifs "Ghost of Priest Failing to Say Masses" (E415.3) is present in these legends. A popular legend in Ireland (see Lysaght 1991), it is found in Newfoundland as well:

Man helps ghostly priest say mass for someone.  
(Carbonear or Kingston, Conception Bay. 70-200:50)

Man helps priest say a mass, later finds out the priest died 30 years earlier.  
(Harbour Grace Parish, Conception Bay. 73-61:99-102)

Priest says mass to girl, nun reveals to girl that priest had died earlier.  
(St. Michael's College, St. George's. 64-1:FSC)

Legends also include motifs such as priest who "Joins Woman After Death Because He Let Woman Die Without Confessional" (Q223.4.1). Patricia Lysaght discusses the importance of this legend in her article, "'Is There Anyone Here to Serve My Mass?': the Legend of 'The Dead Priest's Midnight Mass' in Ireland" (1991). This legend hinges on the fact that two people must be present in order for mass to be said, and so ghostly priests who must fulfill their earthly duties ("for which he has accepted stipends") need a witness for their mass. Beyond that listed above, Lysaght identifies another motif, "Penance: Holding Midnight Mass Until Someone Will Make Responses" (Q521.6) (195). Often the priest in question, as in the example above, has waited a number of years

in order to complete his earthly duties. Lysaght identifies two strains of the legend, type A involves a man going to a church and saying mass with a ghostly priest, similar to the first two legends above; type B centres on a woman meeting the ghostly priest, after which she must find a man to say the mass with him as she is unqualified. Type B is the predominating Irish version, perhaps because it offers a religious commentary on the status of women in the church, or perhaps, as the author suggests, because it is more narratively complex. Although the Newfoundland materials do not represent a large sample, there is an example a girl being able to say mass with the priest (64-1:FSC), perhaps a rationalization of the traditional Irish tale.

Many Newfoundland legends have Irish counterparts. Jacqueline Ni Fhearghusa's article, "The Devil's Son as Priest: Distribution, Form and Function of a Story on the Borderline between Folktale and Folk Legend" (1994-1995) deals with versions of one priest/devil legend in Ireland, but the characters of the priest and the devil occur as motifs in many legends. Stith Thompson identifies several: "Devil In Form Of Priest" (G303.3.1.8); "Chases Devil Away" (G303.16.14.1); and "Disguises As Devil To Haunt House" (K1838). Compare with this the Newfoundland examples:

Priest chases devil in wolf form.

(Harbour Main, Conception Bay. 69-013E:32)

Priest makes devil at the dance disappear.<sup>16</sup>

(Red Island and Argentia. 72-060:26-29)

As the Devil is a figure in both scripture and Catholic traditions, it is not surprising that

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<sup>16</sup> The motif of the devil at the dance is popular in a number cultures, most notably Mexican and Acadian as will be discussed in Chapter V.

these types of legends occur in the folklore of most Catholic areas (see Utley 1945). In both Newfoundland and Ireland, however, the priest has another foe to battle, the fairies.

Priest blesses girl who had been taken by the fairies, which stops her from crowing like a rooster. (Outer Cove (near St. John's). 73-74:22-23)

Priest banishes woman and child because the child was replaced by a fairy. (Sydney, NS. (Originally from Newfoundland) 74-156:6-7)

Priest gets fairy to leave and child to return. (Colliers. 74-150:11-12)

Pádraig Ó Héalaí notes in "The Priest in Irish Fairy Legends" that the characters of the priest and the fairies are not typically seen together in narratives, although, sometimes the priest appears as a protagonist who banishes fairies. In all tales, the priest inevitably and ultimately beats the fairies. Ó Héalaí suggests that this is due to the folk religion concept that the fairies are part of a pre-Christian time and are essentially minor demons (1996:609).

Bad or risable priests make up another category. Legends of bad priests portray the priest as doing something that is socially unacceptable, often something that goes directly against the teachings of the Church, by being greedy or using his power for evil or personal gain.

Priest is believed to be caped figure terrorising children. (Stephenville. 68-008D:8)

Priest can turn mundane items into money. (Cape Broyle. 68-016E:31)

Priest refuses to go to sick curate. Curate dies; one week later priest dies of fright after seeing curate's ghost. (Placentia. 66-1D:FSC)

The third legend here resembles the "Priest Dies From Being Duped" motif (F1041.3.4).

This legend is typically what one could call a counterclerical legend as it frequently

surrounds the major responsibilities of the priest and his ability to use his major roles in order to harm others through his refusal to administer certain rites, resulting in misuse and abuse of his power. Related to these counterclerical narratives are those of unsuccessful priests, which show the relative impotence of the priest as he is unable to exorcise spirits.

Priest performs exorcism for house, doesn't work. (Colliers. 68-019E, p. 9)

Priest tries to exorcise ship's ghost. It does not work.  
(Notre Dame Bay. 75-47:16-20)

There are other legends which portray the priest as somewhat superstitious and fearful.

Priest warns people not to pass in front of dead boy's ghost light.  
(Colliers. 68-019E:11)

Priest urges parishioners not to buy local haunted house because he believes the devil lives there.  
(Codroy. 74-166, p. 22-23)

While these legends are not necessarily very critical of the priest, they do suggest that he is powerless in the face of these dangers.

The final category of priest legends with amusing consequences can be split into those which portray the priest negatively and those which present him positively. These legends are typically told as jokes. Some examples of the negative type are:

Liberal says priest is better speaker than Joey Smallwood. "The priest described Hell in such detail that the man thought he must have been born and raised there."  
(Trinity Bay. 74-183:22)

Father Molloy sees Jesus and twelve disciples walking by, calls Pope for instruction, Pope says "look busy."  
(Ferryland. 94-164:FSC)

Drinker asks priest how someone gets sciatica. The priest says that it is a drinker's demise and asks the man if he has it. The man replies that he heard the Pope had it.  
(St. John's. 74-183:13)

In these three legends the priest is reprimanded in some way. In the first he is shown as being overly enthusiastic in his frightening portrayals of hell, to the point where he

himself is associated with hell. In the second the perceived life of leisure or the laziness of the priest is exposed. In the final one the person outwits the priest after the priest makes a critical statement about him.

Then there are other more positive funny consequence legends, in which the priest is trying to uphold some sort of social order.

Priest dresses as devil to scare misbehaving man, with funny consequences, told by priest. (Unknown locale. 69-008E:5)

Priest tells local couple to get married after dating for 28 years, woman approaches man and misunderstanding occurs. (St. John's. 74-183:21)

In both of these the priest is responding to the community's interest by trying to maintain social norms. The priest in these narratives is ambiguous but necessary as a healer, defender of the faith, and banisher of devils and fairies. He has extreme power which has positive and negative implications. Most legends identify the priest as supernatural, several are counterclerical, but most are ambiguous.

When one moves from major genres like legend, to minor genres with trivializing functions, such as folkspeech, other units of worldview appear. To illustrate this, I turn now to John Widdowson's book *If You Don't Be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland* (1977). In it, he explores the use of real and imagined characters as threats used by parents to manipulate children's behaviour. Although his case study is Newfoundland, such forms exist in a variety of cultural contexts. For instance, a mother at the department store check out may tell her child that the cashier will come and "get him" if he does not sit down properly in the shopping cart. To a certain extent the use of Santa as a control mechanism around Christmas falls into a similar category: if you're not

good Santa may not come; he may take the toys you already have and give them to children that will really appreciate them; and so on.

The research for Widdowson's book was conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during which time he collected a number of items from adults who were discussing their childhood experiences. Widdowson surveyed his participants to determine the types of threats and the threatening figures that are used to determine the attitudes of those creating the threats towards the threatening figures they invoke. Most significant for this study, he mentions legendary priests among the cast of characters used to terrify and control children. Widdowson categorizes the threats to children in a three-part typology:

- A) Supernatural, mythological fictitious and invented figures, e.g. deities, diabolical figures, ghosts, fairies, bogeys (such as the boo man, boogie man, etc.).
- B) Human beings with unusual characteristics, e.g. mummers, strangers, *priests*, policemen, doctors, teachers, recluses, cripples, eccentric types and individuals.
- C) Animals, objects and other miscellaneous figures and devices, e.g. dogs, rats, mice, instruments of physical punishment. (1977:95, emphasis added)

Clearly, here priests are noteworthy enough, with "unusual characteristics" to be used as an example of a human being which is used as a threat. Widdowson notes that the priest's unique relationship as an intermediary to God, and his supposed curative powers as well as his ability to banish supernatural figures, make him a unique threatening figure. He goes on to state some of the perceived powers of the priest: "In addition, he is said to have the power to curse people as well as bless them, and he is able to exorcise ghosts

and spirits. These attributes enhance his awesome image and emphasise the mystical distance which distinguishes him from the common man" (253). This proposition supports Widdowson's idea that priests can be categorized as both human and supernatural threats. They are different from other human threatening figures in a variety of ways, the least of which is that they are often said to turn children into pigs or goats, a power that seems to be theirs alone (253).

Within Widdowson's subcategory of human frightening figures is the classification of "Religious Figures" (252-256). Widdowson notes that frightening religious figures are found in all Newfoundland denominations; however, it is fairly clear that there are more Roman Catholic threats. I argue that all of these sentiments are counterclerical. The characters which are used to frighten the children are the Pope (1 citation), the Bishop (1 citation), Clergy or Clergyman (3 citations), Minister (6 citations), Parson (1 citation), Mother Superior (1 citation), and Nuns (1 citation), although by far the largest category is Priests with 27 citations (253-256). On the use of religious figures as threats, Widdowson states:

A number of religious figures, drawn from various denominations, appear quite frequently in threats. They represent the authority of the Christian church and are used primarily in threats to encourage children to obey, to behave properly and to adhere to the teachings of the church. Although the bishop and even the pope may be mentioned in threats, it is the clergyman in a given locality who is most often used in this way. Among these religious figures, the power of the Roman Catholic priest is particularly evident. This is certainly true in the outports, for many different reasons. Speaking of an outport near St. John's, a young man explained some of these reasons to me in a tape-recorded interview:

... they're deeply religious out there for a start, and the idea of the priest, well, it has connotations of Satan an' God punishing you, I guess. An' of course... in most of the outport communities the

priest is the only person with any education... consequently he's a... he's a temporal and spiritual leader. An' I guess you can threaten a... a "subject" with reprimands from his leader... (1977:252)

Widdowson provides eight examples of the use of the priest in threats (B26.1-B26.8). What the priest will actually do and what power he embodies varied in these examples. For the sake of brevity, summaries from the quotes from the individuals (on pages 255-256) which Widdowson gives as priest threats are:

- B26.1 "If you throw any more rocks I'm going to tell the priest. When he finishes with you, you'll think twice before you throws another."  
(North River) Q67-571
- B26.2 "If you're not good, that man up there will come down and take you." [used in church] (St. John's) Q67-1111
- B26.3 "The priest will horse-whip you if you are a bad boy."  
(Bay Bulls) Q67-1298
- B26.4 "If you don't behave the priest will tell God not to send you to heaven when you are dead."  
(St. John's) Q67-72
- B26.5 If you didn't say your prayers or were naughty the priest was going to come.  
(St. John's) Q67-163
- B26.6 ...(the) priest (was) used to frighten children. They were especially afraid of the priest. They thought he would use the cat of nine tails on them if they were bad.  
(Bay Roberts) Q63B
- B26.7 If the priest was insulted it was said that he could turn you into a goat.  
(Placentia) Q67-398
- B26.8 When I was a child Mom used to tell me that Fr. \_\_\_\_ would turn me into a goat if I worked on Sunday. He had threatened another with that punishment.  
(Renews) Q67-42

These threats all show the priest as someone who is a guardian of the social and religious order, responsible for the corrections of community and religious transgressions. The threats also typically go far beyond the probable or possible: the priest will not simply

slap you if you behave badly, he will “turn you into a goat” or “horse-whip” you. In Widdowson’s conclusions he states that there is a difference between “frightening figures” and “threatening figures”: the priest, an actual person adapted for a threat, falls into the second category (311, n.11). Threatening figures are discussed further as “intrinsically abnormal in some way or are endowed with abnormal characteristics for the purpose of threatening children” (314, n.18). Widdowson also states,

The fact that living people are also used as threatening figures argues an awareness that society gives them official authority, whether permanently or simply as a temporary measure in the context of social control. *Parents and other adults are conscious of the power which the living authority figure possesses.* In using such figures in threat adults deliberately exaggerate this power in their descriptions in order to accomplish certain immediate social ends. (315, n. 21)<sup>17</sup>

Although he states that the power of figures is exaggerated, Widdowson suggests that the use of supernatural figures as threats by adults indicates that tellers have some belief in the individual’s power: “It is clear, however, that there is still some degree of belief, at least in the supernatural figures, [...] and this is also true to some extent in Newfoundland” (315, n. 20). Although the priest’s power may be exaggerated, the use of the priest (who is in most cases the local priest) in threats, implies some recognition or fear of his role and power by the adults who invoke him. These expressions, collected by Widdowson from adults in the 1960s and 70s, reflecting on their childhoods, would have been part of the same cultural experience as that of their contemporaries, for example the budding Newfoundland playwrights who moved the discussion of priestly power into the public sphere and who are discussed in the next section.

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<sup>17</sup> My emphasis.

ii. *Specialised Performers and Public Performances of the Previously Private:  
circa 1973-1992*

Newfoundland playwrights have been prolific in recent years, most probably because their distinct culture requires its own expression which cannot often be presented through mainstream productions (Peters 1992). The material presented by these playwrights and comedians tends to be “revue theatre” derived from local experience, culture and shared heritage. Perhaps the most popular of the Newfoundland playwrights were the members of CODCO, a collaborative group originally comprising Tommy Sexton, Diane Olsen, Greg Malone, Mary Walsh, Cathy Jones, and Paul Sametz. The members of CODCO met in Toronto in 1973 where they wrote their first play *Cod on a Stick*. Scott Strong replaced Sametz, and was in turn replaced by Robert Joy by the time the show toured Newfoundland that year. Andy Jones joined them in 1974, and Olsen and Joy left in 1976.<sup>18</sup> As with many collectives, members fluctuated over time; regardless, several plays and a television series later, they are the most well-known Newfoundland theatre group, both in the province and mainland Canada. In 1990, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation refused to air their skit “Pleasant Irish Priests in Conversation” in which three priest characters discuss homosexuality and sex acts, which eventually led to Andy Jones’s departure from the show (this episode was eventually aired) (CBC 2006). New episodes continued until 1992 at which point the group disbanded (Farquharson 2000).

In her introduction to *The Plays of CODCO*, Helen Peters identifies CODCO’s

<sup>18</sup> Malone and Sexton later went on to form the group *The Wonderful Grand Band*.

humour with the themes of the Rabelasian, carnival laughter studied by Mikhail Bakhtin: ambivalence; directed at everyone; gay and triumphant while at the same time mocking and deriding (Peters xxix). She continues the comparison between the works of CODCO and Rabelais:

They share, for example, fascination with the body and body parts such as mouths and genitals; with bodily functions such as urinating, defecating, vomiting and bleeding; with human activities such as sex, eating, drinking and fighting; with human conditions such as pregnancy, disease and deformity; with the grotesque, androgyny, giants and monsters; with the institutions of the church and state; with rulers, the clergy, teachers and physicians; and with hierarchies, anarchy, hypocrisy, death and hell. (xxix)

Beneath the laughter was an element of the satirical and political: the plays would frequently bring the power of the priest into the mainstream, aiming "to empower the disempowered in society by dramatising human needs" (Peters xxix). CODCO's anticlerical humour is quite aggressive, but usually relegated to small vignettes in larger plays. Local priest characters figure quite prominently, the Pope and nuns less so. Local religion is discussed more often than the Church and its doctrines overall. Despite CODCO's scathing commentary, it often gave quick treatment to the priest before moving on to something else, although several monologues were also written for priest characters. Their anticlericalism may also be incorporated in "throwaway" comments, mentioned matter-of-factly in passing in larger productions and scenes. These comments seem to imply a deeper cultural understanding and insider knowledge that is being confirmed but coded. I present a chronological approach to the plays here in order to depict how these comments changed over time.

In "Elevator," a scene from *Cod on a Stick* (1973), several Newfoundlanders ride

in the same elevator in a government building, attempting to communicate with mainlanders and deal with the Unemployment Office, Welfare Office and Grants Office. Once again, power dynamics are in play. In response to their troubles with communicating with these officials, the following exchange takes place:

- Diane: Well, they don't understand what we are saying, either.
- Mary: I know. What we needs, girl, is someone to come down here to teach us to talk like they do.
- Cathy: Well, don't go to the Irish Christian Brothers.
- Tommy: Now don't go saying nutting bad about the Irish Christian Brothers. They've done an awful lot of good here in Newfoundland.
- All: Yes. (lines 251-258)

Initially, Tommy's comment seems like a warning, but perhaps more notable here is the power of the clerics, and the power of officials in general. CODCO most probably mentions the Christian Brothers here because of the aforementioned role of the priest in Newfoundland communities as an intermediary, and these characters are in need of help with government structures. However, there is something sinister about this dialogue. Cathy says "Well, don't go to the Irish Christian Brothers," but does not tell us why. Tommy states "Now don't go saying nutting bad about the Irish Christian Brothers. They've done an awful lot of good here in Newfoundland" and his friends all say "yes" in unison as though they have been brainwashed. It seems something more is going on in this dialogue than appears on the surface. The exchange continues:

- Mary: We needs somebody new, somebody from the Mainland, somebody like...
- Diane: What about the Jesuits?

- Mary: Like the Jesuits, that's right.
- Tommy: They haven't been here that long.
- Cathy: Yeah, and they're not Irish.
- Tommy: And they says mass too. (lines 259-265)

The hope of receiving another religious order to teach them how to interact with other powerful officials seems to solidify the power and the role of the cleric in the present day as an arbitrator and intermediary, someone to be respected, but perhaps also feared, as is depicted in the next scene, "McJesuit."

Set in a classroom in a Roman Catholic Boys' School, Father McJesuit has the boys introduce themselves and corrects their pronunciations.

Fr. McJesuit: [...] There are no Harrys in this school, there are only Harolds. There are no Joes in this school, there are only Josephs. There are no Freds in this school, there are only Fredericks. What is your name sir?

Harry: I was baptized Harry, Father.

Fr. McJesuit: There must be some kind of mistake. Next please? Speak up sir. Come, sir.

(Crying noise. Next student wets himself.)

Leave the room please. You may leave the room. Ugh, the smell! Now, your name is the first thing that any one will hear you say. Don't be afraid of it, gentlemen. Stand up proud like Jesuit boys. Take a deep breath (Takes a deep breath.) and let it rrrroll off the tongue. My name is J. Kevin McMedicine, ah, McVitamin, ah McJesuit, ah McDuck... Oh, my God! This is horrible... (Sputters off. His mind has snapped.) (lines 51-66)

Although Fr. McJesuit is clearly on the brink of some sort of breakdown, he depicts several characteristics of the teaching priest we see in Newfoundland popular culture and coming-of-age literature (as discussed later in this chapter). The fixation on naming the

students, the baptismal "mistake" and the continual aggression against students are common fodder.

Throughout CODCO's *Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave* (1974) several religious figures are presented unsympathetically. In an early scene, the character of a Fairy makes a comment about the Pope, with a line that intimates something suggestive without being overtly so: "It is sometimes said that the touch of the pope cures legs [...] But, unfortunately, not arms" (scene 7, lines 132 and 133). Later, the stage directions for a scene set at a press conference describe the character of the Cardinal as the Cardinal is "slimy, toady, ambitious cleric with Italianate accent," while His Holiness the Pope is a "pious phoney, bordering on the senile" (105). The Pope's inability to function is clear:

Cardinal: And now the American reporter has a little question for Holiness. *Little* question, please.

Reporter: In view of the presence of the Latin American children, I think it is only appropriate to ask his papacy's stand on birth control and over-population.

(Cardinal and Holiness hold shouting match in Italian. They abruptly calm down for Holiness's pronouncement.)

Holiness: There are too many children. They die. (Unable to think of a solution.) Feed them! (Looks to Cardinal.) Yeah? (More argument in Italian. Tries yet again.) Someone hide all of the food. (Gives up.) Everyone can live in harmony and rhythm. (lines 35-49)

The Pope and the Church clearly do not have all the answers about how to operate in the modern world within the tenets that they uphold. The scenes with priests or the Pope frequently end with the characters giving up, becoming frustrated, or tapering off with more and more "questionable" or sexually explicit comments.

In one of the depictions of nuns, in scene 13, "Death," Sister Celery attends her

biological sister's funeral. Described as "sinister and foreboding" she cautions her nephew about his mourning ("Control yourself, Arthur. What would your mother think?") and reprimands himself for forgetting his manners ("And now, who are these people, Arthur?") (lines 84-85). In addressing a rather upset mourner, Sister Celery states: "You must be careful my child, lest indulgence in sorrow for our dear friend bring you closer to her than you care to be" (lines 94-95). She goes on to make several statements to the mourners: "I have seen many deaths, none of them being occasion for sorrow" and "Those who weep, weep for themselves" (lines 107-108, 110). The character of this nun, now the matriarch of this family, provides none of the support that one may culturally expect in a situation where the family has suffered a loss of this nature. Instead of mourning, or respecting the grief of others, she uses this time to critique the family, cautioning them about their own deaths and attempting to make them feel guilty for grieving.

Peters notes how CODCO's treatment of priests begins to get more aggressive in their next revue *Das Capital* (1975), and she draws special attention to one monologue, "Father Dinn on Sin" :

[A] priest terrifies a captive audience of children through exploitation of the child's fear of innate sinfulness, eternal damnation, unendurable suffering and the indifference of its parents. The result is the emergence of CODCO's growing awareness and exposure of institutional and individual power over the weak and helpless, a situation which is an important aspect of the next play [*Das Capital*]. (Peters 1992:xxvi)

The scene opens with Father Dinn's sermon to a group of children. Similar to the McJesuit scene in *Cod on a Stick*, this cleric is dealing with a group of children who are undoubtedly becoming more uncomfortable as the sermon progresses, and culminates

with the cleric losing his mind. From Father Dinn's monologue:

Father Dinn: [...] A lot of boys and girls over the years have asked me ... "Father Dinn." They ask, "Did our Lord tell jokes? Did the Saviour of the World laugh at funny stories? Did our Lord have ... *a sense of humour?*" Well, of course he had a sense of humour. But ... I don't know why it is, boys and girls, but for some strange reason or other, I don't think that when our Lord said (He speaks slowly and clearly.) "Burn in hell for eternity," that he was joking. I think that day our Lord was in a *very serious mood*. Now, boys and girls, I would like to tell you a particular joke. Once upon a time there was a little boy who didn't say his morning prayers. He died and went to hell. You see, he thought that morning prayers were a joke. Haw, haw. Some joke. He burned in hell for eternity. (Pause.) Boys and girls, have you ever put your finger on a red hot stove? Well, I suggest you do. The pain of hell, boys and girls, is a billion, trillion time hotter than any red hot stove. The pain of hell is no joke. [...] And don't tell me you haven't got any sins, boys and girls, because I heard your confessions this morning, and I was *horrified*. More horrified than I have ever been in the *thirty-five years* I have been giving this sermon. That's right, boys and girls, I have been giving this same sermon for thirty-five years. In fact I am *fed up giving this sermon. I have had it boys and girls up to here*. As a matter of fact, a few moments ago my mind *snapped*. I'm freaking out, boys and girls. I have "flipped my lid." I'm going to go now and jump over the wharf. But before I do, I am going to do something I have always wanted to do. I am going to show you, boys and girls, my dick. (lines 1-66)

The fact that this scene culminates in Fr. Dinn exposing himself to the children is shocking and troubling. How was CODCO able to present this play in a province (and country) where Catholicism was predominant? One wonders why CODCO begins to get more aggressive in its treatment of religious figures at this stage, however, it may be related to their gaining confidence having had positive experiences with their earlier material which did deal with the power dynamic posed by priests. The timing of this play, performed in 1975, may provide some context. Allegations were brought forward about abuse at Mount Cashel in 1975, and although these allegations were not publicly known

and did not result in charges at this time.

Other issues with the corruption of the local Church are also explored; a scene simply entitled "Monologues" shows the involvement of the Catholic church with politics:

Archbishop Skinner: In keeping with the tradition of St. John's as a city of churches, the multi-million dollar Trizec Corporation has agreed to call their high rise complex Trinity Towers, as this is probably the closest to heaven as they will ever get. There will be the God the Father Office tower, the Holy Ghost Shopping plaza, and the Son of God Saloon. (lines 41-46)

This illustration of the corruption of the Church and its willingness to bend for monetary benefits (as mediated through the character of the bishop) is based on ongoing concerns about the position of the St. John's Basilica as well as the loss of the city's character through downtown high-rise development.

In CODCO's 1975 *Would You Like to Smell My... Pocket Crumbs?*, the scene titled "Sisters of the Silver Scalpel" revolves around a 'documentary' presented by a husband and wife team, the hosts of the television show *Wilderness on Parade*. The documentary focuses on the confrontation between a nun and their natural enemy, "a liberated coffee show hostess," and concludes with the pair catching a nun for scientific reasons. Beyond the spoofing of nature programs, there are political messages in this piece.

Russell: Only through close study and observation of the Scalpel can science even hope to solve the mystery surrounding this exotic species, once so plentiful, but now threatened by the relentless forward march of civilised society. (lines 220-223)

And of the confrontation with the coffee show hostess:

Russell: The hostess first tackles and then subverts her victim using a special pouch of hypnotizing and paralyzing pellets, which you'll see here. (The coffee show hostess springs out at the passing nuns, capturing one and forcing a birth control pill into her mouth. The nun grows weak and seems to be hypnotized. The hostess indoctrinates her. The nun awakes very happy; she chucks her wimple and cowl, and prances off, hand in hand with the hostess.)  
(lines 157-164)

The nuns are also depicted cutting up a liver with their "knife-like" appendages from which they get their names (scalpel is a play on words with scapular, part of some orders habits). They are depicted as wild creatures; threatened by empowered women and merely in need of birth control pills in order to effect a positive change.

When CODCO reunited for a series of performances in the mid-1980s, they had to make significant changes to one scene from *Pocket Crumbs*:

There was heated irrational and rational debate among CODCO members about the inclusion of "Morton the Dying Child Molester" in this text. The scene which had been enthusiastically received in St. John's, Toronto, Philadelphia and London in 1975 and 1976, caused problems to audiences and actors alike in 1985 when CODCO included the scene in a St. John's revival in July of that year. As a result, the scene was omitted from the Canadian tour in 1986. In the decade between 1975 and 1985, Newfoundlanders became aware of the extent of child sexual abuse in their province and the devastation that it causes the victim. From the vantage of 1985 CODCO did not feel that its 1975 depiction paid sufficient attention to the victim of sexual abuse. They now say they would not have written the scene the same way at that later date. (Peters 1992:xxvii)

It seems that satire, prior to the revelations of abuse, was an appropriate form for presentation of issues with priests, springing as it did from vernacular expressions, although the genres changed and moved into humorous expressions in public settings. Post-revelations, this satire had served its purpose and now acted as a reminder of the communal knowledge which predated the charges.

CODCO started the ball rolling for the depiction of Catholicism in Newfoundland popular culture, as one of the many axes they had to grind about issues such as poverty, sex and social ills. As Michael Fralic has found, "CODCO began to address fear-mongering and child molestation among the clergy via grotesque satiric portraits in the 1970s, well before the abuses that underpinned their satire were publicly acknowledged" (66). Certainly, much of their work was pre-inquiry, but it continued on after in different forms, such as with the omission scenes from previous productions (Peters 1992:xxvii).

CODCO's anticlericalism was typically part of a larger focus, and in this way CODCO differs from the novelists that came after it (as will be discussed), who took the baton when the frivolity of revue no longer seemed the socially acceptable place for such sentiments (at least in the eyes of the CBC). In 2009, Greg Malone, one of the members of CODCO, published the non-fiction account of his childhood, entitled *You Better Watch Out: A Memoir*. Many of the roots of the counterclerical themes that were pervasive in CODCO's satire are depicted within, including accounts of beatings from priests (70-71, 111, 160, 172), and often violent strappings across the hands, face or buttocks (161, 174, 177, 263, 352). The priests are also described as caring about their charges (237-240, 289-309), and worthy of emulation (249-252 discusses his briefly fascination with dressing like a priest). But the memoir also explores many other aspects of young Malone's life outside his religious schooling at St. Bonaventure's College in St. John's. Positively, this memoir shows a readiness to move these expressions out of the protective genre of humour and into the personal experience narrative.

To return to the chronology of negative expressions about priests, although it was the

first popular culture expression of anticlericalism in Newfoundland, CODCO was inspired and built upon ideas and expressions that were based in counterclerical folk expressions. One of the first vernacular manifestations of public opinion during the Inquiry was a cycle of jokes about priests assaulting young boys, a vernacular expression that many (including academics), found distasteful.

iii. *Counterclericalism Goes Public: The Fr. Hickey Joke Cycle, 1988-1989*

After the Mount Cashel case, there were jokes about the priests in the mainstream. At the time of this writing, approximately twenty-five years later, these jokes are less prevalent, but due to a student collection project conducted not long after, it is possible to determine what forms the jokes took and some of their content and context:

A new priest takes over confession for Father Hickey. A guy comes in and says "Father forgive me, I gave a 'blow job'. The priest didn't know what to say to that so he went outside and asks, "Bobby, what does Father Hickey give for a 'blow job'?" Bobby replied "a bag of chips and a bottle of coke" (J. Kennedy 1994:10)

This joke had many variations, and similar content was presented in numerous jokes at that time. The ephemerality of jokes in general, as well as the content and timeliness of these particular jokes, makes their collection impossible at this time.

The Fr. Hickey joke cycle potentially grew out of earlier jokes that, dealt with a priest being outwitted by a small boy, although these jokes had no explicit sexual overtones. For example, in *The Two Traditions: The Art of Storytelling Amongst French Newfoundlanders*, folklorist Gerald Thomas cites the following joke told to him by Emile Benoit. Initially, the boy's mother makes him hunt a rabbit and deliver it to the priest, where the little boy throws it into the priest's kitchen. The priest then attempts to teach

him how to properly present his gift with a little role playing, and he switches positions with the boy. As Benoit tells it:

The priest comes in holding the rabbit in his hand, he says, "Here." He says, "Father – I've brought you a rabbit for your dinner tomorrow." The little boy says – "Ah thank you very much, my little boy, that's very kind of you." The little fellow, there was a little jar with some, some, some quarters in it euh, he lifts up the, the cover and he takes a quarter out, he says, "Here," he says, "my little boy, twenty-five cents," he says, "for your rabbit!" Ah ha ha ha ha! (1993:265-266)

Thomas notes that "*The Types of the Folktale* has a whole series of anecdotes numbered from 1832A\* to 1832K\* which oppose a priest and a clever boy, the only versions of which are from Quebec" (266), although the priest in opposition to a clever man is found in wider distribution in various legends and jokes.

Further examples of humour involving clerics are found in Herbert Halpert's treatment of the "Humorous Grace *Cante Fable*" (2002:171-188). Once again, we see that the ephemerality of the material impacts the versions we see in print, Halpert states that "texts of the humorous grace type of *cante fable*, such as the ones which follow, seem to turn up only sporadically, often accidentally, evading the most experienced collectors" (171). Although the priest is a character in these stories, he is not depicted negatively, although his station and the impact of his presence on his parishioners are often illustrated. In a section called "The Menu Improved" (182-185), Halpert gives examples of the cleric's "unexpected satirical grace,"

Late one evening a farm family decided they wanted ash cakes for supper,<sup>19</sup> so they cleaned off the hearth and started making them. Just then the husband saw the preacher coming up the front path. They very quickly cleaned up the place

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<sup>19</sup> Corn bread made in the ashes of the hearth.

where they had been making the ash cakes before they asked the preacher into the house.

As was their custom, they invited the preacher to stay for supper. The wife went into the kitchen and prepared sweet cakes in place of the ash cakes. When they sat down to eat supper, the preacher was asked to return thanks. This is what he said:

Oh Lord be praised,  
How we are amazed  
To see how things are mended;  
Sweet cakes and tea  
For supper I see,  
When ash cakes were intended. (183)

In some cases the narrative is told as though the hired hand, or some person other than the cleric gives the grace, however, the point of the story is still the same. It is possible that the number of narratives involving clerics and food is reflective of the social anxiety of "feeding" priests and the social obligations of doing so.

The following joke (or humorous legend) appears as part of a longer narrative in Henry Glassie's *Irish Folk Tales*:

There was another man like meself: he was a fiddler, and he lived up a Derrylin. And of course, I think the fiddlers longgo, they hadn't too much money, and any drink they got, they drunk it. This man, well, whether he had drink in him or not, he appeared to be drunk nearly every day. He was drunk in the priest's eye everyday. He lived near the parochial house, and every time the priest went out, he met him nearly, and this day, "Och, Tom," he says: "Drunk the day again," says he to Tom.

"Aye," say Tom back to him "So am I." (73)

This structure is quite common for priest jokes; without slighting the priest's values the teller is able to praise the parishioner in the narrative for manipulating the priest's words. This may be more complex than a first reading would suggest, but priests were thought to be learned men, and in this instance a parishioner, albeit a contemptible one, is able to

outwit him. In the vein of jokes that target lawyers (see Galanter 2006) it may also tie in to the anti-education or anti-intellectual slant that some of the counterclerical narratives seem to suggest.

In Michael Fralic's thesis, entitled "Towards Christianity Without Authority: Pluralism, Skepticism, and Ecclesiastical Power in Selected Examples of Humorous Newfoundland Writing," one chapter is devoted to a review of published joke books. In it Fralic states "emphases on power relations, institutional privilege, and abuses and moral failures among the clergy that imbue so much of Newfoundland's published humour about religion are abundant in Newfoundland joke books [...]" (2007:33). In citing other sources, Fralic alludes to the fact that jokes may become more popular as the religious system is perceived to have less power.

In *Fun on the Rock*, Herbert L. Pottle supports Mulkay's basic argument in a Newfoundland context. Pottle writes that the susceptibility to humour, and especially to satire, of traditionally dominant institutions such as the churches followed the loss of a degree of their power. (2007:206)

On the content of the jokes, and their form, he states:

Many ecclesiastical jokes in Newfoundland joke books involve confrontations between clerics and laypersons. In most of these, the cleric is the primary butt of the joke. Clerics are routinely depicted as know-it-alls, as arrogant or uptight, or as morally pushy and sometimes hypocritical: traits related to their role-defined difference from their parishioners. (2007:36)

Although Fralic is looking at all clergy in his survey, his conclusions certainly apply to jokes about Catholic priests.

While jokes of this form are still found in oral and written sources in Newfoundland, in recent years the more noticeable joke type in oral circulation has been

those that seem to make light of the sexual abuse scandal (Davies 2004; Hiscock 1990; Kennedy 1994). Most of these concern Father Hickey, the local priest who was at the centre of the inquiry. These jokes are not featured in jokebook publications aimed at tourists and expatriate Newfoundlanders (Fralic 2007). Nor has much been written about them from an academic standpoint; the two sources I found are from somewhat short treatments in obscure publications. In his 1990 newspaper article "No joking matter, when humour reveals a cruel side," which appeared in *The Newfoundland Signal*, Philip Hiscock states:

Respectable people tell jokes which denigrate women, which are racist, which slur religious groups, which blame the victims of sexual abuse. In other words, normally thoughtful people tell hateful jokes.

What do these jokes do? Think of all the "Father Hickey jokes" you heard in 1988 and 1989. A few were just puns (buoy/boy for example), others were whole stories that had to be set up a certain way so that the twist of meaning in the end was perfect. Do you remember the story about the choirboy or altarboy who is asked by the fill-in priest taking confession what Father Hickey gives (as penance he means) for a certain sexual sin? The boys answer huffily, "A bag of chips and a Pepsi!" (1990:9)

In his analysis of these jokes, Hiscock argues that they suggest the boy was a "willing participant" and that they are a "denial of the crime" which "blame the victims" (9). Writing on the same joke cycle, Christie Davies states in "The Right to Joke," that "These jokes caused outrage in the local press, not because they were obscene or because they made fun of a sacred institution in difficulties but because they 'blamed the victim' – in this case the altar boy." He continues "Jokes that appear to 'blame the victim' are anathema to the knee-jerk egalitarians," clearly disagreeing with Hiscock's conclusions (Davies 2004:18).

Davies' consideration of these jokes is part of an overall discussion of distasteful jokes, his opinion being that people give them too much power. Of the abuse scandal, Davies states:

When the author was working in Newfoundland in the early 1990s, there had been a major scandal because the people suddenly became aware of the widespread sexual molestation of boys by Roman Catholic priests and even more so by members of a teaching order, the Christian Brothers who ran the orphanage. These were not the mere unsubstantiated allegation driven by greed for compensation nor were the deeds the acts of opportunistic casual gropers; having read the contemporary reports I can safely say that these were among the vilest crimes Newfoundland has ever seen. They had been hushed up for a long time. No-one disagreed about that. Yet immediately there was a cycle of Father Hickey jokes about one of the perpetrators (2004:18).

Davies cites the following jokes, the first quite similar to Hiscock's, but told in joke form as follows<sup>20</sup>:

Father Hickey had to go away, so he asked a young priest to stand in for him and hear confessions. Bridget confessed that she had given her boy friend a blowjob. The young priest was unsure as to what penance to give, so he sneaked out of the confessional and asked an altar boy, "What does Father Hickey give for a blow-job?" The boy replied without hesitation, "A bottle of coke, an ice-cream and a bag of chips." (2004:18)

Several jokes follow this narrative structure as we will discover, however, others are shorter forms like this one which is based on a standard joke:

How do you get a priest to have sex with a nun?  
Dress her up as an altar boy. (2004:18)

Both authors portray the joke content as shocking. But perhaps their take on the jokes needs to be weighted. Gershon Legman in *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: an Analysis*

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<sup>20</sup> It is my interpretation that Hiscock, cited the joke in this way in order avoid fuelling the joke cycle, and also because he was aware that the most readers would be aware of the joke, therefore lessening the need to reproduce it yet again. Also, putting a joke in popular print may make it the authority and alter future versions.

of *Sexual Humor* highlights the ambiguous and seemingly contradictory nature of humour. Legman illustrates the way in which jokes with repulsive content operate:

In jokes certainly, the ambiguity or contradiction that is so difficult to endure, especially for the unwarned listener, is that the 'dirty' dirty joke apparently enjoys and offers as entertainment precisely those objects and images that both teller and listener really fear and are repelled by. (1968:18)

He continues:

One is disgusted and yet one laughs, and one is disgusted with oneself for laughing. [...] For jokes are essentially an unveiling of the joke-tellers own neuroses and compulsions, and his guilts about these, which he hopes to drive off and nullify by means of the magical release of exciting the listener's laughter. (1968:19-20)

Jokes force the listener to confront his or her issues with the taboos at their centre—they are an aggressive form primarily because they challenge the listener's worldview.

Furthermore, Legman discusses the structure of the longer narrative joke's precursors, including an anticlerical joke in his section on Homosexuality under the subtitle of "Fellation as Rape."

The milder self-accusation of allowing oneself to be fellated (by a man) or expressing any willingness in this direction, is considered halfway to the final self-betrayal, and is encountered generally in the form of some elaborate or accidental misunderstanding. A young priest, who is not very sure yet of the proper penances to mete out in confession, asks an older priest what he should give a fellator. "Oh," says the older priest, "give him a dollar or so, if you feel like it. Personally, I never give them more than fifty cents." (1968:128)<sup>21</sup>

The oral sex/confessional joke broadly attested and adapted to local context with a variety of details. Another is the standard penance and payment joke, which has appeared

<sup>21</sup> Legman cites some origins, "This is perhaps connected with Rotunda's Motif Table T643.1, "Sodomist forces confessor to absolve him." And compare Motif V29.4, "Sodomist makes sport of confession." From *Bandello*, I. 6.) (1968:128).

in collections of jokes from outside of Newfoundland (see Legman), although not with a specific "named" priest:

One day Father Hickey couldn't make confessions because of a court appointment so he asked another priest to fill in for him. The new priest was unfamiliar with the penance that Father Hickey gave to various sins so Father Hickey left him a sheet with the penances on it. The first person went in and confessed to committing adultery so the priest looked up the penance for adultery and told the man to say ten Hail Mary's. The second person walked in and said "Oh Father I think I'm turning into a heathen." He looked up that sin and told her to say fifteen Hail Mary's. The new priest was finding confessions much easier. Then another woman came in and said "Father please forgive me, I gave a 'blow job' last night." He looked on the sheet but couldn't find the penance for this sin so he walked outside and found one of Father Hickey's altar boys and asked him "young boy what does Father Hickey give for a 'blow job'?" The young boy answered "a bag of chips and a bottle of coke." (J. Kennedy 1994:8)

Jokes are malleable to circumstances, and this joke can be stripped of the "law of threes" (Ollrik 1965) preamble and also presented strictly as a set up for a punchline (as see in the joke that leads off this section).

I am fascinated by how predictable these jokes are: they use standard formulaic forms that are known by the folkgroup so that typically listeners are aware of the potential ending for the joke. Several, due to their form and use of introductory sentences, announce the theme of the joke quite quickly. The use of question and answer jokes, and formulaic phrases such as "did you hear the one about..." alert the listener to the fact that they are about to hear a joke. Many jokes start with the words "Father Hickey," which flag the content. The prevalence of the jokes that start with a formulaic question or use the priest's name may signal the subject matter of the joke: they seem to attempt to alert the listener to their content from the outset. The use of puns in the jokes e.g. give as penance and give as in exchange may have an additional function beyond that of humour,

as it forces the listener to consider a word, or a connotation of a word, that they previously thought had one meaning, and see it with another. Through the use of jokes, the teller is showing the listener that something they previously thought had one cultural meaning (the Church or the priest) now has another. The previous way in which members of society considered the priest or Church and the cultural meaning embodied in that role no longer hold true; and much like the pun in the joke can be interpreted differently; so can the priest.

In his analysis of the meanings of jokes, Davies claims that "Jokes are humorous utterances that exist in a world of their own and cannot be reduced to serious statements. Jokes are for jokes' sake. They are not a suitable subject for indignation" (2004:18). Hiscock observes that "Jokes are often very much like gossip in that they spread bits of "news" or alleged news" (1990:9), while Davies echoes this, also pointing out the triviality of jokes: "jokes are both very important and completely unimportant," arguably like many other minor forms of narrative folklore, such as gossip (3). Hiscock and Davies seem to disagree; but both are treating the subject matter briefly due to the format in which their arguments take place. Michael Fralic also weighs in on the meaning of religious jokes in Newfoundland, albeit not referring specifically to Fr. Hickey jokes:

Due to their formal ambiguity, jokes cannot be considered clear means of conveying coherent points of view. Yet joking *is* a prominent way of negotiating meaning, exploring difficult social or epistemological problems, and tacitly discerning points of agreement and disagreement. And despite the ambiguity built into humour, many jokes have obvious political tendencies. (2007: 34)

Fralic's argument makes the valid point that, although ambiguous, jokes provide a way to negotiate meaning and gauge opinions and may be inherently political. Using these

concepts, I provide several examples of jokes here as collected from individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds in an undergraduate paper written for Gerald Thomas entitled "Father Hickey Jokes" written in 1994 and deposited in the Memorial Folklore and Language Archive by J. Kennedy (MUNFLA #97-447). Due to the ephemeral nature of jokes, I was unable to collect any Father Hickey in the field, and thus, draw heavily on this one recorded source.

In her introduction to the paper, Kennedy addresses the issue that at the time of her writing, in 1994, these jokes were already quite peripheral. Cyclical jokes, and joke types which enjoy some popularity before they wane are not uncommon in Newfoundland. Goldstein cites jokes about men having sex with sheep as a cycle in the 1970s (2004:86) and jokes about AIDS circa 1993 (2004:127). The jokes had many interrelated functions and these, of course, would vary with their telling. Kennedy credits this to two factors: that these jokes entered the mainstream when charges were laid against Fr. Hickey, and that the death of Fr. Hickey in 1992 means that now he "must stand before God and answer for this actions" (3). While I agree with the former, I would suggest that his death as well as the plans for compensating the victims caused the jokes' function to fade. The very formulaic structure of many of the question-and-answer jokes, starting with the inquisitive "Did you hear?" is no coincidence. The jokes had been a way to spread news of the event, to open the content for discussion, and to shock; when this function ceased to be necessary the jokes died out. As Christie Davies states on the subject of mass-mediated disaster jokes "The jokes begin within hours or even minutes of the disaster's melodramatic presentation on television, rapidly increase in number, peak a

couple of months later, and then new jokes cease to be created, bringing the cycle not to an end but to a plateau” (2003:15). Both Ellis (2003) and Davies (2003) found that joke cycles sprang up quickly in response to major events and relied heavily on pre-existent joke forms.

Kennedy interviewed three men and one woman in their early twenties; they came from a variety of backgrounds and professions, but three were students. Kennedy herself was Catholic, as was one of her informants, but the others were various denominations of Protestant. Kennedy describes herself as religious, attending mass weekly. One statement from Kennedy which she does not emphasize might actually be quite telling: “...while my Grandparents and other members of my family in their generation have refused to acknowledge the damage resulting from the detrimental charges laid in the cases of sexual assault, I have realized the gravity of the situation” (2). Indeed, perhaps this is what many joke-tellers are saying in their jokes about Fr. Hickey; “while others won’t talk about it, admit it, or accept it, I will.” The inclusion of jokes from those of other religious denominations might seem problematic for this study, however, as Kennedy states: “The effect of the Mount Cashel scandal and the arrests of priests and Brothers has had a far reaching impact not only on Catholics but other denominations and Newfoundland as a whole...” (2). In Newfoundland, where Catholics were in the religious plurality, and where the Mount Cashel Orphanage provided a necessary service to members of all denominations, there was a sense of community investment in this case; furthermore, cases which involve child abuse, a major cultural taboo, draw community commentary.

Kennedy collected twenty jokes from her informants. The jokes have a variety of structures, and interrelated themes and motifs. Most common in these jokes are simple double entendres: "pulling" for masturbation; "manhole inspector" as slang for homosexual; and "ones" to imply penises. There are frequent short puns on the word buoy/boy, which may not be an uncommon device in regional jokes due to the marine culture of Newfoundland. Longer "set ups" and more complex narrative formats in the jokes allow for a more complicated punchline; what the priest "gives" for the sin of oral sex can either be a penance for the sin or a payment for the favour.

Many of the jokes have a question-and-answer format. They transpire in a variety of settings (or implied settings), such as the ocean, the Church, and prison. They cover a variety of themes; criticising both the Church and Fr. Hickey. These jokes, for instance, is more critical of the Church itself than Fr. Hickey:

Q: Did you hear about the new sign on the Catholic Church?

A: The sign says "Please enter at rear" (5)

Q: How come they're not building a new penitentiary in Hr. Grace?

A: They don't have to. It's cheaper to put bars around the Basilica. (10)

Q: Why was midnight mass cancelled at the Basilica?

A: Because all the priests have to be back in their cells by 8:00. (8)

Again, beyond the clear comment about priests in prison, come the second sentiment, the cancellation of midnight mass, and a suggestion of the inability of the Basilica to provide religious services. Most jokes, however, target Father Hickey directly. Some jokes typically reserved to discuss homosexual behaviour hinge on vocabulary, such as the connotation of the term "manhole inspector."

Q: Did you hear about the new job Father Hickey will have when he gets out of prison?

A: He is going to leave the Church and become the new manhole inspector for Newfoundland. (5)

This double entendre is common in humour; for example, stand-up comedian Norm MacDonald's *Ridiculous* album (2006) has a whole comedic song entitled "Manhole Inspector." A large percentage of the jokes are local adaptations of well known forms, as with this variant of a joke about a child molester doll that is widespread and regularly used in connection with current affairs:

Q: Did you hear about the new Father Hickey doll that is out?

A: When you wind it up it plays with your kids (Kennedy 1994:5).

This same joke has been associated with Michael Jackson, among others:

Q: Did you hear about the new Michael Jackson doll?

A: You wind it up and it plays with your kids (jokes.com 2008)

The double entendre of the term "plays with" (as in "playing with yourself" as a euphemism for masturbation) assists the joke. Minor details are changed and localized but most of the jokes rely on forms. The wordplay of buoy/boy in the jokes is fairly common:

Father Hickey was on a wharf right depressed and he was going to kill himself. He jumped over the side because he didn't want to [live] anymore. Next morning they found him with a big smile on his face holding on to a buoy. (5)

Q: Father Hickey was on a Caribbean cruise when it started to get stormy. He was washed overboard and do you know what the captain said?

A: Throw him a "buoy." (8)

Q: Father Hickey was out rowing on Quidi Vidi Lake with some altar boys and he fell in the water. What did one of the altar boys say?

A: Throw him a "buoy." (12)

Despite three different settings and three different complicating actions, the reaction is the

same. Once again this picks up on joke formats that have previously been in circulation: a joke about Michael Jackson uses the same structure:

What do you do if Michael Jackson is drowning?  
Throw him a buoy! ("Katie" 2003)

The jokes may also allude to other potential opportunities for child abuse: one highlights team sports coaches, and is thematically similar to the joke that references rowing:

Q: Why did Father Hickey like coaching one of the junior soccer teams in St. John's?  
A: Because he liked pulling the goalie in the last two minutes. (8)

Several of the jokes are in a longer narrative format that requires adequate set up for the turn of phrase in the joke, with more deliberate wordplay rather than a simple pun.

Three versions of the same joke were collected by Kennedy:

There were altar boys outside the Basilica one Sunday morning with their pants down and their penises in the snow bank. Someone came along to them and asked "What are you doing there?" They answered, "We're getting ready for mass, Father likes to have a few cold ones after mass!" (5)

There was these two buddies standing outside the church one morning and they had their dicks stuck in the snow and this guy passed by and says "Excuse me, how come you have your dicks stuck in the snow?" One of the buddies answered "Cause Father Hickey likes to have a couple of cold ones after mass." (7-8)

There was an old man coming down the street and he seen some boys with their dicks in the snow. The man asked why they were doing that and they replied "Father Hickey likes to have a few cold ones after mass." (12)

It is possible that these jokes are also a commentary on the priest's drinking. Lawrence Taylor notes that is a frequent theme in Ireland, and certainly, while there is no religious prohibition on priests' drinking, it is not always viewed positively, becoming the frequent focus of local legend (1990:147). The jokes may hint towards other behaviour which is

communally deemed inappropriate; concern with priests' behaviour based in religious piety is frequent. While priests can drink, and there are no prohibitions against it, many Christians feel that moderation in alcohol is important. The jokes may contain elements of criticism beyond the obvious: in the buoy/boy jokes, Fr. Hickey is going to kill himself, a sin against hope; others take place on a cruise ship, perhaps a judgement of clerical wealth and spending.

Frequently, prison, or escaping from prison (albeit with a punchline about masturbation), is now the subject of a joke. Although masturbation is often at the heart of the prison jokes, with a pun on the use of the word "pull," a closer examination shows the law at the centre of the joke; the masturbation portion is almost a sensationalistic twist which detracts from the heart of the joke, a critique of law enforcement. Counterclerical comments are often a dialogue about the nature of power in general, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. But, reading deeper, perhaps this is a commentary on the fact that, in many ways, Fr. Hickey and other priests escaped prison in 1975 when allegations brought against them did not bring about indictment, and believed by most to be part of an elaborate cover up.

Q: How did Father Hickey get out of prison?

A: He pulled himself through the bars. (8)

Q: When Father Hickey was in court he had all the altar boys there and you know what they were saying?

A: Come on Father Hickey, we're pulling for you. (12)

Q: Did you hear that Father Hickey escaped from the penitentiary?

A: He hauled himself through the bars and pulled himself over the wall.  
(10)

Although these deal with a slightly different turn of phrase; the escape theme persists:

Q: How did Father Hickey get out of jail?

A: He drew an ass on the wall and blew his way out. (12)

Q: After Father Hickey was returned to the pen, for trying to escape, he tried again. Do you know how he got out the second time?

A: He blew the locks. (12)

Q: Do you know that Father Hickey escaped from Salmonier?<sup>22</sup>

A: Some asshole let him out. (5)

One of the complications of these jokes is that they critique many levels of power dynamics; they are a commentary on power and a counter-hegemonic act due to their topic, using a powerful person or structure in a joke which is at their expense. At the same time they attack the powerful (the priest or Church), they target the powerless (the boy, altar boy or young man). This adds to the discomfort some feel in hearing these jokes. Similar to dead baby jokes, AIDS jokes, Challenger jokes, and Princess Diana jokes, these jokes may be coping mechanisms for the public in the face of such tragedy. Peter Narváez's introduction to his *Of Corpse: Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture* (2003a) adds to this discussion, and the two articles in that collection's "Disaster Jokes" section – Bill Ellis' "Making a Big Apple Crumble: The Role of Humor in Constructing a Global Response to Disaster," and Christie Davies' "Jokes that Follow Mass-Mediated Disasters in a Global Electronic Age" – are relevant to an understanding of this sort of humour.

As Davies (2004) indicated, some Newfoundlanders were surprised to witness these jokes in day-to-day transmission, and equated it with blaming the victim. I believe, however, that the jokes became popular because they provided a cultural *critique* of

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<sup>22</sup> This refers to the Salmonier Correctional Institution.

society's inability to look after its weakest members. It was a *cathartic* and cultural release from secrecy, as documentation suggests that there was foreknowledge of clerical abuse in 1975 (Winter Report 1990:24). Clearly, parishioners in general and Newfoundlanders in specific had no real power to act, and the Inquiry resulted from a fear of corruption in other power structures, as incidents were reported to police but with few actual results. The jokes also allowed for a more passive critique of these power structures, their overall meaning protected by the distraction provided by sensationalistic content. The jokes were a *more overt* way to attempt to spread news and discuss relevant issues which sprang out of traditional coded genres that were already in use in Newfoundland.

The jokes relieve tension, and they are dialogic. They could be used by the tellers to test boundaries and worldview of their audience, whether sitting with friends at the local coffee shop or standing in line with strangers. Jokes illustrate core beliefs of the teller or society in which they are told, allowing for telling and retelling a narrative without a significant time commitment or personal investment in the learning, transmission or listening. Simultaneously they permit the teller to extricate themselves from the beliefs expressed in the joke if they fall upon an angry audience; after all, they are "just" jokes.

Humour theorists and folklorists who write about jokes seem to be able to agree on one thing: we really know very little about laughter or why people tell certain jokes (J. Thomas 1997). Jokes about child molestation, though, are never positive jokes. Those jokes which discuss Michael Jackson molesting children are often the same forms for Fr.

Hickey jokes, but Newfoundlanders knew Fr. Hickey's victims. And as cases progressed and more details were known, it was established that there were more victims and other predatory priests. It is possible the jokes may have operated as a means of social control; reminding priests by their existence that they are being watched and critiqued. They also show knowledge and confirmation of the events and a willingness to share this information in a less coded form than traditional counterclerical expressions: one could argue that puns and turns of phrase are by their very nature coded, but their use in Fr. Hickey jokes is intentionally less complicated. Jokes, depending on the teller or context, can be anticlerical or counterclerical. Although they are different from previous forms, they represent a combination of two traditions: the highly coded counterclerical vernacular expressions about the power of the priest, and the more aggressive anticlerical humour depicted in localised popular culture, such as CODCO's revue theatre. As knowledge of the abuses and charges became more widespread, the Inquiry began and concluded, expressions moved away from satire and into dramatic novelisations.

iv. *The Priest in Popular Fiction of Newfoundland, 1985-present*

Newfoundland's popular fiction over the past twenty-five years illustrates the effects of the inquiry into the sex abuse cases at Mount Cashel. In fiction, as in political cartoons, the forms of anticlericalism expressed are distinct from, but influenced by, the pre-existing forms of counterclericalism in Newfoundland. In particular the ubiquity of one genre of literature, the Newfoundland Catholic boy's coming-of-age story, is revealing. Often based on personal experiences and taking place in a time and place not too different from our own, these novels safely explore what it means to be Catholic. The

protagonists are typically boys, and women only figure prominently when they are mothers. The father is often a flawed character, sometimes dead, or dying, or generally useless. In the formative years, relationships with friends and the setting of the denominational school help the story progress. Ultimately, the child rejects his religious upbringing, which often requires leaving the town and moving to St. John's, or leaving Newfoundland altogether. The novels depict counterclericalism (semi-private, personal expressions related to one's small folkgroup) but the novels themselves are examples of anticlericalism; public, aggressive commentaries with a wide transmission.

Certainly, the list of fiction books discussed in this section is not exhaustive. Firstly, fictional treatments of Newfoundland priests do pre-exist 1985, however, they do not tend to be those in the coming-of-age genre or style, but, rather, straightforward narratives in which religious figures are minor characters. Secondly, other forms of fictional writings about Newfoundland clerics certainly do exist, such as Tom Cahill's play "A documentary entertainment on the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in the colony of Newfoundland, January, 1784," (1984) but, as a fictional interpretation of a historical event, it lends little to this discussion. Neither of these kinds of treatments tends to have the same stylistic flourish and influences that the forms discussed in this section led themselves to, and neither of these styles focus on a young male character as a protagonist.

The predominance of the young male character in the novels from 1985 to present may be because it is a safe vehicle from which to ask questions about the faith. In some cultures, a male character may be able to exercise more freedom than a female; one could

draw parallels between these types of narratives and the predominance of Jack tales in Newfoundland, as both typically involve a central male character in some sort of quest within a coming-of-age situation (see Widdowson 2002). Further still, the questions of a child are usually seen as innocent and naïve, even if they point towards flaws in reason in society at large. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a boy is often put in opposition to a priest in jokes or traditional narratives, and frequently, from this position, challenges the priest (Taylor 1995:146). It may be that young boys or men on the outskirts of the community theoretically have nothing to lose, by which I mean they suffer from no loss of status as a result of a negative interaction.

Although it predates the inquiry, one of the first coming-of-age novels that gives expression to anticlericalism is *The Story of Bobby O'Malley* (1985), by Wayne Johnston. In this novel, a young Catholic boy from the fictional community of Kellies, located just outside of St. John's, tells his story of growing up in the late sixties and early seventies. Although expressly a work of fiction, *The Story of Bobby O'Malley* is also touted for its realistic interpretations and how "as a picture of its time, it is clear, true and absolutely unforgettable" (backcover). The story focuses on his deeply religious mother and his "childish" father, eventually revealing that the father's demeanour is an attempt to deal with his position in a loveless marriage to a woman who felt destined to be a nun. The novel provides a few of the signposts of counterclerical Catholics struggling with their Catholicism, from the frigid mother who tries to uphold the family's values and religion, to Bobby as he "first embraces then rejects his vigorous Catholic training" (backcover). Nuns are seldom mentioned in the book, although at a funeral one of Bobby's friends

relates that "it was best, while near the casket, not to smile, because any sign that a good time was getting underway would provoke a rosary from the nuns" (177-178).

Explicit counterclerical expressions in the book are few and minor. More interesting is the predominance of religion in day-to-day life, and the exercise of vernacular religious practises: such as consulting the priest for curative purposes and the use of holy water as a personal purifier. This depiction of the pervasive uses of religion helps to clarify the tenuous relationship between parishioners and the church and the need for counterclerical expressions as a means of coping rather than resorting to a more radical means, such as leaving the church altogether. Bobby O'Malley's priest, for example, attempts to heal Bobby's obsessive compulsive disorder, but fails.

It got so I couldn't get the phrase out of my head. It was like something going round and round, at higher and higher speed. It came into my dreams and soon I couldn't sleep. [...] Finally I broke down and told my mother what was happening. She consulted our priest, and he advised that we fight fire with fire. From now on, instead of the phrase my father taught me, I was to say the Hail Mary over and over. Whenever I heard "aggregate of microdots," I was to shout it down with "Hail Mary full of grace," and I was to keep at it until Mary won out. This, as it may have been forsen [sic], only compounded the problem, and it wasn't long before Hail Mary and microdots came together in a strange fusion of blasphemous gibberish, such as might be recited at Black Mass. (17)

When Bobby begins having nightmares, his mother, Agnes, once again consults the priest:

My mother consulted the priest, who said the hag was a kind of spiritual claustrophobia, the soul entombed, buried alive in the body. He came to the house and blessed my bed. I put on my altar outfit and carried the sceptre and holy water, while he went round and said some prayers. But despite his prayer, the dreams continued. (91)

And the priest is required to help the family prepare the house to move in, much to the annoyance of the some family members:

A Protestant family owned the house before us and, when my mother had the priest come and bless the empty rooms, my father muttered something about "chasing the heathens out with holy water." (100)

The book refers to the priests and Brothers "making men" of their young charges. Bobby suggests that his mother wanted him to be an altar boy because it would make a man out of him. And later, when he attends a particularly strict Catholic boys' school, this theme re-emerges.

The Brothers liked to tell of how, almost every day, one of their former students, often one who, during his stay at Brother Arthur Noonan High, had been much chastised and punished, came into the office to shake hands with Brother Gilmore, and to thank him, and to tell him that, many times since he had left the Barn, the lessons he learned there had stood him in good stead. Few of us thought that the Brothers were making up the story. The affection they reserved for reprobates and upstarts, the zeal with which they beat them up, the way, when strapping them, they looked them in the eye, as if to see there, awakened by the blows, the seed, the nascent moral fibre that, in time, would make them men—all this convinced us that the story was either true, or had been around so long, the Brothers could not remember making it up. (128)

Aggressive exchanges between Brothers and students in the classroom are typical of coming of these age novels.

Brudder Bill, as we called him, was by no means alone among the Brothers in endorsing a theory that boys, like horses, had need of breaking. One of the favourite games of the Brothers was Mock-Humiliation, the all-in-fun tearing down of a boy in front of his fellows. If you were singled out for Mock-Humiliation, your full co-operation was expected. Brudder Bill used MH the first day to find out if Tommy was broken:

"Stand up Bates."

"Yes Brudder."

"Are ye broken Bates?"

"Yes Brudder"

"Who broke you Bates?"

"Me mudder Brudder."

"Yer Mudder broke ye?"

"Yes Brudder."

"How'd she break ye Bates?"

"I can't remember Brudder."

"Ye can't remember Bates?"

"No Brudder"

"Born broken, were ye?"

"Yes Brudder."

"So why'd ye blame yer mudder?"

"I'm sorry Brudder."

"Sit down Bates."

"Yes Brudder." (133)

Nonsensical tirades appear throughout Newfoundland popular culture in dialogues between the priests and students, as physical and emotional abuse seems to be the main format that the fictional priests follow in "making men" out of their charges. At one point Bobby states "I was terrified of the priest" (77). He attempts to explain the priest's actions at school, and the perception of the constant physical abuse through the eyes of each family member:

The priest went about some days and swatted us like so many flies. One minute you were standing, minding your own business, doing your best

not to look at him; the next, you were reeling, head ringing, across the room, victim of a surprise attack. There was no motive, neither malicious or punitive, in any of this. It was done randomly, almost unconsciously. He might have been a doting devil, having fun with a bunch of cherubs. On his good days, most of us were punch-drunk before mass even started. Ducking was permitted, as were multiple swings on his part, but there were no time-outs. He might have his hands on your shoulders, telling you what he wanted done, and –SMACK– he was picking you up off the floor. My father said that no-one not wearing a hockey helmet should stand within ten feet of him. He didn't think it was funny, this strange impulse of the priest's, and advised that the next time he hit me I should hit him back—"One good sock in the sacred groin, and you'll hear no more from him." My mother, when I told her what the priest was doing, saw it as a kind of endearing nervous tic which, if brought to his attention, might embarrass him. (78)

The Catholic Church plays a huge role in the life of Bobby's mother, and she is the defender of the faith in the house. She is a member of the Catholic Women's League and the St. Stephen's Sisters in addition to her position as a teacher in a Catholic school board and the Assistant Director of Curriculum and Texts. It is mentioned that she felt herself destined for the nunnery before she got married, and this may influence the family's decision to encourage Bobby to go into the priesthood (a decision which eventually causes him to flee).

Bobby's father, Teddy, is quite critical of the priests: "What was confession, he wondered, but a way of starting over, a way of disposing of the past – what was a priest but a kind of garbage collector? My mother winced when he said this" (165). Bobby is also critical and aware, but at the same time being groomed for the priesthood of which he wants no part. He also knows the power the priest wields: "Our priest was of the old school. He asked nothing of his congregation but absolute subservience, to him, and where those few were concerned who recognized the distinction, to God" (79). The

humour in this phrase and in the book overall is endearing, but the real issues they bring forward and their appearance in the explicitly public nature of popular culture are remarkable.

A few years later, in 1989, Patrick O'Flaherty's novel *Priest of God* appeared. Set in the actual community of Long Cove, Trinity Bay, the central character is Father John Ryan, a troubled priest who has had problems in his own past, leading to his newly appointed charge in a small community. This novel straddles genre lines, similar in some ways to the priest character in Graham Green's *The Power and the Glory* (1940) who is conflicted and atones for their flaws on a path to redemption, although *Priest of God* is ostensibly a mystery novel. In many ways, this novel is quite similar to Linden MacIntyre's recent work *The Bishop's Man* (2009), a novel set in Cape Breton. Both books present a flawed priest; because of the context and the storyline, the reader assumes the character has committed an act of sexual deviancy. In both cases, the priest is revealed to be free from that particular crime, but each judges himself more harshly for other sins. In both books, there is a sexual predator that happens to enjoy an elevated status in the community.

There are counterclerical comments throughout *Priest of God*, many from the parishioners; but the author also presents Ryan as a flawed or, rather, human priest. There are a variety of sexual overtones in the book, both those from the priest himself and those from people in the community. Upon meeting a member of the congregation, Ryan muses "She was in her late twenties or early thirties, a brunette of a kind he used to chase, somewhat half-heartedly and without much success, in university: distant, soft-spoken,

gorgeous. There was no ring on her finger, he noticed" (13). He also mentions comments from his parishioners: "[He] sometimes thought he picked up sly digs at priests under the banter. 'Everybody's at it these days, aren't they, Father?' Or: 'I knows the story is about old foolishness, Father, but the men in it is with women and that's not so bad now, is it?'" (17), suggestive of the priest's sexuality (with the double entendre "at it") and possible homosexuality.

Although somewhat latent at first, the majority of the novel deals with the tension between the local merchant and his son (Cyril and Junior Squires) and the priest as they vie for power. Like most Newfoundland novels that deal with priests in the post-Christian Brothers scandal, there is a mention of the Inquiry. "They were sitting in the den [...] looking at the evening news on TV. Another priest in St. John's had been charged with gross indecency with juveniles, and there were rumours of more charges being laid against Christian Brothers at a St. John's orphanage" (129). The novel as a whole plays with the stereotypes surrounding public ideas about priests; the priest is implicated with a troubled past (which the reader is left to imagine), however, it deals with his reluctance to break confession, a resulting infanticide and his subsequent mental breakdown when faced with the consequences of his decision. In comparison, the merchant's son, Junior, has been molesting young boys and, with the aid of his father, has committed murder to protect himself from charges (195-203). The novel concludes with the priest leaving the priesthood and going to the mainland. Although dealing with an adult priest, it bears many resemblances to Newfoundland coming-of-age literature.

Ed Kavanagh's *The Confessions of Nipper Mooney* (2001), like many books

which focus on the life of young Catholics, deals at length with the main character's experiences in the religious school system. Nicolas Mooney, nicknamed "Nipper," is brought up in the 1950s and 60s in a fictional farming community named Kildura. Most of the twenty-five counterclerical incidents in the novel are linked to Nipper's education. As usual, there is an incident surrounding the first communion. In this case, when the priest drops the host, he swears, and leads Nipper to believe he did something inappropriate (79).

Eventually, Nipper is sent to nearby St. John's in order to attend "All Angels" school and be taught by the Christian Brothers. This may be one of the first post-inquiry fictional books to deal with the Christian Brothers as characters. Because of the time frame, the reader has the benefit of hindsight with which to read this book suspiciously, always looking for the exposure of a malevolent or deviant priest. The book does not disappoint, as the second half focuses on Nipper's time at All Angels and the physical and emotional abuse that the Brothers heap out on the students.

A final variation on the coming-of-age novel, Leo Furey's *The Long Run* (2004), takes place at the Mount Kildare Orphanage, a place not entirely different from the actual Mount Cashel Orphanage. Both are homes for boys, run by Christian Brothers in the East End of St. John's. Despite a wealth of incidents which describe the actions of malevolent priests, Furey also depicts one priest, affectionately called "Rags" by the boys, who is kind and caring. The novel also contains four incidents of child sexual abuse. The boys realise that a "night walker" is visiting their dormitory once a month and visiting the same bunk. Later, in a discussion of dreams, the child who is being abused talks about being

visited in a dream by a man wearing a black dress and women's undergarments who climbs into bed with him. The identity of this priest is never explicitly stated, however, it is most probably Brother McCann, one of the more violent priests. Brother McCann is, by far, the most negative depiction of a priest in the novel. He routinely straps the boys and is fanatical about various aspects of religion. He quizzes the boys mercilessly on random items about Newfoundland geography. He also encourages the children to shun each other. In one of the more graphic descriptions in the book, he decides to teach sumo wrestling at the orphanage and uses this as an opportunity to wrestle with the boys, during which he rubs himself against them for his own sexual pleasure. Later in the book, a Brother Superior visits the orphanage with his assistant. The assistant attempts to manipulate the boys into performing oral sex on him, which he calls "an act of transference," stating that once they do so they will receive his semen and become men, thus having the ability to produce their own semen (293-296).

There are a few violent or psychological incidents which bear mentioning; one chapter begins with Brother Walsh lecturing the boys about how many squares of toilet paper to use after a bowel movement, demanding that no more than four squares per sitting be used (88-91). There are times during Brother McCann's "monologues and dialogues," where the boys are terrified to be called on because it seems there are no right answers to the questions. There are various moments when Aiden Carmichael, the book's narrator and chief protagonist, talks of the similarities between the lives of the orphans and those in prisoner-of-war camps. There are few good times, and those that appear are mainly due to the support of friends rather than anything to do with the priests or

Brothers, although one boy mysteriously receives a new hockey stick and puck after telling several Brothers about praying for the items. Day-to-day life is painful and rigorous, with strappings and slaps coming from every direction for any small misdeed.

These illustrations from Newfoundland popular literature, in the form of coming-of-age novels, use marginalised Catholic youth as their chief protagonist; they introduce and reify counterclericalism as a dominant theme in Newfoundland literature. The works problematise the position of the priest as is evidenced in the folk culture (as examined in an earlier section) but they absolutise it and project it as ubiquitous. This literature is also reductionist; priests are primarily presented negatively. The works themselves—public expressions against fictional priests—are anticlerical, although they depict counterclerical parishioners on a local, small group dynamic scale.

A variety of popular culture depictions of anticlericalism and vernacular expressions of counterclericalism have emerged since the Hughes Inquiry, however, the majority of these have had verbal forms. During and after the Inquiry, newspaper cartoons appeared in the popular press, marking the first depiction of abuse by clergy into a visual non-fiction forum. The cartoons are artistic and political, similar to vernacular expressions about the same topic, but unlike the face-to-face interaction provided in most folklore transmission, newspaper is a “one way” medium which does not allow for debate in the same way (McLuhan 1994, see also Purseigle 2001). Editorial cartoons do typically present the thoughts of the community at large, a lay rumination of the day’s events; they can be satirical and straightforward, in this case depicting the victims as well as the accused.

v. *Mainstream Non-Fiction Expressions: Kevin Tobin's Political Cartoons, 1990s-2000s*

Kevin Tobin's political cartoons ran in *The Telegram* (the St. John's newspaper with broad distribution throughout the province), from the early 1990s through to 2000. Although Tobin's cartoons dealt with many issues, religious themes are recurrent. As may be suspected, Tobin engaged the issue of Mount Cashel and its aftermath, although in sheer numbers, those about school reform overshadow them.<sup>23</sup>

The Church's compensation of the victims of sexual abuse as a means of buying forgiveness is one issue that Tobin addresses; usually through the form of a priest asking



Figure 1: "Finally... Christian Brothers Go to Confession" (Tobin 1995:25)

<sup>23</sup> Not all of Kevin Tobin's religiously themed cartoons are discussed here; for space considerations the school reform issue (the move from religious-based to non-secular schools), which also had counterclerical sentiments, is not fully treated.

what he owes in perhaps the more shocking of his cartoons.

Tobin uses the familiar setting of the confessional in this depiction, and adds the dollar signs to the top of the confessional box in Figure 1, which followed the decision to pay damages to the victims. The priest's face is hidden in these two images; however, the



priest in Figure 2 seems more repentant.

**Figure 2:** "Let us pay..." (Tobin 2000:23)

Tobin also treats the subject sensitively when dealing with child abuse and healing, depicting Shane Earle (one the adults that came forward about the abuse) telling his inner child that "it's going to be ok" (Figure 3). In another (Figure 4), his depiction of a joyful child springing from the rubble provides a commentary; some people felt that the Mount Cashel orphanage building itself was a horrible reminder apparent in letters to the

editor such as “Mount Cashel should be burned” (C.D. Macdonald 1999). It was closed in 1990 (CBC 1989) and subsequently a monument, a grocery store and suburban housing estate were built in its place. In casual conversation many have expressed to me that they still do not like frequenting this grocery store because of its location and the negative



connotations it has.

**Figure 3: “It’s going to be OK” (Tobin 1995:11)**

Despite their politically-charged content, the newspaper cartoons were widely published and distributed throughout the province, illustrating the acceptance of these expressions in the mainstream at this time. By the time of the printing of Kevin Tobin’s cartoons in the 1990s, anticlericalism was frequently found in regional publications.

Anticlericalism was not underground, nor was it revolutionary. It was indeed a mainstream “tradition of belief” (Hufford 1982; Riegelhaupt 1984).



Figure 4: Mount Cashel (Tobin 1997:4)

Less mainstream publications also used priest characters as fodder. In Figure 5, a cartoon from *Outlook*, the newsletter of Newfoundland Gays & Lesbians for Equality, a homosexual priest couple is depicted questioning the Vatican but also somewhat naïvely expressing their understanding of where they stand in the Church, while a more aggressive depiction of a priest is found in Figure 6, from the Memorial University of Newfoundland student newspaper.



Figure 5: "The Vatican says that homosexuality is wrong" (*Outlook* 1996)



Figure 6: "Have you been touched by Jesus my son?" (*Burntside* 2004:21)

Much the way fools or small boys traditionally challenge the priest in jokes and folktales

(*The Types of the Folktale* 1832A\*-1832K\*; Glassie 1985:73; Thomas 1993:266), this

young male university student challenges a priest with allegations of sexual impropriety.

vi. *Conclusion*

Newfoundlanders are aware of the issues surrounding priests and anticlericalism has replaced previous forms of private counterclericalism. The readiness to talk about the shortfalls of priests may be a result of its thorough discussion in popular culture, but that is difficult to ascertain. Certainly, some Newfoundlanders are anticlerical. And that should not be a surprise. If one were to go by only the examples given here, in the current climate, anticlericalism may appear to be more acceptable than clericalism. All has been exposed and laid bare in Newfoundland: people are aware of what happened at Mount Cashel and in other parishes throughout the province. While this provides rich subject matter for analysis the emotional cost of the situation and the continual affect of the outcome on victims of priests' abuse makes it a heart-wrenching state of affairs. Prior to anticlericalism appearing as a dominant theme in popular culture, counterclericalism was found in vernacular culture. This took many forms from radio call-in shows and newspapers to public sessions that allowed space for community commentary.

Various types of beliefs about priests exist in the folklore of Newfoundland as documented by the archival holdings and a reanalysis of Widdowson's *If You Don't Be Good* (1977). Although collection started in the 1960s, based on the age of informants, we could probably date the expressions as early as the 1950s. The Irish influence can be seen in some of the legends, although many seem as though they may be variants indigenous to Newfoundland. As one moves from legends which present the priest in the

role of a defender of the faith, or as having supernatural healing powers, to jokes and anecdotes in which he is more human (in all senses of the word), the priest's position is increasingly more ambiguous. Finally, the use of the priest as a frightening figure – someone more sinister, someone violent, someone with supernatural abilities used for ill – betrays his even greater ambiguity within the Newfoundland worldview.

More public manifestations of Newfoundland forms of counterclericalism entered the popular sphere in the revue theatre of CODCO, but anticlericalism secured a spot in the mainstream worldview after charges were laid against Fr. James Hickey and the Hughes Inquiry into the alleged cover-up of sexual misconduct of priests at Mount Cashel began. Counterclerical attitudes in the population clearly predate the incidents of abuse; the first RCMP inquiry into the allegations at Mount Cashel took place in 1975, and comments rise in satire shortly thereafter. Counterclericalism as a private expression became a popular mainstream expression, changing genres along the way to those more suited for public forums. Sentiments in the private domain (within families or folkgroups) expressed about the shortcomings of a priest, or anecdotes which show ambivalence, are counterclerical expressions. These expressions are meant as a way to deal with day-to-day interactions over which the parishioners have little control, and often serve as a coded means to deal with frustrations.

When these coded means are used as a way to instruct children and others about dangerous situations, they can fall short of their intention for example, the joke about the child who degrades himself (somewhat willingly) for the promise of a pop and a bag of chips, items that could readily be provided by a family with sufficient means, or one that

took efforts in buying treats for their children, rather than being patronized by others providing for their unwanted or unprovided for children. Although it may seem implausible that legend has a place in this horrific event, the depiction of the priests' power in folk narrative may help to shed some light on the length of time it took for the victims to come forward and the effort that was made by local agencies to ignore the allegations of abuse until the Hughes Inquiry took place in 1989 (Hughes 253). In the present day, in the wake of the inquiry into child abuse at the Mount Cashel Orphanage at the hands of priests, the legends about priests have undoubtedly changed as a result.

I argue that items such as the Fr. Hickey Joke Cycle are not intended by any stretch of the imagination to blame the victim. Rather, these jokes critique the untellability faced by male victims of child sexual abuse and a culture that could produce a child naïve enough to believe the priests depicted within the jokes. Within the narrative of the joke, they also criticize a culture that has children desperate enough to believe the priests.

Even today, Atlantic Canadians (and others) code their warnings, telling their children not to "take candy from strangers" despite the fact that children are much more often molested by acquaintances rather than strangers, and pedophiles rarely if ever use candy as a luring mechanism. The idea that Newfoundlanders whom have been victimised are "victims of [their] our own heritage" (Harris 1990:19) is unsettling. To me, this is the strongest argument for the exploration of counter narratives; they are undoubtedly coded critiques of power dynamics gone awry. To hear an expression and do nothing, or to assume that the narrative is representative of the exact situation which it makes explicit is problematic. Teachers, parents, police and others who are meant to

watch over children should be aware of these paradoxes. Conversely, applications of this insight should be attempted in other settings. When a large body of folklore exists about a person, their role, or their habits, a community could re-examine its content and context as a potential source of a coded effort to share untellable narratives.

Based on the material surveyed in this chapter, I have argued that counterclericalism is transmitted privately, informally, and within small groups, while anticlericalism is transmitted publicly, formally, and to larger groups. Genres for the transmission of counterclerical materials include personal experience narrative, anecdotes, minor genres and jokes, while genres for the transmission of anticlericalism include personal experience narrative, anecdotes, minor genres and jokes *mediated by popular culture*. Counterclericalism is a "slow burn": it may exist for decades and never change format, although it is usually indicative of extensive problems. Anticlericalism, however, is a "flash fire": it is typically reactive and often revolutionary. Counterclericalism may be the widely held "tradition of belief" of a community, however, due to its intensity, anticlericalism cannot be the sustained "tradition of belief" of a community; it typically creates pressure which must produce action (in this case, the Hughes Inquiry and the dismantling of the denominational school system). Counterclerical community expressions determine consensus, are coded and may function as warnings, however, anticlerical expressions are not typically concerned with consensus, because they are necessarily reactive, and therefore, their forms may take a more aggressive and less coded format, and the places they may be told may not have as many sanctions as areas for tellability of counterclerical narratives.

Chapter Three builds on this argument in its examination of a counterclerical legend attached to a specific priest in rural Cape Breton. I look at the use of the narrative for consensus building and providing cultural commentary: this allows us to examine one legend which has reappeared in a variety of sources and become cultural shorthand for concern about power dynamics and loss of culture. Working within the premise that counterclericalism can be a "tradition of belief," I show that these narratives have existed over one hundred years, yet are still functional in modern tellings. Using the manifestations of the legends I show the cultural impact of this priest as it maintained in the tradition today. This legend and the communal approach provides different yet complementary material, which allows for further exploration of the themes and functions of counterclericalism in Atlantic Canada.

### III. THE FIDDLE BURNING PRIEST OF MABOU: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL GENOCIDE<sup>24</sup>

I moved to Sydney, Cape Breton, in December 2005. After my move I found myself once again submerged in a new community with a daily dose of new interactions, and I quickly had the need to encapsulate the gist of my work in as short a sentence as humanly possible and in a form that implied no value judgment (unlike the term anticlericalism or counterclericalism). I simply told people that my thesis topic was on the role of the priest in Atlantic Canada. Time and again I was presented with one kernel narrative: "We had a priest here that burned our fiddles." My previous research into campus folklore taught me never to ignore the story the participants want to share, regardless of the direction it takes the larger project, so I began to ask about the narrative and seek more information.<sup>25</sup> It soon became clear to me that locals wanted to tell the story of this priest, had told it before, and had told it so often that, for them, it needed little contextualizing. The narrative's active circulation led me to focus primarily on the *named* priest in this chapter. As we will see throughout, the structure and details in narratives about priests tend to vary according to folklore genre, in the instance of this historical legend, it is often told as a legend report with few details, but is attached to a

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<sup>24</sup> The term "cultural genocide" may seem heavy-handed, but I am convinced that the reader will understand it is not used lightly as will be revealed throughout the chapter. In brief, cultural genocide is the willful destruction of the culture or heritage of a people for political or military gain.

<sup>25</sup> Initially my master's thesis (McDavid 2002) was meant to focus on a women's residence and rites and customs. When my fieldwork began the women were not as receptive to the project as I had hoped. My previous experiences in residence led them to the conclusion that most of their experience was probably familiar to me and did not bear repeating. The male residence, on the other hand, was very open to the idea of documenting their experiences, and eventually became the central focus on the work, which still allowed for the exploration of the same themes and gender issues although it had not been part of my initial plan.

specific priest. While I use motifs and variations from more general legends and folkloric forms, my primary interest lies with those expressions which detail the role and actions of one priest within a specific community, Father Kenneth MacDonald, first Pastor at Mabou, Cape Breton, from 1865 to 1894.

*i. The Legend*

The following seven legend reports about Fr. Kenneth are representative examples. The legend appears in the oral and written tradition, in academic articles, websites, vernacular publications, student papers, folksongs and educational videos.

Version A (Nilsen 1996-97:185-186)

Like Fr. Kenneth, Fr. Andrew seized all the violins belonging to his parishioners, but unlike Fr. Kenneth he did not break them into pieces – he just kept them and as a result had a house full of violins. We may note here that Fr. Andrew played the violin himself. Like Fr. Kenneth, he was against dances because of the drinking and courting that followed.

Version B (T. MacLean n.d.:4)

The first attack on the Cape Breton musical culture was by the church, specifically, Reverend Kenneth J. MacDonald a parish priest of Mabou from 1865-1894. The church at the time held that the fiddle, which is the base instrument of the Cape Breton culture, and dancing, were tools of evil. The result was an attempt to banish them. Later on the churches views changed to tolerance, then acceptance, and finally endorsement. A cynic might conclude that this has to do with the financial benefits reaped from parish picnics.

Version C (MacKinnon 1989:25)

As was the case in Presbyterian Scottish communities on occasion, these fire and brimstone clergymen attempted to stamp out the music and all the perceived debauchery that accompanied it. The best known case of this in Cape Breton occurred during the pastorate of Father Kenneth MacDonald who was parish priest of the Mabou-West Lake Ainslie parish from 1865

to 1894. In an attempt to quell the demoniacal atmosphere which he felt centered around the music in his parish, he had all the pipes and fiddles gathered up and burned (MacKinnon 1989:25).

Version D (M. Thompson 2006:8)

In the late-19th century, Father Kenneth MacDonald, a Catholic priest in Mabou, attempted to discourage fiddling because he thought it led to excessive alcohol consumption. A few fiddlers handed over their instruments to him to be tossed in the fire.

Version E (Fr. Angus Morris in MacGillivray 2006)

An old parish priest, he did confiscate the fiddles. And ah, in many cases I don't blame him. But the people were pretty smart... they had two fiddles and they always gave him the worst fiddle [chuckles].

Version F (W. Kennedy 2002: 34)

Way back before I was born there was the old priest, smashing or burning all the fiddles in Mabou. There were musicians back then who'd give him a poor fiddle to smash and keep a better one hidden. Eventually the Cape Bretoners got wiser and stood up for themselves. But what's the harm in violin music, you know? I've hear some say, "I don't want to go to heaven unless there's music there" and I guess I about agree with that, eh?

Version G (Gopher Baroque, Grant 2006)

Father McKinnon had a dream, he heard a 1000 (sic) violins.  
They sounded so obscene, calling souls to sin.  
The condemned began to dance forgot to weep and gnash their teeth.  
Their joyous trance scandalized the priest.

Chorus:

Burn ye fiddles burn, burn ye fiddles burn. (x2)

Father McKinnon's' looking for kindling,

Burn ye fiddles!

Next Sunday at the mass he gave a solemn homily,  
He said the devil craved to hear that fiddle de diddle de dee.  
To play the violin, he said was vile and coarse.  
Scraping the guts of a cat with hair from the rear of a horse.

He searched the parish wide from cell loft and spire.  
In the field behind the manse he built a ten foot (sic) fiddle pyre;

and when the pyre was lit the amattis' (sic) flared up well  
but the strads (sic) they hissed and spit, like unrepentant souls from hell!<sup>26</sup>

But as the fiddles flamed there came an impish wind,  
that filled to poor priests' lungs with essence de violin.  
The parish has been purged of tapping toe and heel,  
entirely exorcised of strathspey, jig and reel.

The priest who breathed in deadly fiddle smoke  
has etched upon his sleepless brain  
all those dreaded fiddle notes.

It becomes evident from this representative sample there is a body of lore surrounding Fr. Kenneth. Before attempting any sort of analysis, I look at the context from which it emerges and examine some biographical elements of this priest's life for further hints on why these legends are commonplace today.

ii. *A Glimpse of Cape Breton Local History*<sup>27</sup>

Cape Breton Island is part of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia: this history is complex, and the conditions surrounding its re-annexation with the mainland were unusual and are still publicly contested by a small, but vocal, minority.<sup>28</sup> Generally, it can be said that a tension does still exist between Cape Breton Island and mainland Nova Scotia. Regionalism and nationalism are alive and well in this area and are often accompanied by a sense of pride: there are many public indications such as signs which encourage residents to "Think Cape Breton First" for purchases instead of making the trip

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<sup>26</sup> The instruments indicted here are Stradivarius and Amati violins.

<sup>27</sup> Cape Breton history is a far more complex topic than what I present here, one which should include moments like the expulsion of the Acadians, the movement of the Loyalists into the area following the American Revolutionary War, and so on. This brief history is only supplied to set up the context of this Chapter and is therefore purposely sparsely detailed.

<sup>28</sup> Most recently, this has been publicly spearheaded by Mark MacNeill, the Chairman of the Cape Breton Island Provincehood Campaign.

to the shopping centres in Halifax. The Island was physically linked to mainland Nova Scotia by the construction of the Canso Causeway in 1955, but prior to that it enjoyed greater geographical autonomy. Despite its uniqueness and the ability to identify itself as a region within Nova Scotia, political judgements such as the Episcopal See's location on the mainland, in Antigonish, continue to have some long-term effects. In Cape Breton, Catholics outnumber Protestants two to one, while Protestants far outnumber Catholics on the mainland.

A discussion of the current attitudes in Cape Breton would not be complete without a thorough understanding of its settlement. Marie Thompson provides a good synopsis:

Cape Breton culture traces its origins to the Scottish Highland immigrants who began arriving in Nova Scotia in the late 1700s. After their defeat by the British at Culloden in 1745, clan chieftains lost their military power. Many became landlords and ordered villages to be cleared to facilitate livestock farming. Some of those evicted moved to crofting tenancies and worked in the kelp-gathering industry in order to pay their high rents. Before 1815 many left of their own accord to go to North America. After 1815 the kelp industries collapsed and more lands were cleared of people to make way for sheep. Thus began a major migration of highlanders, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, westward across the Atlantic to North America and beyond. The highlanders who left old Scotland to seek freedom of expression and opportunity in a New Scotland brought their bagpipes, fiddles and dance steps with them. Meanwhile, both political and religious persecution of Highland customs led to a discontinuance of many styles of music and dance in Scotland. (M. Thompson 2006:7-8)

Upon immigration to Cape Breton, many Scots worked in the coal mines in poor and dangerous conditions at subsistence wages. The Scots people underwent many challenges in establishing ownership of land, having access to Gaelic-speaking priests, and getting adequate pay for work. Like most of Atlantic Canada, small coastal towns sprang up in

Cape Breton based on fishing, farming, or access to natural resources. Mabou, located in Inverness County, Cape Breton is one such town, a coastal agrarian community which was also proximate to coalfields. Mabou was founded in 1797. The area is predominately Catholic, with a current population of approximately 1000. This is down from the late 1880s, when estimates state it as 1190, comprising 250 families (St. Mary's Parish [n.d.]: 17).

Although a small rural town, Mabou has risen to one of cultural importance in Cape Breton. It is considered the heart of Cape Breton traditional music, which, especially since the decline of industry on the east of the Island, has become increasingly commodified and intrinsically linked with tourism. Of central iconic importance in both the folk and popular manifestations of this music is the fiddle. Mabou is seen as a pastoral utopia, often providing the perfect example of rural Scots-Gaelic Cape Breton, as "This area has been called with justification the fountain-head of Cape Breton culture and music" (Hamilton 1997:354). Historically, this area is the birthplace and the stomping ground of many a "fine fiddler," to use the vernacular terminology.

### *iii. The Man*

Kenneth Joseph MacDonald was born in South River, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia on May 10, 1821.<sup>29</sup> He was educated at nearby St. Andrew's Grammar School, and went on to St. Francis Xavier College in Arichat in 1853 (the year it was founded) at the age of 32. He spent the following two years (1854-1856) at the Grand Seminary of

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<sup>29</sup> Information on Fr. Kenneth's life is taken from Rankin (1945) and A. Johnston (1971). It should be noted there are some discrepancies between the two.

Quebec, and was ordained in December of 1856. It is suggested that this swift training was due to a "scarcity of priests" (Rankin 1945:5). He was initially posted as Assistant at Arichat from January to May of 1857, after which he became the first Pastor at Ingonish and Bay St. Lawrence until September of that year. For two years he fulfilled the position of Pastor at West River/St. Joseph's (September 1857 to July 1859), and this was followed by a six-year appointment to Arisaig and Bailey's Brook (July 1859-June 1865).

MacDonald became the first Pastor of Port Hood and Mabou in 1865, and he remained in this area until his retirement in 1894. The reach of his parish changed over time. He always retained Mabou, but Port Hood dropped from his responsibilities in 1868, while West Lake Ainslie was added in 1871. During his tenure at Mabou he built the glebe house; in 1887 brought the Congregation of Notre Dame nuns, and he made preparations for a new church. He retired in 1894 at age 72 because he "was crippled" from a fall (Rankin 1945:5). He spent some time in the area but his health required him to move first to St. Francis Xavier in 1900 (which had moved from Arichat to Antigonish in 1855), and then to the town of Reserve Mines the following year. He became a resident of St. Joseph's Hospital in Glace Bay in 1902 where he remained until his death in 1910. He is buried in Sacred Heart Cemetery in Sydney.

An archival search and a perusal of local vernacular histories reveal few sources of information. Fr. Kenneth is mentioned in church histories and early accounts of the region. Most worthy of note is the article written by Fr. Duncan J. Rankin, who as a young man knew Fr. Kenneth both as his priest and as a friend and teacher of his mother, who took a year of schooling from him in preparation for obtaining her teaching license.

The eight pages he wrote about Fr. Kenneth comprise the best account of his life in full that I have had access to, and one of the first vernacular histories which include him, much less make him the focus of the discussion. Written in 1945, the piece reads in part as though it was written by a hagiographer, an apologist, and a friend.<sup>30</sup> For example:

He was so fearless in denouncing evil that badly-disposed people gave him considerable trouble and tried – as hard as their unscrupulous conscience permitted them – to undermine if not to destroy his influence. (Rankin 1945:5)

In order to more fully explore the written record, which supports and gives credence to the legends which surround him, I have quoted extensively from Rankin's work. In discussing the stories told in the home, Rankin makes reference to Bible stories, but also says:

Good dancers, singers, musicians and those who could fight well at weddings were also spoken about, and stories of the priests who labored so zealously in the parishes of Mabou, Broad Cove, Port Hood, Cheticamp and Judique also formed a part of our fireside chats. Since my mother had spent the year preparatory to obtaining a teacher's license going to school from Father Kenneth's, she was particularly fond [sic] of talking about this zealous priest. (Rankin 1945:3)

This written account of the narrativisation of priest's actions and the discussion of their heroic deeds offers some concept of the importance that oral narratives about specific individuals played at this time. As well, it should be noted that Rankin put the priest in one category, and the "Good dancers, singers, musicians and those who could fight well at weddings" in another by his use of the word "also," suggesting an opposition. This

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<sup>30</sup> Biographical works about priests in this diocese were not uncommon, and although their format and style has changed somewhat, this body of work continues. See for example a recent book about a Cape Breton priest, *The Forgotten World of R.J. MacSween: A Life*, written by a former student (Donovan 2007).

paragraph essentially forms the introduction to Rankin's account.

Rankin seems to suggest that Father Kenneth was not adequately supported by the Bishop. He notes that "one regrets that, in his old age, he could not have been given the help that would enable him to continue the work he had done with such great zeal" (1945:6). It becomes clear throughout the text that Rankin feels that Father Kenneth is one of the unsung heroes of the early priesthood in Cape Breton. That said, Rankin is painfully aware of the issues that many had with the priest and gives several examples which highlight the extent of his influence over the parishioners:

We are told that much of the farm work such as plowing, sowing, moving, harvesting, cutting and hauling the fuel for the church and glebe, was done by those who were in arrears with their dues. In so far as contributing to the support of the pastor, the church, and the school, was concerned, Father Kenneth insisted that the law of the church be carried out. (Rankin 1945:4)

In a small community with economic disadvantages, there were likely many who were in arrears with their dues and farmwork and churchwork in a small town undoubtedly became a public performance and expression of lack of ability to pay their dues.

Those who remember the years between 1890 and 1898 know that – as a general rule – the priests of the Antigonish Diocese voted on the conservative ticket, and many of them visited their parishioners at election time in order to influence them to vote for that party. Father Kenneth was one of this number. Many of the laity who honestly believed that, as Catholics, they were supposed to cast their vote as they thought proper and that not even a priest had any right to influence them in this connection regretted that their pastor, whom they admired and respected, thus interfered in politics. (Rankin 1945:7-8)

As Rankin discusses, the church had no formal stance influencing voting at this time, and there were no regulations on preaching politics from the pulpit; but the locals did understand that it was within their rights to vote as they saw fit.

It is a well known fact that – later on – Father MacDonald, like many another priest, fully realized that if he had followed the above rule [not influencing votes] his relations with the people would have been much more amicable, both pastor and parishioners would have been happier, and the memory of these years would have been much more pleasant. (Rankin 1945:8)

Rankin alludes to problems in the parish, but one must read between the lines; the implication of memory here suggests, once again, a narrativization of this among the parishioners.

Specifically, though, the main issues that Fr. Kenneth is most known for, from his placement in Mabou in 1865 to the present day (112 years after his retirement), are his feelings surrounding picnics and temperance, and the actions that resulted from this.

Father Kenneth MacDonald was one of the most earnest workers of his time in the cause of temperance. So bitterly did he regret the harm done by drinking that nothing short of total abstinence, could be regarded by him as a proper attitude towards drink. Because he found that dances, picnics and such outings lent themselves to drinking he strenuously opposed them, and those whom he found indulging in intoxicating liquors had to pay the penalty. (Rankin 1945:8)

Fr. Kenneth's distaste for picnics crippled the potential financial resources of the church. Although the legend often becomes framed as a narrative about his distaste for the music, the core of his reason against picnics and other festivities seem to be that he felt they led to drinking. At first glance, it may not be clear that the decision to prohibit this sort of gathering would have an economic outcome, but it undoubtedly did. Even his eulogizer disagrees with him on this point:

The last time I saw him before his death he again insisted that picnics were not the proper channels through which to raise money for any charitable purpose – least of all for building a church or convent. He was sorely disappointed because, just then, I was going to have a picnic in order to make funds to build a glebe house. (Rankin 1945:8)

Regardless of the lack of funding opportunities due to the priest's opposition to some modes of fundraising, he was still quite successful in other means.

Let it be said to his (own) credit as a financier that, at Mabou, he built, a carriage house, barn, glebe-house convent and he had \$9,000.00 laid by to build a church – a good standing surely – and especially in those early days when there was less money in circulation. (Rankin 1945:8)

Further, the spiritual caretaking of the parish was never in question.

Whether or not the strict discipline exercised by this earnest apostle was responsible for the prosperity and good standing of the parish we may not and can not judge, but certain it is that, during his pastorship, exceptional progress was made and, "The parish was giving a larger percentage of priests to the Sacred Ministry and more subjects to the religious life than were any of the neighbouring parishes" (Rankin 1945:8).<sup>31</sup>

After a thorough accounting of MacDonald's life, Rankin moves the pamphlet towards a close, but before concluding on how the priest's work lives on, he gives anecdotes from a man who was the young nephew of Reverend John MacNeil, the priest's friend from college and the seminary.

[The] old priest came into the hall-way and was taking off his coat when the young boy, very politely, offered to put it on the peg. However, the priest declined the offer, and told him he did not know how to hang the coat. [...] At the time of this incident the boy decided that the priest was very fussy. (Rankin 1945:9)

It becomes clear that Fr. Kenneth was a difficult and challenging man, but it is said that he expected no more from his parishioners than he did from himself. Despite the usual tone of these community histories or vernacular publications, especially religious ones on the occasion of a death, Rankin's work is quite critical:

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<sup>31</sup> No source for this quote is given in the original; however, it is possible that it comes from the priests' correspondence with his Bishop. Other quotes from the letter in which MacDonald tells the Bishop he will not give him any of his cows are in the Rankin text.

It has been said by one of Father Kenneth's parishioners that oftentimes he seemed not to be able to distinguish between the crime and the person who committed it – between the sin and the sinner. (Rankin 1945:7)

Written accounts, even those by Rankin, detail him as a strict disciplinarian and social advocate: he was against the consumption of alcohol; he disliked picnics; he would withhold an individual's religious services until accounts were paid to him in full; and he told his parishioners how to vote.

The control of musical events and the control of alcohol seem to be the starting point for community issues. A modern website devoted to the village of Mabou gives some historical account of the parish, church, and priests.

The work on the church was completed in less than two years. Over the summer of 1897, efforts were made to raise much-needed funds. One such event was the first Mabou picnic held in July of that year. It was a "gala day" in Mabou (St. Mary's Parish [n.d.]: 26).

Of note in this quote is the fact that a) it notes the first community picnic and b) it contextualizes it with the year and the need for funds. No mention of Fr. Kenneth is made at this point in the text, but the picnic takes place three years after he retired. The account of Fr. Kenneth on this website is seemingly historically accurate and straightforward, and does not delve into "gossip" or narrativize the priest. The account is more explicit in what it does not say; for example, the majority of the priests are portrayed in a more flatteringly light than Father Kenneth. In the depiction of Father Alex "Mor" MacDonald, the priest from 1835 until his death in 1865, and his decision of where to place the glebe and church, he is described as asking for their input (albeit on a false pretence).

According to a traditional story, Father Alexander "Mor" knew beforehand it would difficult for the parishioners to agree on a suitable location and he called the parishioners of Mabou together. On that certain day he informed

them that he was thinking of building a grist mill and wanted their opinion as where would be the most central site. After much discussion, the [crowd] of parishioners decided that the Oak Point Farm would be the best. Then on hearing their decision, Father Alex "Mor" kindly informed them that it would not be a grist mill he would build there, but it would be the location for the proposed church. It is said no hard feelings were felt or expressed. (St. Mary's Parish [n.d.]: 6-7)

The author also mentions how Father Alex "Mor" "was fondly known as 'Sagart Mor'"<sup>32</sup> (14). Father John Bryden (priest from 1937-1948) is "remembered for his kindly, gentle manner and he was much loved..." (39). Of course, it is difficult to infer anything from these accounts, and immediately one might draw the conclusion that little is known about the priest or that he is rarely discussed, having died one hundred years ago. This, however, is untrue: much is known about the priest, having been discussed and written about quite frequently. This community website most probably has chosen not to engage in those discussions. It seems that although the legend of his anti-fiddle activity is widespread, currently, it is usually relegated to cultural publications (musical and academic) rather than historical ones. I believe there is still some trepidation about committing this sort of critique of a priest to paper, and others doubt the historical veracity of the accounts, or at least, are unsure of the specifics of the event.

The expression of political resistance through folkloric forms provides a socially acceptable counter-hegemonic critical commentary on social issues through a culturally accepted means of communication. In specific, the local priest is a main player in localized narrative. As Kenneth Nilsen states of his fieldwork experience:

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<sup>32</sup> In Gaelic, "sagart" means priest and "mòr" is used for both "great" and "big."

When I first started collecting Scottish Gaelic material from Nova Scotians in Boston (Massachusetts) just over ten years ago, it soon became clear to me that tales about priests formed a substantial part of my informants' repertoires. In fact, in my first recording session with Donald Cameron, who was raised in a Gaelic-speaking household in Beaver Meadow, Antigonish County, on mainland Nova Scotia, nearly half of the stories I recorded involved Catholic clergymen. (Nilsen 1996-97:171)

As I have shown, priests historically have held powerful roles, especially in communities where they provided the services one would typically now associate with elected offices. They made recommendations for further education, created legal documents, and settled disputes. Naturally, a discourse must spring up to counter the dominant power, especially when the priest was in a physical minority but dominated in potency. How the priest dominated differed, no doubt, according to many variables. Father Kenneth's main tool appears to be fear. "Strictest of all, by all accounts, was Fr. Kenneth MacDonald, parish priest of Mabou" (Nilsen 1996-97:185). Citing his informant, Donald Cameron, Nilsen accounts:

DC tells the story of one Mabou man who was known to fear almost nothing. One day another man asked him, '*A Dhòmhnail, nach eil an t-eagal ort ro' sian?*' (Donald aren't you afraid of anything?) To which Dòmhnall replied, '*Tha, tha an t-eagal orm ro' dà rud: Maighstir Coinneach agus an tàirneanach!*' (Yes, I'm afraid of two things: Fr. Kenneth and thunder!) (Nilsen 1996-97:185)<sup>33</sup>

Of course, one wonders how long one could run a parish on quiet sustained fear and what it takes to create, maintain, and nurture that fear.

Other than those presented, few details exist about the priest's life, but he lives on in legendry. Kenneth Jackson noted, on the prominence of religious tales in Scotland, that

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<sup>33</sup> Translations provided in original source.

“They are very rare in published collections, yet the material in the School of Scottish Studies shows that they are by no means rare in living fact” (K. Jackson 1952:127). One hundred years after Fr. Kenneth’s death this legend can still be easily collected. Initially, this struck me as an unusual occurrence for priest narratives: for example, as I noted in the last chapter, to attempt to collect a Fr. Hickey joke in Newfoundland today as part of a larger body of jokes would not be impossible but it would be unlikely; and the personal experience narratives I have been collecting from my mother about her own priest that are the focus of the next chapter are not told by my brother and me. Historical legends and character legends exist in my home community, but in very small fragments after the person has died, especially if they have no local family with similar traits. In my experience, the sustained existence of the Fr. Kenneth legends is both folkloristically unusual and thrilling.

Why, then has this historical legend about a person persevered? One version of the legend (Version G) is a folksong, written by the Ontario folk group Gopher Baroque. They reference a “Father MacKinnon,” but in an e-mail exchange with a group member I was told explicitly that it is based on the same story (while taking some liberties, including incorporating a reported incident of Ontario Provincial Police trying to burn marijuana stores and having a slight surprise when the wind changed direction). The legend, then, as performed and reconfigured by this group, has extended to at least a national audience. It is my feeling that because the legend involves fiddlers from Mabou, and because the Mabou fiddling tradition is still very strong today, it has become part of the occupational folklore of Cape Breton fiddlers. International festivals, like Celtic

Colours, provide opportunities for sharing of tunes and narratives among local and visiting fiddlers.<sup>34</sup> As will be expanded upon in the case study in Chapter Four, there is also interplay here between traditional culture and popular culture, with the material that is currently in circulation appearing to be informed by both.

Across the legends the actions are fairly consistent.

- (1) Fr. Kenneth either confiscates/burns/hoards/banishes or breaks fiddles;
- (2) Fiddlers give them up/hide them/trick him/ or are absent from the narrative.

And a coda often appears:

- (3) The tradition lives on/several fiddlers are living proof of his failures.

Furthermore, the legend fits in with two local ideologies:

- a) Some priests are inherently flawed or promote any number of things in the name of religiosity;
- b) The musical tradition in Cape Breton can, and has, survived despite all odds.

The widespread attestation in folklore of the 'flawed priest' provides support for the first ideology and aids in the transmission of the legend. But the second ideology requires some further contextualisation.

#### *iv. The Fiddle's Cultural Resonance*

As much as the priest is predominate in all these narratives, equally so is the

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<sup>34</sup> Celtic Colours is a traditional music festival held in various venues in Cape Breton Island. Although Celtic music is the focus, performers come from all over the world and tourism increases as a result. Interactions between local and international performers rise during this event with shared performances and proximity in accommodations at performance venues leading to "after parties."

fiddle. Undoubtedly, there is the temptation and potential to draw connections between this narrative and supernatural ones about religious figures and fire<sup>35</sup>, or the devil and fiddles.<sup>36</sup> There has long been a connection between fiddlers and the devil, and fiddlers toy with these ideas, even today, with song titles such as Ashley MacIssac's "Devil in the Kitchen." But this legend has no supernatural elements, and to look at it through that lens marginalises the cultural constructions that promote the legend telling. Perhaps more closely linked is belief that the "banning of bagpipes" by Scots Presbyterians is common in the folklore of Scots people (Sparling 2000:219). The beliefs and practices of Scots Protestantism are believed to have contributed to this, but so too is a prevailing sense of a deliberate effort against Scottish nationalism. But in Cape Breton, these legends are only attributed to Fr. Kenneth. I found one example which alludes to this belief crossing denominations:

The fiddle was supposed to be the instrument of the devil. And I believe that these clergy who were, who caused so much destruction of the fiddles, they destroyed, had many many destroyed and in recent weeks I

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<sup>35</sup> See O'Sullivan (1966:240) when the priest banished the devil in a shower of fire, scorches a mountaintop (147); or for other religious figures' control over fire, see Tale Type 752A, "Christ and St. Peter in the Barn" which depicts Christ and St. Peter controlling fire to thresh oats; or "Christ and the Smith," where a Saint or Christ (depending on the version), place an old woman in the fire to rejuvenate her (D1886, E121.2). The priest is frequently in proximity to hell and the devil, see "Robber Madej" 756B where a boy goes to hell to absolve the contract for his soul that his parents made with the devil before he can become a priest (similar to 811 "The Man Promised to the Devil Becomes a Clergyman").

<sup>36</sup> In *Bluenose Ghosts*, Helen Creighton cites several Nova Scotian variations of legends about drinking and dancing and the appearance of the devil as a response to these behaviours (Creighton 1957:91-117). In my contemporary legend class I have collected several narratives about the appearance of the devil at card parties, where he frequently is credited with burning the house down as he escapes through the roof upon his discovery. The devil at the dance is a common legend in Atlantic Canada, and one I heard as a child in New Brunswick; the musicians at the dance are often noted in this legend as well. DeVos (1996: 283-286) discusses the geographic and historic spread of this legend, citing it in Brazil, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Danzig (cited as early as 1875 in this case). Other legends about the devil and musicians abound; Narváez and Everett discuss the devil and Robert Johnson in their 2003 article.

discovered that this had happened in both Catholic and Protestant areas. (quoted in MacGillivray 2006).

In Cape Breton, though, the fiddle is iconic, and there are few mentions of Fr. Kenneth collecting bagpipes as well (probably due in part to the fact that Fr. Kenneth objected to activities surrounding fiddle playing which do not take place to the same extent around bagpipe playing). Here, in Cape Breton, the fiddle stands for the "old country," for the "new country," for family, for tradition, for the working class, for hardship, for status (and lack thereof), and for counter-hegemonic power. When used decoratively the fiddle is often physically festooned with ribbons of Cape Breton tartan (in signage and when reproduced as miniature souvenirs or on display as knickknacks in public areas such as restaurants), and culturally it is enshrouded in romantic nationalism.

The fiddle is key in the promotion and maintenance of traditional music and culture in general. It has been reclaimed as a status symbol, and has become an iconographic cultural shorthand for "pure" or "honest" living. Fiddle music has been used to socialize, to deal with frustration without words, and to expel energy through energetic fiddling and dance.

The fiddle is used as a symbol in a variety of places on the Island, in a variety of forms: such as roadside signs for the Ceilidh Trail<sup>37</sup>; tourist shops and generic stores; on

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<sup>37</sup> The Nova Scotia trail system is a highly developed set of rural routes which use old highways as a means to direct tourists through less-traveled sections of the province. The various trails names evoke local culture; for example there is both a Glooscap Trail (referring to Mi'kmag narratives) and an Evangeline Trail (referring to the Acadian Expulsion 250 years ago). In "Music as a Living Tradition," Dave Mahalik defines ceilidh as "a Gaelic word that originally meant a house visit in which people gathered to talk. Later music was added and the term took on the meaning of 'house party.' Today the use of the word has been expanded further, and ceilidh can mean anything from a small house party to an outdoor concert" (Mahalik 102). For a discussion on the "scenic route" system in Quebec, see Bricault 2007.

the signage and promotional materials for musical establishments such as Strathpey Place and the Celtic Music Interpretative Centre; and in the advertisements from the Centre for Cape Breton Studies at Cape Breton University for its programs and research. The Sydney Marine Terminal is home to the "Big Fiddle," a large reproduction of a fiddle on the waterfront, which plays pre-recorded fiddle music. Several local family restaurant chains decorate with fiddles or images of them, typically wrapped with a ribbon of Cape Breton tartan and located in a place of prominence. Academic and popular DVDs and books also make use of the image of the fiddle, and a variety of books on musical traditions are published each year.

In 1972 the CBC produced and broadcast a film called *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* (MacInnis 1972). Marie Thompson has recently written a critical piece on this production (2006). Essentially, the fiddle tradition could be said to be "always going, never gone."<sup>38</sup> But for our purposes, Thompson quotes a few of the interviews which can be used to illustrate the sense of what the music means. On the difference between local music and that in Scotland:

*They left for oppression, you could say, and once they arrived in this country they got the spirit of freedom and that spirit of freedom is expressed in the music, which is not found in the music of Scotland. You have a kind of sadness or sorrowful feeling in the music as played by the violin players over there. There's more gaiety and more joy and more freedom in the music here.* (Fr. John Angus Rankin, qtd. in M. Thompson 2006:12, emphasis added)

On the fear of the loss of the tradition from the lack of young fiddlers:

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<sup>38</sup> Although this phrase is borrowed from Barbara Rieti's unrelated work *Strange Terrain: The Fairy World in Newfoundland* (1991) it seems well suited to the present argument.

I think a very big part of our lives were at stake... It's something very deep in our soul, our music.... And with our fiddle especially, I think it can express every feeling of the human heart (Fr. Eugene Morris, qtd. in M. Thompson 2006:19, emphasis added)

Others, too, produce a similar sentiment. In his contribution to a collection of essays on Cape Breton culture, musician David Mahalik, notes that:

The music lives here, as much a part of the community as any person or building. It will survive no matter what happens around it because it always has. Through religious opposition, mass migration and now, a new generation's interpretation, the music has grown stronger. (Mahalik 1996:104)<sup>39</sup>

Once again it is clear that there is a sense of pride that the music survives as well as an idea that it becomes stronger with every attempt to strike at its core. In this context, it seems that the legend may make a deeper statement than a surface reading reveals. Is it not "cultural genocide" if someone burns your means of expression?

The ideological assertion that "the musical tradition in Cape Breton can, and has, survived despite all odds" could also be interpreted as "the people of Cape Breton can, and have, survived despite all odds." There is still rhetoric among Cape Breton provincehood movements and in everyday life about the challenges of life in Cape Breton, the lack of work, and the poor conditions of the industrial work that was once available. The lack of services is also seen as a personal offence by some, as many government and health services (not to mention leisure opportunities) are centralised in the more affluent Halifax.

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<sup>39</sup> Mahalik is the founder of *What's Goin' On* (a free cultural newspaper), a founding member of the House of Rock (a collective of Sydney, Cape Breton area musicians who play post-industrial rock) and a member of a local band called the Tom Fun Orchestra. He has also worked for the Celtic Colours International Festival for a number of years in a variety of capacities.

The legend of the burning of the fiddles is a confluence of a variety of things: the fiddle, while present in other legends, has a local importance that is difficult to explain or imagine. The fiddle is a means of leisure and expression, and some might say there is almost a religious aspect to the music itself. While popular culture mediation such as the recent folksong created by Gopher Baroque will only add to its spread, and the local legend is becoming global, it is also changing as time goes on, from a contemporary legend, to a historical legend, to an aetiological legend. Typically, local legends that gain wider exposure do so via commercial means, and sometimes, thus, mass mediation. As well, during that process they frequently go through a "fake lore" (Dorson 1950; 1976) period. I believe that this legend is unusual in that it is an anti-hero legend, one with a local importance but with a growing notoriety.

The legend of the burning of the fiddles by a priest, then, also serves as an aetiological legend: an explanation for the perseverance, challenges and belief in Celtic music today. Diane Tye, in her discussion of local character narratives in Nova Scotia (1989), states that they frequently offer a space for discussion of issues of an individual's non-conformity to social expectations and at least a temporary resolution. Indeed, many of the retellings of Fr. Kenneth's rampage involve a coda which states that he ultimately failed through illustrations of the strength of the musical tradition in the area today. This statement of the strength of the tradition is frequently tied to an individual musician's strength and by extension to the strength of Cape Breton's people and its culture. Musicians are the specialised practitioners and embodiment of local culture who have persevered despite all odds:

The Catholic Parrish (sic) of St. Mary's has a long musical history... one of the more interesting anecdotes concerns a certain Father Kenneth MacDonald who, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century ordered all the fiddles of the parrish [sic] burned as "the instrument of the devil"... (working with Ashley MacIsaac has given me some insight into the well-intentioned father's motives)... but it is more than evident that, with a good measure of thanks to John Morris Rankin, MacDonald failed utterly. (Cohn 2000: 21)

On October 31, 1894, the very day that the notorious Fr. Kenneth MacDonald resigned as pastor of Mabou parish, Danny "Johnny Ranauld" was born. Fr. Kenneth, in his religious fanaticism, had tried to stifle the sound of the violin in Mabou. Danny, on the other hand, was to dedicate his life to the glory of Highland music. (MacGillivray 1981:8)

The priests' influence extended far and wide in the community, and Fr. Kenneth is not unique. For example, in *The Company Store: James Bryson McLachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners 1900-1925* (1984), John Mellor illustrates the role various sectors played in the battles against unionization. It is also worthy of note here that in some areas, the churches were closely aligned with the mines, and items such as church and hospital dues (keeping in mind that several hospitals were church-run) were automatically deducted from paycheques.

Through their untiring sacrifice, miners were organized into a union to demand better working conditions, but for their efforts they were vilified by the press, persecuted by the federal and provincial governments, the judiciary and the courts, the more affluent segments of Canadian society, and even the clergy. During the turbulent strikes of the 1920s, ministers of all denominations openly sided with influential coal and steel producers in Cape Breton at the expense of the starving, evicted miners, even to the extent of waving Union Jacks from their lofty pulpits as they solemnly warned their flocks of the danger of Bolshevik infiltration by godless atheists posing as union leaders. (Mellor 1984:xvii)

In his masters' thesis, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Coal Strike of 1909-1910" (1987), Ian Alexander Andrews presents several examples of the priests'

involvement in political affairs. Some comments refer to priests in general: "Cotton's *Weekly* accused the church of being "the faithful upholder of capitalism" for seeming to support the Dominion Coal Company in the dispute" (Andrews 1987:56). But Andrews notes that this was not limited to Catholic priests as "both Catholic and Protestant clergymen would take sides and openly support one side or the other" (Andrews 1987:57). Interestingly, priests threatened companies, writing letters to their owners and suggesting that they be taken seriously "because I am a priest and have influence which I can use to the great detriment of your company" (Andrews 1987:59).

Historically, though, the problematic event occurred when the militia set up machine guns on church property as part of the intimidation of striking workers. The facts of the priest's precise role were unknown, but the parishioners still reacted negatively.

The priest of the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church, Father Charles McDonald, claimed to be away at the time and innocent of authorizing the militia to use the church property. It was reported that only 15 out of 250 members showed up for mass in his church the next Sunday, and the situation became so serious that the bishop launched an inquiry into the actions by his clergy. (Andrews 1987:55)

Priests' power and control in the political realm also extended to the fishery. In her master's thesis "The Influence of Interest Groups on the Settlement of the Trawlerman's Strike in Petit de Grat in 1970" (1973), Marguerite Martha Balawyder mentions the priest's role in the continuation of the fishing industry.

Like every fishing village in Richmond County, Petit de Grat is a tightly knit community, where every member of the community is known; where the family continues to be a strong unit of society; and where the Roman Catholic parish priest is still considered both a religious leader and secular advisor. (Balawyder 1973:2)

As early as 1929 a co-operative fish processing plant was established in Petit de Grat. Initially successful, the plant fell into the hands of an inefficient management and was about to be closed. Painfully aware of the hardship such a closing would cause, the parish priest, Father A. Boudreau, decided in 1950 to invite Booth Fisheries Canadian Company to Petit de Grat. (Balawyder 1973:3)

Although contextualising the priest's power and influence as positive in this situation, one can only postulate what it would be like to be on the wrong side of such a powerful individual, or what deals were struck in order to keep industries invested in the communities. For better or ill, the Cape Breton priest is clearly powerful, with influence over parishioners in the realm of religion, politics, economics and culture. Even indifferent priests can be viewed as 'bad' religious figures, because culturally, Cape Bretoners expect advocacy, as well as social and community involvement from those in authority (an expectation often referred to by self-critical Cape Bretoners as the 'company town mentality'). A priest who only fulfills duties to a basic level would be seen negatively. Cape Bretoners seem demand exceptionalism and a willingness to commit to advocacy based on community needs from their priests.

#### v. *Conclusion*

There is clearly a power dialectic going on in the legend of Fr. Kenneth. It is part of the common pattern in vernacular expressions which challenges priests' power by juxtaposing a priest with the town drunk, a young boy, or a wise man who have little to lose by confronting the priest. Although somewhat absent in the story, the fiddler, represented by the fiddle, is the dissenting voice. The priest and the fiddler would have historically enjoyed a similar degree of power; both traveled, officiated at events such as

weddings, and had large spheres of influence. To quote Rankin again:

Good dancers, singers, musicians and those who could fight well at weddings were also spoken about, and stories of the priests who labored so zealously in the parishes of Mabou, Broad Cove, Port Hood, Cheticamp and Judique also formed a part of our fireside chats. (Rankin 1945:3)

Rankin seems to illustrate two bodies of narratives: on the one hand, those of the “dancers, singers, musicians and those who could fight well at weddings” and on the other hand, and perhaps even counter to this, “stories of the priests who labored so zealously.” One may wish to consider who the priests labored against, if not the people in the former category. Marie Thompson interviewed novice-turned-musician, John Allan Cameron: “when I was growing up, the most important people in the community were the fiddler and the priest” (M. Thompson 2003:23). There are certain similarities in this power dynamic within a small community to the situation in Newfoundland between merchant and priest, both of whom often wrestle to stake their claim in certain aspects of community life. Perhaps it is not coincidence that a recent premier of Nova Scotia, Rodney MacDonald, is a fiddler and a dancer from Mabou.

One may wonder if Fr. Kenneth actually burned their fiddles, a question for which I have no answer at this point. But it does not matter. The community feels that their fiddles were burned, and these fiddles are more than simple objects but a connection to their traditions, their past and their souls. If Fr. Kenneth did confiscate the fiddles, was he in any way justified? Thompson quotes one informant:

[There] was a barn there flat on the ground and the house was ready, too, it was old, and had an awful lean to it, but there was people living in it, there was clothes on the line. And Neil said to my father, “there must be a good fiddler live there, Dan” he said. Everything was falling down. (qtd. in M. Thompson 2003:22)

An impoverished fiddler was thought to be a good fiddler, and in many cases the life of a musician brought little pay, but much access to alcohol and other social ills, which maybe said for musicians even today. Fr. Angus Morris stated in *Highland Legacy* that “in many cases I don’t blame him” (MacGillivray 2006). Beyond the affect alcohol or a “travelling” lifestyle on the musician themselves, various communities would travel to see the performers, and courting, brawling and drinking took place, all of which were frowned upon by the Church. In a very basic way, the musicians, through example and creation of venue, were seen as being influential in the perpetuation of inappropriate social behaviours.

What does the legend mean in the present day? Today it may act as a means to discuss modern priests’ interest in the promotion of Celtic music. As Marie Thompson notes:

Indeed, many priests themselves were proficient musicians and dancers. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century local Catholic priests encouraged fiddle music and dancing at summer picnics. At Broad Cove, the local Catholic priest initiated the first Broad Cove Scottish Concert in 1956, an afternoon of Gaelic singing, fiddling, bagpiping, step dancing and Highland dancing on the first Sunday in August. (M. Thompson 2006:8)

But it may be a means to critique that involvement, for example, it gives way to this discussion of Fr. Kenneth himself:

He was not inconsistent but it is remarkable that, on the one hand Fr. MacDonald attacked fiddle playing and the ceilidh because they were associated with stills but presided over mass that used local violins in church. (Gibson 1998:203)

But others such as Glenn Graham note that, “The Catholic clergy were early to recognize the important role of music and dancing in maintaining morale in a depressed economy”

(Graham 2006:57).

Catholicism in Mabou thrives today, but the clergy are still suspicious of the people. During a recent phone conversation I had with a priest in this area, he noted, as a qualification of his own interpretation of the Fr. Kenneth narratives, his parishioners' willingness to exaggerate and spread rumour. There is still an air of distrust, and the priest noted that when he was initially posted he inquired among the older people of the parish to determine the veracity of the tale. While inconclusive, the lack of evidence caused him to suggest that Fr. Kenneth must have simply taken the fiddles and was unable to return them at later date because they had fallen apart in his basement, a slightly less romantic narrative. Although priests in the area have incorporated fiddle music into worship, or promoted traditional music concerts, critics question these priests and suspect it is for the financial aspects, while locals are particularly mindful that newcomers learn "the history" and "the music," terms which in this context connote a history of oppression, struggle and defiance.

Despite the counterclericalism in this legend, and its widespread popularity, Mabou is still largely viewed as a Catholic community with extensive involvement in the Church. The critique expressed in the legends presented in this chapter seems to be an organic way to cope with the challenges presented by interactions with someone in religious authority. The community narratives seem to provide an outlet for positive commentary about modern priests who incorporate music into Church celebrations and are involved in fiddling, bagpiping or stepdancing. Although the majority of Cape Bretoners see these priests as positive influences on Cape Breton music tradition there are

some that question the motivation, as depicted in a student paper on the topic (the aforementioned version B). This legend about the priest as a local character with villainous tendencies allows for community discussion about the nature of priests in general; the old familiar story can become a starting point for shared narratives about individual experiences and beliefs, even leading into personal experience narratives and warnings about the power of current priests.

In the next chapter I present the personal experience narratives which form my mother's repertoire of priest stories. I discuss her motivations for sharing these stories, how they help to provide insight into her individual worldview and experience, and how they open for debate family concepts of religiosity and personal lived religion. Like the stories about Fr. Kenneth, my mother's stories about nuns, brothers and priests are indicative of underlying personal concerns which have long-ranging consequences.

#### IV. THE MONSIGNOR "WAS A VERY SCARY MAN": PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

##### NARRATIVES FROM ACADIAN-NEW BRUNSWICK

This chapter is unique because personal experience narratives are an unusual form for published priest narratives, doubly so because personal experience narratives are a somewhat emergent area of study in folklore (starting with Stahl 1977). As discussed in Chapter One, the preferred form of priest narratives studied by folklorists tends to be legends or legend reports, often about priests in the distant past, frequently unknown to the teller. Beyond counterclerical sentiments, these character legends can also function as a means to communicate history (as in Chapter Three), or they can simply be as part of a larger body of narratives (many master storytellers have a few priest narratives in their repertoire as previously discussed in Chapter One).

But my mother's narratives are more personal, and explicitly outline familial conflicts with the church, personal issues with patriarchy and power, and the spiritual void which she continues to attempt to fill as a response to leaving the Catholic Church (cf. Primiano 1985). Her counterclerical narratives seem to be a counter-hegemonic discourse on the nature of power in general, rather than a comment on clerical power in particular.

Furthermore, this chapter provides an autoethnographic approach to the topic at hand, looking at my experience of religion as influenced by the experiences of my mother. My first experience encountering a priest was when I was three years old. My mother and I were visiting my aunt in the town where my mother grew up, a place somewhat foreign to me. My two male cousins, only a few years older than myself, were

already notorious for taking me all around town, standing me on milk crates at the arcade so I could play the pinball machines, filling me with orange pop and candy, and walking me so much I wore the bottoms off my jeans. On one of these monumental trips I found myself at the playground with an urge to pee that can only be created by an unwatched three-year-old guzzling orange pop. My cousins brought me to some place where they thought I could use the bathroom. A man in long black robes opened the door and my cousins told him my secret shame. He recognized them and, due to the size of the community and my staunch family resemblance, identified who I was (or rather, who my mother was). I was politely let in and allowed to use the facilities.

And that was the closest I came to a priest in my early life. I have otherwise had little interaction with priests, but have heard much from my mother. In all honesty, I have no personal opinions about priests, living or dead, even after all my research. I was not raised Catholic but my religious instruction was filtered though a lay, folk or vernacular Catholicism via my mother. In our nuclear and extended family there are long-ranging effects of counterclericalism: although my mother looks for religious meaning constantly, the rest of the family has essentially rejected this pursuit. This chapter explores my mother's search for spiritual meaning in response to her Catholic upbringing and examination of what role, if any, was played by other factors such as her Acadian background, familial and economic circumstances.

My mother was born in 1950. She was the sixth of seven children born to my grandmother. My mother's stories of growing up are overshadowed by a problematic home life. This is something that has caused intense rifts in the family, as many members

want to forget any dark patches in their upbringing while others need to discuss them in order to move on: to confront them in order to prove that they did indeed exist. My mother belongs to the latter category, a fact that has plagued her her whole life, causing conflicts with family members and leading to unavoidable emotional problems, some of which have been made manifest in physical conditions. My mother attests that my grandfather was a physically abusive and sexually predacious alcoholic, however her siblings generally refuse to discuss this possibility. There are few left in my mother's family now, although she only turned sixty this year, three of her siblings have died and neither of her parents are living.

Until the age of twelve, my mother attended religious schooling in northern New Brunswick. Around 1962 my mother left home and went to southern New Brunswick to live with her brother and his wife. She saw this as a means of escape from her home life, however, in this house as well, there were some problems as my uncle and his wife frequently argued and eventually did get divorced. The family also consisted of three children at that time (a fourth was born after she moved), and my mother frequently took care of her niece and nephews as part of her contribution to the household because she was taken in by them. She admits to feeling isolated at this time, having moved, and then having many demands on her "free time" to help with the house, therefore being unable to make friends easily. She met and began dating my father when she was quite young, I believe around fourteen. He was several years older than she was.

Approximately six years later, around 1968, they moved to with my father to Toronto and they married. Although details are sketchy, she did hold down a few jobs as

a telephone operator for message services (such as those for doctors) at that time. Shortly after her marriage she found she had an abusive husband. Believing herself to be supported and loved by his family, she was surprised when he physically beat her into submission at a family gathering and no one said anything. Once again she was forcibly removed from a community (friends and family) and made to be submissive. She was forbidden to leave the home and matchsticks would be placed against the exterior door to see if it was opened when my father was absent. She believed that her infertility was the cause of the abuse she had at the hands of my father. However, when I was born in 1975 and the abuse continued, and in some ways intensified, it was made clear that things would not change for the better. In 1976 she left and stayed with a friend. My father contacted his brother who moved in with him and assisted with my care, which is actually one of my earliest memories. Apparently I screamed non-stop for my mother for the first two days. Eventually, after negotiation, physical assaulting my mother again, and being embarrassed (or perhaps more aware of his actions) when I began to talk, he finally gave up his attempts to keep us separated. With a lack of resources and limited funds, my mother took me and returned to her family home. We lived with her father and mother for about six months. Perhaps in an attempt to emasculate herself, my mother cut her hair quite short and actively participated in the local trapper's association with my grandfather, although the association membership and trapping also functioned as a means to earn extra money. Eventually, she was given some help to set up a small home, but just up the road from my grandparent's house. Given my grandfather's tendencies, this was not a good situation for us; my mother moved away at twelve for good reason,

but did not feel that she had much of a choice but to come back. When I was three we moved to the neighbouring town, about thirty minutes away. My mother began dating a man she met in the trapper's association. They married in 1980 when I was five, my mother was thirty and my new father was thirty-five. He adopted me and I took his surname. In 1982 my brother was born. As a single parent my mother with no safe guardian for her child, my mother had "chosen" not to work, and when she remarried she moved to a rural community. Her help was a benefit to the small subsistence farm owned by my new grandparents. She did not have her drivers' license (and there were no employers in the community) so she did not return to work. The first year she was on the farm I was still at home as I had yet to begin school. Soon after that my parents bought a three bedroom mini-home which they permanently placed on the farmland adjacent to my stepfather's parent's home, and where they still reside today.

I conducted interviews for this chapter with my mother on two separate occasions, once in February 2006 when I interviewed her over the telephone and took fieldnotes, the other in November 2006, when I recorded an interview with her at my home during a visit. Other pieces of information come from my "baby books" (two scrapbooks my mother kept to record events in my life from birth to age eight or so). I asked my brother to participate but he did not wish to get involved and my father (technically, stepfather) also had little to say. My family has considered my mother's lived religion a personal issue they refuse to discuss with her. I gleaned other information from informal conversations, remembrances, and my mother's material culture expressions.

In general, a family unit can allow for the transmission of personal experience

narratives in a way that other groups do not (Boatright 1958; Brandes 1975). These personal experience narratives may be used as illustrations over a lifetime – within a selected group of family members. The audience may be limited, despite the fact that the individual may see these narratives as illustrating defining moments of their life. The previous chapters dealt with regional and community expressions of counterclericalism. In this chapter, I move to examples of counterclericalism in one woman's repertoire of personal experience narratives, and examine how her religious upbringing, as performed in these narratives, has shaped her religious worldview. Here I draw on folklorists' significant contributions to the field of vernacular religion, particularly that of Leonard Primiano (1995). Primiano's concept of vernacular religion was very helpful when exploring the personal experience narratives and religious beliefs of my mother. The move by folklorists to "vernacular religion" reflects a larger philosophical and theoretical commitment in folklore to new approaches to the study of religion, including the experiential approach articulated by David Hufford (1989). In this chapter I follow Hufford's lead and look at the stories I collected as experiential. I reflect on them as vehicles for belief and worldview and leave aside questions about truth and validity that one might encounter in the approaches of other disciplines. Some of folklorists' disagreements about how to approach religious topics are rooted in the fact that religion is typically institutionally based and folklore is the study of individual expressions, not organizational ones. In her article "The Secularization of Religious Ethnography and Narrative Competence in a Discourse of Faith," Diane E. Goldstein illustrates the folklorist's dilemma:

As ethnographers, we describe cultural groups and practices, hopefully with an eye toward at least trying to understand notions of significance and meaning for the people we study. But, while it is true that folklorists, anthropologists, and our other ethnographically based colleagues show a concern for describing cultural behavior, our ethnographic studies of religious folklife differ from our ethnographies of children's game playing or street-corner society. In the church, at prayer meetings, at religious ceremonies, we become frightened scientists hiding behind complex theories, narrow definitions, and sometimes even older notions of an irrational-but- quaint peasantry clinging to remnants of primitive thought and behavior. We don't do this in our other ethnographic works, only in those which involve belief issues, only in those which present a threat to our own safe worldview. (1995:25)

A study about religion presented by a folklorist could be closely examined by their peers for clues about the individual's motivation.<sup>40</sup> While one of the many reasons for my inclusion of this chapter is to show my own motivation and background with regard to religion in general and Catholicism in particular, more importantly it presents my mother and her struggles to voice her counterclericalism, most of which stem from early interactions with one religious figure. However, Elaine Lawless notes in "Women's Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent," "reciprocal ethnography" often becomes autoethnography as the author exposes more of themselves and their feelings on their research, or the experience of using that approach in their work (1991). My experience has been no different, and it was challenging to keep the focus on my mother in this chapter as I oscillated between removing myself and focussing on myself, including and excluding details as I attempted to present a clear retelling of my

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<sup>40</sup> Anecdotal evidence of Christine A. Cartwright's experience in presenting material related to her PhD thesis "Charismatic Culture in St. John's, Newfoundland: A Crossdenominational Study of Religious Folklore in Three Groups," at the American Folklore Society suggests that those present challenged her, suggesting that scholarly distance was compromised by her denominational membership.

mother's life stories and how they have affected the way she negotiates her worldview and subsequent religious experience. Lawless, citing Miller, discusses "over-reading" of women's narratives, while she promotes a "gendered-overreading," addressing those things which may be deemphasized or unsaid (1991:49-50). In addressing the narrative style of women's life stories, Lawless puts forward the concept of "narrative blocks" and rejects the comparison of these forms to the structures of male autobiography, suggesting that feminist ethnography is experiential and emergent, often dealing with the unspeakable, or to use a concept more frequently used by other folklorists, "untellable" (Shuman 2005).

Using the performed autobiography of my mother, and tempering it with the private biography, I examine how my mother's early exposure to counterclericalism has affected her life and her continual search for spiritual meaning. As I age and gain my own life experience, I reflect on what her experience has taught me and what her narratives tell me.

Like the Cape Bretoners who lost their fiddles, and the children of the Mount Cashel Orphanage in the previous chapters, it seems my mother was marginalized many times over. Victimized by the Church as well as her family, her ethnicity and economic status, my mother tells narratives that grapple with issues of power. Those narratives she is willing to share are reflective of communally shared narratives and dialogues about power; rejection of the church structure and commentary about priests was common among her siblings. On the other hand, her body of narratives also reflect a deeper untellability. Power dynamics created in the home were not discussed; my mother's father

and her first husband are not the subject of conversation. Counterclerical narratives become her means of articulating feelings about power, and she has pursued new religious avenues and interpersonal relationships as an answer to her own powerlessness.

Narratives about priests become an acceptable way for my mother to discuss abuse without alluding to her family. Her rejection of the Church and quest for a new religion parallels the rejection of one nuclear family (her parents, siblings, and first husband) and her quest for a new one (children, husband, close friends). The chapter examines my mother's relationships and current beliefs and practices and how they form a complex worldview and a means for negotiating her day-to-day life. Although, like many people, my mother has left the Catholic Church for a variety of reasons, her story also allows us to examine an example of a Catholic who chose to continue to try to find spiritual meaning through alternative religious paths.

*i. The Acadian Experience*

New Brunswick's North Shore is an insular area with a poor economy, historically focussed on forestry and its subsidiary industries. Beyond its economic hardships, New Brunswick has many internal tensions due to religion, language and class, tripartite influences in which a certain membership in one denotes or connotes a place in the other. In the North, to be Catholic is generally to be French Acadian, and historically, to be economically disadvantaged. Despite its position as the only officially bilingual province, it has some tensions between the English speaking population, which is composed of Scots, Irish, British Loyalists, and indigenous Mi'kmaq, and, on the other hand the French Acadians, most of whom came to New Brunswick after the Expulsion or Grand

Dérangement of 1755.

Carl A. Brasseaux succinctly summarizes the issues surrounding the event in his article "Four Hundred Years of Acadian Life in North America":

The diaspora, known to historians as the Grand Dérangement, resulted from the Acadian refusal to become a party to the almost continuous Anglo-French imperial wars in North America during the eighteenth century. The colony of Acadia changed hands – either through conquest or diplomatic negotiations – ten times between 1604 and 1710, when the British assumed permanent control of the region and renamed it Nova Scotia. (1989:6)

There were several reasons why the Acadians were hesitant to sign oaths of allegiance. Despite a shared language, Acadians were, and are, culturally distinct from the French-Canadians of Quebec and the French overseas military presence of the eighteenth century. Both the English and the French were pressuring the Acadians to declare allegiance to them so that they could be forced into the local militia. Both sides were also wary of them inhabiting the contested land without a firm alliance with one side or the other.

Eventually, in 1755, due in part to the Acadians rejecting the new convention and preferring to honour the 1730 convention, and also due to the British's continued distrust of French-speaking subjects, the Acadians were deported from their homes. There has been extensive research done on the plight of the Acadians and their forced exodus in the Expulsion (such as Brasseaux 1987; Voorhies 1976). Many ended up in Louisiana and became what is known as the Cajun population. To a certain extent this historical event forms the myth kernel of every Acadian's story. In "Les migrations acadiennes" (1979), R.A. LeBlanc estimates that approximately seven hundred Acadians came to the Chaleur Bay area of Northern New Brunswick, the bay into which the Restigouche River flows

(115). Despite my “disconnect” with my Acadian background through the loss of both language and family ties, family legend has it that it was during this time that my maternal grandfather’s family came to Northern New Brunswick, fled to the woods, and founded the town of St. Rose.

My mother is half Acadian, but rarely talks about her background. Historically religion played a large part in the lives of Acadians, and freedom of religion was one of the key issues which made them hesitate to become English subjects when the region changed hands, as there was fear it would require a rejection of faith. Even today, in Northern New Brunswick, to be French is typically to be Catholic; to be English, Protestant. Acadians have had nuanced relationships with priests, and without delving too far into an exploration of those issues, one can easily look at some small examples. In Bill Casselman’s *Canadian Food Words: The Juicy Lore & Tasty Origins of Foods That Founded a Nation*, he makes a broad yet not unfounded generalisation:

There is a hefty dollop of anticlerical humour in all dialect of French, and le français acadien is no exception. The stranglehold that the church once held firmly about the neck of even secular affairs in small Acadian and Canadian French communities in olden days caused occasional resentment among people of the parishes, and one of the relatively innocent ways ordinary folk could get a soupçon of revenge against dictatorial priest and strap-armed teaching nuns was the sacrilegious, off-colour satire of folk names for daily things. (Casselman 1998:121)

But more specifically:

Nun’s farts are little dessert pastries that look like cinnamon rolls. [...] These wee confections are also called *bourriques de soeurs* ‘nuns’ belly buttons,’ or more politely *rondelles* ‘slices’ or *hirondelles* ‘swallows.’ Inching a little higher up the obscenity scale, one finds a doughnutlike roll made from leftover homemade bread dough called *trous de soeur* ‘nun’s holes.’ They are usually eaten with molasses – to sweeten the experience. (Casselman 1998:121)

As well, Casselman provides a phrase familiar from my own childhood, the “pope’s nose,” used to refer to the fatty tail (or behind) of a cooked bird (79-80).

The blasons populaire of the North Shore depict a general dislike of the Acadians and rurality by the English speaking population: a woodcutter’s plaid jacket is described as a “Val D’Amour sports coat,” supposedly “high fashion” in the predominately Acadian community. The Acadians are generally referred to as backward, uneducated, poor people with unusual foodways. But this is not limited to Northern New Brunswick: Brasseur states that:

Apparently because of the absence of an Acadian Defense League, critics have been completely uninhibited in casting aspersions against South Louisiana French-speakers, promulgating throughout the nation epithets that they would not use in private when referring to other American racial and cultural minorities (1989:3).

Without entering into a contest to determine which minority is the most marginalized – a Pyrrhic victory at best – it is difficult to determine the level of racism directed at Acadians in their day-to-day lives. Acadians are typically Caucasian, although they may bear traits from intermarriage with African Americans or First Nations Peoples, especially in Louisiana and the Maritime provinces, respectively. I believe that this lack of visual difference from the culture of majority may lead to the perception that ridicule directed at them is not racist; for example, “humour” directed at “rednecks” can be both scathing and in the mainstream, and is typically more culturally acceptable than those which put African Americans or East Indian groups as the butt of the joke.<sup>41</sup> The same could be said

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<sup>41</sup> See also Erin Sharpe (2007) for a discussion of one woman’s experience with being an unrecognized minority.

for the "Newfie" joke which makes fun of Canadian Newfoundlanders. This joke is all-too-popular, mainly because it is perceived by those in the mainstream as not victimizing anyone.

It is not incidental that I raise these points: my mother knows the local history, and continues to live this marginalisation today as a French Acadian married to a man of Irish and Loyalist extraction in a Protestant community which is predominately English-Scots-Irish.

*ii. Approaching the Family Context*

My maternal grandfather grew up a "poor French Catholic" like many people on the North Shore, but with the introduction of a paper mill in the town of Dalhousie, he learned English, got a well-paying job and married my grandmother, a woman of Scots extraction. Although my mother and her siblings all knew some French, there was an attempt to distance themselves from their Acadian background, as membership in that group also indicated lower status and class and, quite possibly, imposed limitations in potential life experiences.

My maternal grandmother was married twice: the first relationship bore two children, a son and a daughter. When my grandmother was widowed she married my grandfather, converting from Scots Protestantism to Roman Catholicism in the process; they had five children, one of whom died shortly after birth. All of my mother's siblings remained Catholic: they did not pursue other religions, and primarily depend upon the Church for marking rites of passage, although I do not mean to suggest that they all practice ongoing attendance.

Unfortunately, my mother spent most of her life feeling unwanted and unloved. Being the fifth of six children was difficult enough, but being the twin of the first viable biological son born to my grandfather probably created the earliest issues of concern. A child that died shortly after birth was also a son (Donald), making this one all the more precious. Added to this was how the pregnancy was not known to be twins: she was unexpected and somewhat unprovided for as her narratives bear out. During a trip home in June 2006, my mother was talking to my husband and me about the possibility of us having twins in the future. She was explicit that we should treat them both equally, recalling the family stories of her early life: "He had the crib because he was a boy; they put me in a drawer. They [family members] all used to laugh at me and say that was why I was small and that I looked funny, but I am over that now." When I responded, "Yeah, I can see that," she was able to manage a laugh, an improvement over previous conversations on the topic.

In her memory, my mother was a very small child, as photographs from that time attest: perhaps this is due to being from the second set of twins born to my grandmother in a short period of time; perhaps to being a twin in general. Although she does not describe herself as such, I perceive her as being shy and nervous: she definitely came from the generation of children expected to be seen and not heard, and my grandfather, among other things, was a strict disciplinarian. Of course, the interpretation of these family narratives, through her eyes, is very telling: in a different interpretation one could see the use of a drawer as a bed as the inevitable plan for an unexpected - and even expected - child of the time period. But the use of this in childhood teasing by her

siblings bears many scars.

My mother has many stories about her childhood, although the majority of the stories involve her Catholic education, not her abusive homelife. Going to school was likely a traumatic time for her, despite enjoying learning a great deal and, by all accounts, doing well. She was easily threatened and perhaps very sensitive compared to other children. It became clear through our conversations that my mother hoped school would become a refuge. Instead it was another source of exposure to abuse. The same could be said for Church, as it offered few opportunities, but public embarrassment and incomprehensible rules. Her narratives become tellable life stories which allow for rumination on the nature of power.

### *iii. Extended Family and Extended Catholicism*

Counterclericalism runs throughout my mother's family, and traumatic stories of religious education are quite common. As Stanley H. Brandes found in family narratives, often they are told collectively to reflect the collective position of the family, especially if it is something that the family feels it may have to clarify, because it is not a community norm (Brandes 1975). According to family narratives, in some ways, my mother's Catholic education was liberal, at least when compared to her father's.

I know that my father had a hard time with writing left handed, they used to give him the strap. And force him to write with his right hand. It was a really big thing in his generation, but not so much in ours.

My grandfather had been strapped and ridiculed for using his left hand to write, and forced to use his right, being told by the nuns that the left hand was of the devil. I'm not overly familiar with my grandfather's religious history, but he told me this when I was a

child, quite obviously because it had made a great impact on him. Perhaps not coincidentally, we have a family full of people with varying levels of ambidextrousness.

There are also several issues about the priests which arise when talking about family rites of passage. In the late seventies and early eighties, my mother and all but one of her siblings got divorces. My mother was married for the first time in a Lutheran church, and subsequently divorced. She married her second husband in a civil ceremony and converted to Protestantism a few years later. Most of her siblings have their rites of passage within the church although they do not regularly attend, and many of them have opted for skipping certain rites altogether (living common-law, for example).

Well, there were divorces in our family, like I say; we were really involved in the church when we were smaller as opposed to when we were older. And I don't think they thought about the church with regard to the divorces and the separations that went on in the family.

Divorces and conversions may have led to a wider split, and ostensibly counterclerical behaviour. In recent years, despite the necessity of having a priest say mass at weddings and funerals, the family has changed their practices in order to remain autonomous from the church. This extends to unusual practices such as unsupervised late night burials of cremated remains. I was nervous to broach this topic with my mother as I know her feelings on the precipitating event for this new ritual are complex.

J: But the priest doesn't get involved with the graveside stuff anymore in the family.

L: No.

J: 'Cause they do that themselves [laughs nervously].

L: Unhuh.

J: How long have they been doing that for, that is just recently?

L: That's just recently yeah.

The precipitating event for this family practice was when difficulties arose about burying and securing last rites for a son named Donald who had died in infancy. This is a very emotional issue which my grandparents (understandably) did not want to discuss very much. Church records, which now would be censored due to privacy laws, were opened to the immediate family in the late 1980s. It was learned that Donald was baptized by "Apostolic Indult," a term used by the Church to explain a priest other than the family priest giving sacraments. My mother's interpretation of the term was that it was related to the word "indulgences": to her, the term and the issues surrounding the baptism are suspect. Within the family in recent years there has been a general rejection of burials in the church cemetery, although services are still performed. My mother herself spent some time in her life trying to obtain death certificates and religious records in order to determine why there were issues surrounding the burial. Family narratives give different impressions, but essentially my grandmother gave birth to twins and one died. Due to a disagreement with the priest (over his fees or potentially, his attitude about their marriage or my grandfather's behaviour) it has been implied by my mother and her siblings that there was a problem with administration of last rites, and it was a challenge to have the infant buried in consecrated ground. The family has adopted some coping mechanisms to avoid the involvement of priests with family burials.

My grandfather had taken most of his grandsons trapping with him at some point. When he died, members of the family walked along his trap line – the area of the woods

where my grandfather typically set traps when hunting – scattering his ashes and collecting stones. His grandchildren placed the stones they had gathered into the emptied urn. One aunt was subsequently given the urn and she buried it at night in the family plot in the cemetery. My youngest aunt died in the early 2000s, but her ashes were reserved because her children were quite young at the time and the family was unsure what to do. My grandmother died shortly thereafter. Her and my aunt's ashes were then scattered by all my aunts and uncles and their children on a beach where the family had picnicked when they were young. Once again, the urns were passed to my aunt for a late night burial.<sup>42</sup>

Although a mass was said in these instances, and a priest was present, his presence was confined to the church ceremony, the details of which were decided upon by my mother's oldest sister. In some ways, my mother's two living sisters handle the organized religion and secular parts of rites of passage separately, but as specialized practitioners for the family. The elder sister deals with the organized religion aspects for rites of passage – talking to the priest and planning the mass – while the younger sister deals with the secular, generally planning food and decoration, and the late night burials.

My mother's family has always been overt in their counterclericalism: one sibling brought a priest doll as gag gift to a Christmas exchange: when the lucky recipient pushed down on the head of the doll, the priests' erect member "comically" escaped their

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<sup>42</sup> This practice is not influenced by economics, in recent years several family members have become fairly financially comfortable. In my grandfather's case, a subsidy due to his status as a veteran would have also contributed to funeral costs. My grandmother also had some funds in place to handle her affairs upon her death. In comparison to this choice for late-night unassisted burials, which could be considered a choice for the sake of frugality, in other rites of passage such as births and marriages, great expenses have been accrued.

vestments. My mother prefers personal experience narratives as the mode to address her attitudes towards priests and religious orders. It is to these narratives that I now turn.

*iv. A Young Girl's Experience with Catholic Education*

There are several vignettes about my mother's education in a denominational system and early religious experiences: she had a stool which she had to use in order to reach the chalk board for several years; she was made to stand in front of the class with gum stuck to her nose as a punishment for chewing; she had a teacher who would throw chalk at the students; she and friends hid a tuna sandwich in one of the teacher's classrooms; the priest stopped mass when she arrived late; and he personally visited the home for money.

Having heard many of these narratives throughout my childhood, I wondered what the folklorist in me would find. The personal experience narratives of my mother were generally either empowering or defeatist, with a few being ambivalent or ambiguous. The pluralities of the narratives are centred on abusive behaviour from the priests or Brothers. Others focus on pranks or behaviour that seemed justified or acceptable within the narrative due to this abuse. A few deal with nice Brothers or nuns, but these are undeveloped narratives, more a statement of her belief than a personal experience narrative, and a close listening to the recordings showed a lack of emotion or personal involvement in telling those anecdotes. Other items are general memories. For the sake of exploratory discussion, I have given each narrative a title. The majority of the narratives are "dis-empowering," and the empowering narratives are few and far between. Those which have a positive "voice" typically illustrate Brothers and nuns who willingly spent

time with the children and engaged them. Such is the case with two religious, described as “little” and “young”:

#### The Little Brother

There was one little Brother, he was very small, he was as like as small as the kids in the class. This was around grade 8, he was the local photographer, so he used to take a lot of pictures of the kids’ activities and stuff around the school, he got everything, he was really good that way and he was nice. [...] he was one of the nicer ones.

The school also had a pretty young nun that the children befriended so she would tell them more about nuns. My mother still remembers the awe she and her friend were in when one of them boldly asked what the Sister wore under her habit and she lifted the hem a little, showing them her shoes, hose, and the hem of her slip.

#### The Young Nun

There was one, she was a younger one (we knew her because she grew up not far from where I grew up) and she took us aside one day in the schoolyard and she lifted her skirts and she showed us her black stockings, and her extra slips, and all the layers of clothing, like, that were involved in her outfit – which was really something – it must have took them a long time to get dressed in the daytime... they wore a lot of clothes. [...] Must have been hard in the summer.

Beyond the positive aspects of these two narratives is their sympathetic nature: the “little Brother” is notable due to my mother’s own adolescent insecurity about her size, when she was frequently the smallest in her class. And the nun is another sympathetic figure for the rigour of dressing and for her potential discomfort from the warmth; her youth and suggested attractiveness is not incidental, either. Other narratives are of a personal nature and seem ambiguous, but do not really say much about my mother’s attitude.

Despite the lack of action in the narrative, or perhaps even the lack of narrative,

there are some general comments about the nuns being strict and the need to hide certain behaviours from them.

#### The Uniform

We wore a uniform, it was a gray box-pleated jumper with a white blouse and a pair of navy blue socks with flesh coloured leotards. [...] we were not allowed to come into school with a pair of slacks on, if we were girls. The nuns were very strict about that.

#### The Non-Uniform

J: Did you ever wear snow pants to get to school?

L: Yes, and then snuck in the bathroom to take them off and hide them before the nuns saw it.

J: Did you ever get caught or anything?

L: Never got caught, no.

Despite a confident retelling at this interview in November 2006, previous tellings that we will explore later in the chapter have eluded to a more traumatic set of events.

My mother did well in school and for the most part enjoyed academics despite the religious structure. And as my mother was quick to point out, the two were closely linked and there would be punishment for neglecting religious studies:

#### Being Catholic was Everything

...You had to keep up with your religious studies, you could not grade [advance to the next grade] just by having low religious studies marks. Like catechism marks, they would stop you from grading if you didn't have it. [...] if all your other marks were really up there and that one was down, well that, it didn't matter that the other ones we up, being Catholic was everything, eh, it was all important.

Oftentimes, events like the separation of the boys from the girls were not understood at the time and are still seen negatively. In fact, a lack of understanding or explanation

permeates many of the early narratives.

### They Separated Us

- L: We were together 'til grade 4 and then they separated us and we had different school yards and everything.
- J: Did you find that hard with your twin brother?
- L: Yes, I found that I missed him an awful lot *when they took* – when they separated us like that.<sup>43</sup>

For Grades One through Four she and her brother had been in the same class, and he helped her in the navigation of her day-to-day life, carrying her books, helping her put her coat on, and so on: much was lost with their separation. The day-to-day details of her life as a child continue to have a large impact on her contemporary life-history narratives.

In prior conversations my mother has mentioned that as the children had to pass the children's graveyard on their way to church from school, they would theorize that the nuns had buried their own illegitimate children there. Indeed, it seemed that among the children there was a general mistrust of the nuns' supposed lack of sexuality; that they either were promiscuous and had children out of wedlock (which they subsequently disposed of) or that they were sexually reserved and "should go get laid." Certainly, my mother was scared of the nuns and Brothers but there are also humorous narratives from this time. In fact, while there was a fear of the nuns there was also some disrespect for them, my mother and her school friends used to question the sexuality of the nuns:

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<sup>43</sup> My emphasis is used throughout this Chapter to highlight "telling" details and interesting turns of phrase in the interview process. So many of the items that my mother shared with me were short and somewhat understated that I have felt it is best to do this to highlight their importance.

### Nuns Need to Get Laid I

The nuns were all cranky... we used to say that they needed a piece<sup>44</sup>... that they needed to get laid. (Feb. 2006)

### Nuns Need to Get Laid II

The nuns were all kind of uptight and high strung. [Whispered] They [the children] said they should go get laid.

That said, entering an order might be unavoidable:

### A Future Nun

I think we were all brought up with the idea that they would like to have one of us, like they would like to have the first-born son as a priest and they'd like to have the first-born daughter as a nun. And so, like we all grew up with the possibility that might be part of our future.

Some narratives describe retaliation for an indiscretion, past or present. These items rarely address a specific reason for treating the Brother or Sister in that way. As an explanation my mother told me that "The nuns were terrifying too. The seemed to, ah, *live on the fear of others*" (Nov. 2006). But the specifics of the initiating event are not related to the listener, as shown in the narrative about one Brother:

### Brother's Hidden Sandwich

[...] they [students] slammed a tuna sandwich in a book and put it on the shelf, like by his desk. And he could smell this horrible smell and he couldn't figure out what it was [...] he was kind of, really, tough and mean. But *there wasn't a lot of nice people that taught at these schools.*

Initially I was unsure why this was, but it seemed to be used as a "distancing" mechanism. General statements were made to clarify or justify the behaviour. One might

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<sup>44</sup> "Needed a piece..." refers either to the colloquialism "piece of ass," "piece of skin," or "piece of tail," all of which are widely used in the area to denote a perspective sexual mate "he's a piece of ass," or the act of sex itself "I just got a piece of tail."

think that some of the events that initiated the behaviour are long forgotten, but, realistically, I know that the reason that they are not repeated is because they had a long-term effect on my mother. Oftentimes, I think my mother was still concerned of implicating herself in the actions depicted in the narrative: thus "they" hid a sandwich. My mother depicts herself as a bystander, or someone reporting gossip, while at other times she has insinuated that she was more heavily involved.

Although we did not get into it in the interviews, despite my various attempts, there is a separate group of narratives where she is systematically humiliated and terrified by the Brothers and Sisters, but she did not seem to want to discuss these. For instance, she was caught chewing gum and made to stand at the front of the class with it on her nose. The story of how she wet her pants when caught by a Brother wearing snow pants in the school, directly breaking the school's dress code which required girls to wear skirts, tunics or dresses, did not come up in the interview, although in the past is had been told to me frequently. Instead I received what I call a "confident retelling" which I call "The Non-Uniform." As mentioned earlier, the focus in that narrative is that she was able to break the code and never get caught.

J: Did you ever wear snow pants to get to school?

L: Yes, and then snuck in the bathroom to take them off and hide them before the nuns saw it.

J: Did you ever get caught or anything?

L: Never got caught, no.

Whether this narrative has replaced the other, whether it is a new empowering story to replace the earlier one, or whether the earlier narrative was a fixation on a small event

which has been dropped, I am unsure and did not wish to force my mother to discuss.

There are other incidents that she has previously shared that she did not mention despite my leading questions, verbal coaxing, and hints. For example, once when she was talking in class a Brother threw a piece of chalk at her and it shattered on the wall beside her head. While she does not share this narrative anymore, she does mention the one of the girl being held outside the window by the Brother, a violent narrative but one in which she is the spectator.

#### Out the Window

In high school there was some that hit the kids and that was still again a Catholic school. I remember one [a Brother] grabbing a kid by the throat and holding her right out the window because she was late for school [...] she was late for school and he just grabbed her by the throat -like her waist was on the windowsill- and he was holding her out by the throat and he was yelling at her that she was late and never be late again kind of thing. (Nov. 2006)

I believe she prefers to tell narratives where she “exacts revenge” without expanding on the cause of the embarrassment, changing them to empowering narratives which do not depict her as a victim. This also enables her to explore the event without getting into the emotionally dangerous territory of the Brothers’ and Sisters’ behaviour, what could potentially be called “compartmentalizing.” When she does tell those sorts of narratives, in which there is an abuse of power or retaliation, she tells narratives in which she is generally the spectator.

Once again, it bears mentioning that my mother was, and is, a very sensitive person, easily moved by the plight of others as though it is her own. She is typically very affected by these sorts of displays. She would willingly cause herself anguish to help

others, she is known to be very kind, and in the local vernacular, my father has accused her of being willing to “give away her arsehole and shit through her ribs,” essentially, to help others to her detriment and with no regard for herself, often to a dangerous extent.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, this environment was psychologically abusive to her.

My mother’s exposure to religion and religious figures extended beyond school. Some of her religious narratives surround her rites of passage such, such as this one discussing her confirmation at age seven, and do not explicitly mention religious figures:

#### Little Bride of Christ

Of course we were all dressed in white dresses with little white veils and we all looked like little white angels or something. [...] we had little white gloves and you were like a little bride of Christ or something.

Of course, there were multiple occasions for going to church, as the student went as part of their schooling, and mass was offered several times a week. As the narrative suggests, this was seen as both a dominating and organising feature in my mother’s life.

#### The Week of Church

But I know that *when it came to church we went to church...* the school was next to the children’s graveyard which was next to the church. And we used to walk through the children’s graveyard every Friday to go to confession so that we could go to communion on Sunday. And that was the regular thing, and then of course, we had catechism every morning.

Although specific priests are not mentioned, they are referred to:

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<sup>45</sup> For example, at the time of this writing, my mother was providing care giving services on a part-time basis for an abusive child with a variety of behavioural challenges including violent tendencies; later on in the process she had loaned money to a person who had limited employment, and most recently, she has befriended a recovering alcoholic.

### A Sin a Week

Every Friday we went to communion and confession. If you said you had nothing to confess, they would ask you "do you think you are perfect?" I realized if you had one sin they would leave you alone. I would say "I talked about someone"... or "I stole something," but you had to be careful with that one because you would be told to give it back. Then you would have to say six Hail Mary's or something... *or you would go straight to hell.*

But even home life was not necessarily a great comfort or a shelter from the Church:

### Punishment at Home

J: Did the parents ever get mad at the school for stuff like that [holding the girl] out of the window)?

L: No, no, in those days you didn't tell that stuff at home and if you did tell it you got a spanking at home 'cause the Catholic church was always right.

My mother thought the priests were all knowing, or maybe just knew too much. When she enquired about her deceased brother's baptism she was permitted to look at Church records and was surprised and angered by what she saw:

### Private Information

But I know that I got access to the Catholic Church records and actually found out a lot of private information about other people that I knew that was written right in these records. [...] They wrote down everything...

Although it was not made explicit in this context, the information she was shocked about was the record the priest kept of suspected fathers for unwed mothers' children.<sup>46</sup> These

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<sup>46</sup> When my mother accessed these records, The Freedom of Information Act and the Protection of Privacy Acts had not been created. These Acts have made it very clear that there is a specific way to gain access to Church records. In the present day, access to most Church records is typically controlled by the local priest, and individual records are copied for access, rather than the entirety of the records being supplied in response to an inquiry. In the old manner, when people had to prove age for Canada Pension, or other

narratives deal with religious figures, the Church, and priests in general. But many of her stories of being raised Catholic often highlight the fear and dread that precipitated going to church and seeing the Monsignor.

v. *"The Monsignor was a Very Scary Man"*

My mother's community had a priest with the title Monsignor, an honorific granted by the Pope which permits them to certain rights and privileges in the Church. Its similarities to the French "Mon seigneur" or "my lord" (from which it is derived) would not have been lost on the Acadian parishioners. The Monsignor made a large impression on my mother. In family retelling among her and her siblings, because my grandfather had seven children, he was required to pay more money to the church than other Catholic families with fewer children, and the priest often came around the community to collect them personally.<sup>47</sup>

Excommunication

The priest came around every year at Easter [to collect tithes]. He would give us [something small like] a picture of himself and glow in the dark prayer beads. And he said to my father "you made x amount of dollars this year, and your children didn't give enough." Daddy [her father] put him out of the house and he [the Monsignor] said he would be excommunicated. (Feb. 2006)

I asked my mother how the priest would know how much money my grandfather had

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reasons, they would often need access to the Church records and may have been able to see notations related to amounts owing the church, parentage of children, private adoptions, and so on. In my experience in an archive which held church records, it was normative to see this sort of notation in the priests' records.

<sup>47</sup> The idea of how much to give to the church varies across religions, and is not mandated by all churches. This money is meant to support the priest, the physical church and material objects in it, the local poor, and so on. Use of the collected funds can also vary from parish to parish.

made, and the answer was simple. My grandfather worked at the pulp and paper mill, and there were a variety of ways the priest could find out; from parishioners who had similar positions and reported their income to the priest, or from an “inside man” at the mill. The Monsignor had the power to find out, one way or another.<sup>48</sup>

### Tithing

You were supposed to give a certain percentage of the family income all us kids and everything all had little envelopes that you were supposed to put your money in. And I can remember them coming home one year and the Monsignor telling my father that he hadn't given enough because we were only putting a quarter in our envelopes and we should have been putting more than that. [...] I think it was like 10% of your income, and it was a small town he knew everybody's income, like he, I don't know if he knew somebody within the mill where my father worked that got him what everybody's wages were but he seemed to know what everybody's wages were. (Nov. 2006)

It is possible that my grandfather had his own issues with the Monsignor: one might suggest that he was not paying his tithes, or that the two had a personal disagreement. Although rarely explicit, the confusing circumstances regarding Donald's death and burial seem to be at the centre of the counterclerical beliefs of the family at large. Whether or not the family's interpretation of these events is correct does not matter much. What matters is that they have considered it as true and tell it as part of their biography.

The Monsignor was the most terrifying man of the cloth from my mother's perspective:

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<sup>48</sup> I have collected similar narratives informally from students in Newfoundland and Cape Breton during class discussion, referring to the coal mines.

A Big Fucking Hawk I

He'd be up in his pulpit there and he'd stop when you would walk in late [to mass]. He'd grab the pulpit and *lean forward just like a big fucking hawk*. He'd *stare and stare and narrow his eyes*... stop in the middle of mass until you sit down. Stare until everybody looks at you and you sit down. (Feb. 2006)

And in another account:

A Big Fucking Hawk II

Yes, he'd come right over the pulpit like a big hawk, there, and he'd look right down at you. He was terrifying. (Nov. 2006)

The Monsignor and the priest both seem to use the community at large (albeit in different ways) in order to control the individual parishioner. The stopping of the mass was particularly mortifying to my mother. As she has explained previously when telling this narrative, lateness was often unavoidable due to trying to get all the children ready at once. This is a painful memory for my mother, and she often mentioned that it seemed like the mass was stopped for an eternity because the Monsignor would wait until the entire family was seated. Knowing her as I do, I think the use of "just like a big fucking hawk" is particularly telling of her anger about the situation, which seems to have lingered on and perhaps even become more explicit as she is further away from the Church and more able to express her displeasure. Typically, she isn't prone to simile or metaphor, which also marks this as unusual, and her exposure to both French and English makes metaphors and turns of phrase difficult for her to relate. The emphasis on staring is also worthy of note: "He'd stare and stare and narrow his eyes," and "Stare until everybody looks at you," illustrating that he stares and encourages others to do so as well as part of a public shaming. It may not be incidental that her mother is known within the

family for giving the “double whammy,” a long, piercing stare reserved as warnings for her children and grandchildren’s indiscretions. While this may seem humorous in description, it was a source of fear as well. Staring was also meted out as public shaming in the family unit. As a shy person who can be introverted, the staring, which may be forgettable to others, is still remembered as traumatic for my mother. Of course, there is also an unspoken double bind, because there would have also been penalties for not going to Church, so that is not a viable alternative to lateness.

Although there were other priests, the Monsignor was the most memorable for a variety of reasons, one being his personality:

#### A Part of All Children’s Nightmares

- J: Can you think of, are there any priests that you remember or anything from when you were growing up, or is it mainly the Monsignor that was in the town?
- L: Well, there were other priests that were there too, but because the Monsignor had – I don’t know, *he almost had*, what do you call it, when someone has, *like a charisma?* [...] Well he was sort of like that. And he kind of was really bright and shining and he drove a great big car and the other fellows were kind of low profile compared to him.<sup>49</sup> So you never really, you knew their names, but they didn’t have the reputation and everything that he had. *He was very much a part of all children’s nightmares*. Yeah, he was a very scary man.

The fear of the priest from an almost supernatural perspective, in the children’s nightmares, is not dissimilar from Widdowson’s findings in Newfoundland (1977) as

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<sup>49</sup> The priest’s car comes up frequently in legend and personal experience narratives. In older narratives, it is frequently his horse that it discussed. In the communities in which the priest lived, these would undoubtedly be markers of conspicuous consumption and elevated status. See also page 58, footnote number 12.

discussed in Chapter Two. As he states of the perceived powers of the priest: "In addition, he is said to have the power to curse people as well as bless them, and he is able to exorcise ghosts and spirits. These attributes enhance his awesome image and emphasise the mystical distance which distinguishes him from the common man" (253).

Although my mother's narratives outline fear of the priest in specific, they also outline a general fear of the afterlife and fear of hell. She has often said that all the Monsignor would preach was "fire and brimstone."

#### Hell was so Close I

I used to think hell was so close, like the ground would open up and the Devil would take me away. (Feb. 2006)

#### Hell was so Close II

*Being brought up Catholic is not a pleasant experience.* 'Cause there is so much that they make you afraid of, the devil and you know, you think like the chute to hell is in the principal's office [She laughs]. (Nov. 2006)

The threat of hell was very real for my mother, and, living through Vatican II and the changes to key concepts in Catholicism, such participation in mass by parishioners, changes to the language of the services, and changes to Church doctrine, could not have been easy for a teenager. These comments are not dissimilar from those of Widdowson's participants, for example, the person who suggested: "If you don't behave the priest will tell God not to send you to heaven when you are dead" (St. John's, B26.4, Q67-72) (Widdowson 1977:256)

Throughout the interview process, my mother often told narratives in more simple or complex forms than I had heard previously. Generally, the narratives can be grouped into three primary types; they seem to be defeatist, or empowering, or they are

ambivalent. Themes of the narratives include abuse (what I call defeatist narratives), acceptable response to abusiveness (empowering narratives), teachings, and actions of nice persons (ambivalent narratives). Of course, there are also some miscellaneous items that bear a challenge to classification. Arguably, "abuse" and "acceptable response to abusiveness" are similar themes, but protagonists in the narratives are different. Typically, the responses to abuse build on the abuse narratives in discussion, and are presented to justify behaviour. Narratives with a certain level of ambiguity eluded classification; however, the prevalence of ambiguous narratives might be more worthy of note than the potential meanings of these narratives.

Many of these items I refer to as narratives, may in fact, be considered more statements than narratives; however, I chose not to categorize them in that way as I feel that may unintentionally prioritize their content. In fact, I feel that oftentimes those narratives that are very brief in this instance may actually have more to analyze than those that are quite explicit, the untellability of those narratives retracts them to a legend report or mere kernel (Kalcik 1975). For my mother, these narratives have been historically tales of victimization, but I feel that as she has examined other religions and engaged in therapy, they have become more empowering narratives. Pauline Greenhill uses the term "generalization narratives" (1994:34) to categorize these narratives which are similar to personal experience narratives, yet seem to be more general narratives without explicit detail. She suggests that personal experience narratives tend to describe a "specific incident" the teller remembers (34). Greenhill argues that "the generalization implies the relevance of a situation of observation beyond a single incident, where a personal

experience narrative does not" (36). Although Greenhill is discussing very different circumstances, I would argue that my mother's use of generalization narratives has a threefold function: to give her narratives higher authority by suggesting they are communally accepted statements, to remove herself from the narratives and therefore minimise risk in their telling (what I call "distancing"), and to show that the events narrativized were recurring patterns of abuse rather than specific events that would be described in personal experience narratives.

vi. *"Even when I left I was still a Catholic": Past and Present Lived Religion*

In the years following my mother's divorce, she and I lived alone and had very little involvement in organized religion. I'm not really sure when she stopped going to Catholic Church, but she was married in her husband's Lutheran church and I do know that I was not baptized as an infant in any denomination. However, she did instruct me in prayer and religious songs: most memorable was reciting "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" before bed and being sung "Away in a Manager" as a lullaby. I remember crosses, holy medals and holy pictures that were kept in shoeboxes and periodically taken out. A votive prayer candle in a red holder held a prominent place in the apartment, and at Christmas many holy carols were sung: my mother deeply missed singing in Latin. When my mother remarried, in 1980, she had a civil ceremony. My new father was not religious, but he had been raised United Baptist, a stream of Protestantism that is not dissimilar from United, and one that is not evangelical in Northern New Brunswick. His parents were church goers and I was encouraged to go to Sunday School by my new grandmother, to "meet local children." My mother did not have a problem with this, but

our nuclear family remained largely uninvolved in the church.

Then a family crisis occurred. My new father was hurt at work, his leg crushed in an industrial accident. He was whisked to a hospital four hours away after local doctors quickly determined they could do nothing. My mother went with him in the ambulance; eventually, she was told that her husband's leg would have to be amputated. My mother had lots of time alone while my father was in the hospital. She met people in the hospital who were talking to patients about religion. She prayed on her way walking back and forth to the hospital. She said she was looking for a sign that everything was going to be all right. One day during these walks she tripped on something on the sidewalk. She looked to see what she had fallen over and saw a large cross; the type she remembered from her childhood as being part of the nun's and priest's robes. She said she knew then that God had listened to her prayers and that our family would be fine.

In the meantime she began to have more talks with specific religious people that had talked to her in the hospital, and had even visited their church, a more progressive or evangelical United Baptist branch. The doctors told my parents that they had never seen anything like it; although my father's lower leg had been crushed the fragments had started to knit. His leg would not be amputated. The hospital was further shocked when his leg healed completely and he needed very little physiotherapy. My mother thought that God had used this as an opportunity to talk to us. I remember this conversion narrative being told quite often when I was a child. But during our interview my mother presented other less romantic scenarios as well for the return to church.

### It Was Quite Easy There

Well, we got back in to going to church when your father and I, when Daddy and I got married. [...] And we thought it was important, your Grandmother thought it was important for you and when Timmy came along, for him to go to church so I changed religions and became a Baptist, 'cause he was a Baptist and they were generation after generation of Baptist. [...] it was quite easy there compared to being Catholic.

For the next five years we were very active in the local church. She even taught "Mission Band" (an information/outreach class for preteens to learn about missionaries) and my parents and I were baptised in the river (my brother was too young at the time).

I think one element that was difficult for my mother in her new church was that the local minister was not that involved in his parishioner's day-to-day life. In the summer he would work his way around the community and visit most people once, or visit them in the hospital. But he was not directly involved as my mother's priests had been. She tried to forge close friendships with all the ministers that the church had in that time period, but there were a few dogmatic arguments. One minister, when forced to explain the differences between her old faith and her new faith said "Catholics worship a dying Christ." This enraged my mother, but it was apparent that the cross at the front of the church (which was not a crucifix) and the lack of emphasis on the Passion, but strong focus on the resurrection of Jesus (discussed several times a year in many Baptist churches) were puzzling to her. It was not necessarily evident to her that Protestants and Catholics, Christian sects, ministers and priests, all use similar readings but place different emphasis on that content. Those offered by the United Baptist church in this community simply did not mesh with her understanding of religion. At the same time, it offered the only viable, community sanctioned alternative to Catholicism, which was no

longer an option:

It Was Too Smothering

The Catholic Church was really controlling in New Brunswick and in Québec and we were right on the border there, so it was quite strong and I think that was why I left it because it was too smothering in those days.  
(Nov. 2006)

But there were still conflicts with the Protestant church: often internal as suggested in her comment "Even when I left the Catholic Church I was still a Catholic," but also external. I would suggest that the perceived flexibility and room for discussion within Protestant faith further complicated matters; social positioning and class could play a different role there without the supervision of a mother church; and congregational rifts which eventually lead to splits are all too common in New Brunswick Protestantism. As aforementioned, my mother dislikes conflict and uncertainty. It is my feeling that she was, and is, continually seeking a religion that provides a comforting structure but which is not judgmental or heavy-handed about what it is willing to accept.

One personal issue my mother had with Protestantism in general, and the United Baptist church in particular, was the limited available avenues for public communication of faith through objects, a frustration illustrated in a number of her comments: "I was accused of being Catholic for wanting to hang banners in the Protestant Church"; "Protestant churches have no statues; the Catholic Churches have the Stations of the Cross with the story of Jesus." In the liturgy and at other times, a significant amount of religious instruction in the United Baptist church was spent discussing idolatry and how praying to statues (such as of saints, which many Catholics pray to as part of their

religious practices) fell into this category. I think her frustration over the Baptists' rejection and criticism of material manifestations of religious belief in pat led to her leaving that church sometime in the late 1980s, and also on her more recent uses of material objects in her continual search for meaning.

At the time she left the church, my mother was suffering from an unknown illness. She was diagnosed with fibromyalgia a few years later. I do not think it is a coincidence that my father's illness spurred us into the church, and my mother's illness moved us out. Fibromyalgia is still not a widely known or accepted disease. In 2008, the first prescription medication designed solely for the treatment of fibromyalgia was marketed. Several popular books outline the myriad of potential causes and treatments. *The Fibromyalgia Handbook* gives an adequate definition:

Coined in 1976, the term *fibromyalgia* describes the basic symptoms of constant muscle pain, tenderness, fatigue, and tender points. [...] fibromyalgia causes widespread pain – in the back, neck, arms, and legs – with many tender or trigger points that are very painful when touched. Fibromyalgia – with its deep muscle pain, disturbed sleep, and feelings of depression – affects more than 10 million Americans, with 90 percent being women. There are new estimates that as many as 8 percent of *all* women are affected by fibromyalgia. This many bring some comfort to the millions of women who thought the symptoms of fatigue, aching muscles, and low-grade depression were “mental” in nature. (McIlwain and Bruce 1999. 10)

*The Fibromyalgia Handbook* outlines many common symptoms such as pain, fatigue, trigger points (sore pressure points), sleep issues, anxiety, depression/difficulty concentrating, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, restless leg syndrome, dryness in mouth/nose/eyes, etc. The exact cause of fibromyalgia is unknown, but many women have it in combination with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from domestic abuse; studies

suggest higher incidents of severe emotional, sexual, or physical abuse in fibromyalgia patients than the general population (Fibromyalgia Symptoms 2008).

The frequent comorbidity of fibromyalgia with stress-related disorders, such as chronic fatigue, posttraumatic stress disorder, irritable bowel syndrome, and depression, as well as the similarity of many CNS abnormalities, suggests at least a partial common substrate for these disorders. Despite the numerous cerebral alterations, fibromyalgia might not be a primary disorder of the brain but may be a consequence of early life stress or prolonged or severe stress, affecting brain modulatory circuitry of pain and emotions in genetically susceptible individuals. (Schweinhardt, Sauro and Bushnell 2008)

Although there are many treatment methods, typically, pain medication does not adequately ease the suffering of the individual.

My mother went to the United Baptist church looking for answers and hope when my father was ill. She looked for support from the church community when she became ill, but they did not understand her ailments. She had volunteered in the church and even run a youth group but was now unable to do so. She changed from being independent and able to help all who needed assistance to being totally dependent and unable to carry on with her support to others: it changed most of her relationships inside and outside the church. My mother's break from the United Baptist church caused her to look for new ways to construct meaning and new ways to express her beliefs.

#### *vii. Making Meaning and Communication of Faith*

In the intervening years since her departure from the United Baptist church in the late 1980s, my mother has continued to look for meaning. She became quite involved in the study of the *Urantia* book (see the 1996 publication by The *Urantia* Foundation, originally published in the 1950s), a prophetic book which has some similarities in the

way it was written to the Book of Mormon. The book was suggested to her by a very religious friend on his own quest. She researched New Age religion and past life experiences, mainly, I think, due to the encouragement from her Acupuncturist to pursue Eastern religions. She tried alternative therapies such as acupuncture, chiropraction, crystal therapy, music therapy, meditation and herbal supplements. She began using talk therapy and self-help books and workbooks to work on some of her personal problems from her childhood, her first marriage, and her debilitating illness. It was quite noticeable that during this time she began to express herself through material culture, both vernacular and popular.

It is difficult to pinpoint a set of religious beliefs that are followed by my mother. She has been exposed to and practiced a variety of religions. Beyond being brought up Catholic, married in a Protestant (Lutheran) church, and converting to the United Baptist Church during her second marriage, she has also sought out information about different religions and been exposed to religions and religious books by friends. I remember the Urantia book as being one of the foundational cornerstones of her belief for at least ten years.

In recent years she attended Anglican and Mennonite churches (at the same time) with two different friends. She has also "tried" a couple of religions that she decided "were not for her": at the insistence of friends she read the Book of Mormon and attended a Pentecostal church service. She became involved in Eastern religions through her acupuncturist, but on her own she explored new age religious movements and popular religious/self help books.

These religions all informed my mother and impacted her life, however, I could not say with any certainty that she follows one more than another. It is complicated. In “‘Desperately Seeking Sheila’: Locating Religious Privatism in American Society” (1992), Bruce A. Greer and Wade Clark Roof examine religious questions in an American national survey. Their discussion of religious privatism, which they also deem as “Sheilaism,” sheds some light on my mother’s religious beliefs. As Sheila Larson, one of the participants in Robert N. Bellah’s work *Habits of the Heart* states in outlining her beliefs:

I believe in God, I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice...just try to love yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other. (quoted in Greer and Roof 1992:346)

My mother shares many of the markers that Greer and Roof find in common with those that practice privatised religion. She lacks institutional loyalty, considered herself Protestant at times, is a baby boomer, and lives on the East Coast (although in Canada). The authors find that “Among the four age groups, the 30- to 40- year old, (mostly “baby boomers”) showed the greatest degree of privatism” (1992:350). This type of belief system is referred to as “believing without belonging,” as no membership in a church, worship with others, or communication with other like-minded individuals is necessary for observing their belief system (352).

The beliefs that my mother has fall inside and outside organised religion. She holds a variety of beliefs in her worldview at any given time, many of which contradict each other. For example, she believes in fairies/angels/spirits, herbalism, alternative

healing, auras, feminist-centered new ageism, feminism, maternal spirituality, potlatch and reciprocal potlatch, meditation, ESP, past lives, and reincarnation. It would be challenging for one organised faith or group of people to have these same beliefs. Although her belief in many of the distinct items is not unique, her worldview may possibly be unique. As Greer and Roof note:

“Sheilism,” in its many individualistic, privatistic, and voluntaristic forms, is widely prevalent in contemporary America. Sheila’s kind are found both inside and outside organised religion, among those with no religious affiliation, as well as among those who claim to be deeply spiritual such as some in the New Age movement. (Greer and Roof 1992:347)

My mother’s bricolage of created, purchased, and gifted material culture has made some things easier to talk of, and her use of religious material culture in daily life is reminiscent of Catholicism. The lack of material culture in the Protestant church was one of the differences that was the most difficult for my mother to accept. Her use of material objects to express her faith has carried on throughout her life. As mentioned, when I was a child there were some vestiges of Catholic medals, holy cards and so on, throughout our apartment. Now, away from Catholicism, she does not feel comfortable with overtly Catholic imagery. She also has a husband and two children who are not themselves religious (it is easily arguable that my mother has the most religious interest of anyone in the immediate family) and with whom she has to socially negotiate any major expressions of religiosity.

My mother’s upbringing, in a family with limited resources and several siblings demanding those resources, has resulted in a psychological need for material objects. Most of her siblings have this same desire for material objects, and there are family

disputes that have resulted. She often equates others' willingness to part with objects and give them to her as a sign of love, perhaps because she did not have a lot as a child. She is slightly prone towards hoarding. It is common for her to ask point blank for an item of jewellery, clothing, or knick-knack punctuated with the phrase, "You should give me that." I have chosen to find it rather endearing, from lack of option. Due to the number of siblings and nieces and nephews she had there have also been incidents of her prized possessions being broken or passed on by her parents before their time, items of clothing being shared, and so on. As a result I would say that material objects mean more to her than they may mean to others. Their possession is not from an acquisitive motivation; rather, they are quite sacred with implied meaning.

From an absence of other opportunity, years spent outside the work force, and both a desire and a need to stay at home and rear children in the early days, my mother keeps returning to her love of folk art, and she uses it to create objects to communicate belief. She had begun to teach herself to draw at a young age, but other skills were taught in the home and later took on an artistic slant. Although she learned to sew as a child, and sewed baby garments and formal gowns when the occasion called for it, her love was producing dolls and doll clothes. She dabbled in oil painting, although this was costly, so she favoured less expensive needlework. Most of this creativity was for her enjoyment or for the decoration of the apartment; she sold some items and produced some items upon request for payment, but never in an organized fashion. The local aesthetic calls for a variety of displays and decoration (see also Gerald Pocius's (1986; 1991) discussion of rural home decoration in Newfoundland outports for comparison). When she first

separated from my (birth) father, she brought little with her, thus there were few personal effects in her possession to add to the "hominess" of the apartment we shared, there seems to be a constant quest for additions to the aesthetics of the home, however, not necessarily to a community norm but more so to replace previously owned objects lost or taken before their time.

One could argue that these objects that my mother has made, collected, or purchased for others are communications of her faith. My mother hopes that I will pass religion on to my children and has groomed me for this from a young age. Initially, the items she gave me were more Catholic in nature, such as a guardian angel figurine who watches over a girl playing precariously on a windowsill. She gave me several crosses over my life: a gold one from my birth father, her first husband; an enamel one with matching earrings and pink roses on it; a turquoise and silver one on a black rope during my teenage heavy metal phase; and most recently a silver one she found at a costume jewellery store.

During her exploration of New Ageism and the *Urantia* book, she began to read about the levels of angels in the universe. Angels had always appealed to my mother, and by extension, so had fairies, in their twentieth-century popular culture manifestation. She liked the idea of benevolent beings that watched over people. Fairies became a way in which I and my family could comfortably communicate with my mother about her religious beliefs. Over the years her immediate family has bought her calendars, books, figurines and jewellery with fairy motifs. A fairy influence can be seen in some of her artistic items, and most recently, she began to paint a fairy mural in her bathroom. Her

husband has contributed to an extensive fairy collection which she keeps in a curio cabinet in her bedroom.

For her part, especially when it comes to me, she communicates her faith through objects more often than not. She was quite pleased a few years ago when we worked together using craft products to create a stained glass affect on some of the windows in her home, due to her affinity for the stained glass of the Roman Catholic Church. Most recently she has taken to giving me music boxes from a special collection by Avon. These music boxes depict angels. The narrative associated with the creation of the music boxes is found on a tag inside each box:

For He shall give His angels charge over you" Psalm 91:11

The Sarah's Angels are designed and created in memory of Mrs. Sarah Lee, whose angelic personality touched many lives. In June 1996, she was diagnosed with liver cancer and was given 6-12 months to live. In one of her prayer times during her illness, she saw ministering angels, and felt God's presence surrounding her. She asked God to give her more time so that she too can minister His love to other hurting and needy people. God granted Sarah's prayer and she was not taken home until January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000, at the age of 40. Angels are spiritual messengers bringing God's love and protection in many ways. God gives His angels charge over us as our guardians.

These "Sarah's Angels," music boxes, along with other items I have received from my mother over time, cause me to think that she looks to objects to communicate and negotiate her faith, especially when she feels disconnected from other religious avenues. I find it interesting that something that is an intrinsically Catholic (or at least, non-Protestant) means of worship has been reclaimed by my mother as an alternate practice, as she states: "You know when you were in school you got a star on your paper; we got a holy picture." There was a focus on giving items to communicate belief and to

acknowledge a pupil's grasp of religious tenets in the Catholic Church. Homes often had religious statues, and images in the living room or parlour, kitchen or family spaces and in bedrooms.

As Gerald Pocius states in his article "Holy Pictures and Newfoundland Houses":

Like many approaches to the study of individual items, the holy pictures found in the Newfoundland home could be examined strictly as discrete objects that follow particular patterns with regard to distribution and content. However, these images function within the specified cultural context of the home, and are one part of the visual environment that influences, and in turn is influenced by, specific behavioural codes. The content and placement of these prints can only be understood by considering them as part of a complete spatial system, whereby objects placed within certain behavioral domains are indicative of the relationships and action that take place within those spaces. (1986:138-141)

Protestants in my home community did not use religious imagery or material culture representations of their beliefs to the same extent, although it would be common to see a plaque of the Lord's Prayer or the Serenity Prayer in a kitchen or other informal space. Although she left the Catholic Church and had become Protestant, leaving that church as well and moving into New Age religious movements, she still maintained a Catholic means of incorporating her beliefs into her everyday life which was problematic for her in a small Protestant community. Becoming Protestant was not as easy as it looked, but material culture in the home, in the more private areas, such as the bathroom and bedroom, provided a positive way for my mother to express her religion to her family and to control access to it within the home, restricting its exposure to family and close friends. The material culture also provides a manifestation of her spiritual beliefs and allows for a daily awareness of them without an engagement in their discussion. The tellibility of the material culture hides the untellibility of my mother's religious quests within the family

unit.

viii. *Conclusion*

Although arguably my relationship with my husband or son should be more meaningful and central to my being, my complex relationship with my mother is probably the defining one of my life. Her relationship with me is also central to her understanding of herself, and it is probably not coincidental that we have periods of disharmony in our relationship when I go through major changes which introduce new relationships in my life or change my status, as I got married had a child, and achieved personal success outside of the realm of parental influence. I'm not sure if my relationship with her really rings out in this chapter. I was concerned about pushing her too hard throughout the interview process, but I was intent on collecting the stories she had previously told me. Initially, I had not thought to consider how these narratives fit in with her life story, and failed to interview her about that. By the time I considered doing so, her health prevented that from happening. I often feel powerless in our relationship, and, traditionally, as the child I would have a potentially lesser role in a family dynamic than a parent, but I also wield a tremendous amount of power, as do my father and brother, as my mother states, "Now I only have three major influences in my life: Daddy, you and Timmy" (Feb. 2006).

Despite the relaxed language and amount of material I received from her, there was a general mistrust at times:

Don't Laugh

- J: Did you ever think about becoming a nun or anything?
- L: Don't laugh.
- J: No, I'm not going to laugh, I was just trying to think about how to word it because I didn't want to say going into the convent because that wasn't quite what I mean.

And the times I chose not to push her make me unsure of what I missed out on, especially in the light of comments like these at the end of the interview process:

Actually a Child Molester

- J: But the Monsignor was a bit of a pain in the ass, wasn't he?
- L: The Monsignor was actually a child molester.
- J: Really?
- L: Yes he was.
- J: Oh, I didn't know that.
- L: Yes. He liked little boys and they were all scared of him.

Really, though, what most interested me was how my mother has had a problem with patriarchal institutions, how many religions fall into this pattern, and how she has tried to navigate that and find ways to cope<sup>50</sup>. She has embraced and followed many types of alternative religions in a very small town that makes swift judgments, but she has been internally compelled to do so. Like her artistic work, it has become a means of self-exploration and self-nurturing. But she has never left her upbringing behind:

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<sup>50</sup> The question of patriarchy has been addressed in most major religions by academics working with feminist theory. For further exploration of this topic, which is too large to treat here, see Wallace (2000), Noriko and Masako (2003) and Peterfeso and Maffly-Kipp (2011).

### You Are Always Afraid

Yes. [...] I'm still religious, not going to Catholic Church, going to another church, but I don't think that Catholicism really leaves you because it is taught through fear instead of through love, like they teach you that God is someone to fear instead of to love. And so you end up fearing more than anything, being a Catholic. Like *you are afraid* you are going to die without having confession, *you're afraid* you are going to go to purgatory and *you are afraid* and *you are always afraid*.

Although I explore my mother's story as one example of experiences, reactions and subsequent expressions of faith, these patterns can be found in other women's lives (Lawless 1988). In talking to women over the course of this writing, I found many others who had similar experiences and subsequent changes. The body of religious literature, the number of new religious movements in North America, and the predominance of "religious privatism" all allude to the fact that my mother is not alone. But the issues that many women have had with religious authority can lead them to follow paths of religious solitude to avoid conflict in their religious practices. Conversely, dialogues about power may allude to feelings of marginality that are untellable, but counterclerical narratives may be tellable compared to narratives of abuse in the home. Narratives about priests critique the power dynamic which all Roman Catholics are a part of, and therefore may add some protection, while narratives about parents and spouses have no collective voice, victim or enemy among community members, this communal aspect of counterclericalism is not present for other narratives.

It is important to note that, although the young male's Catholic experience is the subject of many coming-of-age stories, even in a small genre such as fiction and non-fiction of the provinces of Atlantic Canada (for example, that of Newfoundland as

discussed in Chapter Two), there are no parallel young female Catholic coming-of-age treatments in literature. In fact, there are a few pieces of literature which deal with Catholicism from a young girl's point of view, for example the fictional "stories, poems and memoirs" by various authors in *Catholic Girls* (1992) and a humorous treatment of Catholic girlhood in *Pagan Babies and Other Catholic Memories* (1982), both of which are set in North America contexts. Neither of these treats the subject in the same way as those with male characters, focussing instead on small, somewhat disjointed vignettes, much like my mother's reminiscences. To my knowledge, there are no books centered in Atlantic Canada which have female Catholic protagonists coming-of-age. Sheldon Currie has depicted female characters with Catholic backgrounds in novels such as *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum* (1994) and *Down the Coaltown Road* (2002), but they are not coming-of-age stories with one central Catholic character (and, however sensitively written, do not draw on a woman's experience).

My point here is that while men and boys may see themselves represented in literature and films, popular culture does not seem to afford the same luxury to women based on the dearth of examples. Perhaps, as Elaine Lawless suggests, this is due to the textual representation of women's narratives by the women themselves, which addresses the fact that they are fluid "narrative blocks" (1991:41-42). Indeed, focussing on the "blocks" idea, I would say that my mothers' "blocks" are representative of the issue that, for her, so many things are, from her perspective, untellable and, from the audience's perspective, almost unbelievable, or perhaps she finds her audience not wanting to hear or believe.

Religion in general and Catholicism in particular, in my mother's experience, is a male-dominated institution. Rather than a refuge from problems in the home, Church and school became the cause of more family problems and tensions as my grandfather embarrassingly argued with the Monsignor. My mother's fixation with the circumstances of her brother's baptism and burial suggest her belief that the clergy knew of her father's abusive tendencies, in some regard, yet did nothing. She focuses on the Monsignor's ability to terrify her, and also the fear she felt at Catholic school. Most of the narratives in her life have to do with fear, although, as I suggest, some have changed throughout her life to become more empowering. Other narratives have dropped from her active repertoire, or as Lawless might suggest, certain "blocks" (1991) are omitted, perhaps due to how I asked questions, what she thought I wanted, or even how she felt at the time.

My mother's whole life has been a rejection of Catholic authority, and patriarchal authority, for a variety of reasons. She talks of the fear she felt in the church, but she does not talk, in these narratives, of the fear she felt at home, or at the hands of her first husband. I think that, given the age at which she left her home community (when she was twelve), she missed the potential for being received into women's groups in the church, whether these would be informal friendship groups, or formal organisations such as the Catholic Women's League, which may have allowed for a more acceptable means of circumvention of official religion. As a twelve-year-old at her brother's home, she became a caregiver to her nieces and nephews, a situation where she again felt exploited. The lack of support for her wish to circumvent patriarchal forms of control caused a rift between her desire to continue to practice her beliefs and the necessity of community in

order to do so. Shortly after her first marriage she found she had an abusive husband, thinking she was gaining a supportive family to replace the family and community she did not feel she ever really had, she was surprised to find they would be complacent in the face of her ongoing abuse at the hands of her husband. When she eventually remarried, in her telling, she was terrified, but spurred on by the requests of a three-year-old demanding a new father. Then she found herself moved from an urban setting to a rural one where she was the only Catholic and Acadian. Although her second marriage is supportive, or perhaps, because it is, she has continued to look for ways to subvert patriarchy, ways to find and form religion, create communities of women, and in general, find her place in the world. In this second marriage she has again found herself isolated due to her partner's seasonal work which means long absences from the home where she is usually housebound due to her illness and lack of driver's license. Her rural community which is largely Protestant, and has an English speaking background rather than Acadian, is not that welcoming. She's clearly a survivor, yet there seems to be a passivity to these stories, using coding strategies such as cited by Lawless in women's abuse narratives, a means to make the untellable tellable by structuring the narrative in specific patterns and perhaps changing it to resemble more of a legend report than a personal experience narrative (Lawless 2004).

Both Catholicism and the experience of her community – the way in which she perceived both to support patriarchy, in her church and in her childhood home – caused counterclerical attitudes and beliefs which continue to affect my mother's life. I believe this, in turn, caused an intense longing for self-expression; however, the means of self-

expression available to her are limited in her day-to-day life. Expressions of counterclericalism have become intrinsic to her understanding of self, forming narrative blocks which are shared or withheld as the occasion dictates. These issues of tellability and untellability are both internally and externally imposed. Members of our immediate family suggest that rendering the narratives untellable may help her in her ongoing negotiation of her day-to-day life, accelerate the healing process and cause her to be less depressed. By suggesting they cannot listen to her stories, and creating boundaries in what they will or will not accept as personal experience narratives, they inadvertently aid in the continuing process of her marginalisation.

These counterclerical personal experience narratives are my mother's oldest body of narratives. Although the narratives have aspects of untellability, they allow for a dialogue on power which, I believe, is representative of other power issues that she has struggled with, specifically the dominance of her father and, later, her first husband. For a variety of reasons, these narratives are more difficult to discuss, so counterclerical narratives allow for a dialogue on power which touch on some of the problems with the family dynamic but do not open more complicated relationships for discussion. Although counterclerical narratives may seem marginal in her repertoire – they are rarely shared publicly (outside of the home), unlike some of her other narratives – they are foundational in that they explain her present lifestyle and constant search for meaning and acceptance. Her desire to find a religious community is a problem which she continues to struggle with and which results in her need to practice religion outside of organized structures. The way she negotiates religion and her day-to-day life and even how she decorates her

home and gives gifts to others all exhibit her counterclerical worldview and her quest for something to replace it.

My mother's counterclericalism eventually caused her to leave the Church, but as she says, she's "still Catholic." Despite being Catholic she has been separated from her means of religious observance, and has developed an interpretation of religion which has changed over time, but many of her practices can be interpreted as related to Catholicism. Although she is progressive in her approach to religion, and continually searching for meaning and groups that are welcoming to her beliefs, this process is exhausting for her. My mother was a practicing Catholic for approximately a fifth of her life, but her love of the Church, specifically its history, rituals, material culture, and songs, has been coloured by her experience with nuns, priests and the Monsignor's use of power, not to protect the weaker members of the congregation, but to further exploit them.

## V. CONCLUSION

### *i. A Theoretical Framework*

As outlined in Chapter One, while anticlericalism has been studied in other disciplines, it has not been explored extensively by folklorists. This thesis is in part an answer to this gap in that the three case studies I present show what a folklorist can bring to the discussion by introducing the concept of counterclericalism. It is an approach that builds on the work of historians and anthropologists although it is distinct from it. I have been fortunate to be able to consult the works of anthropologists and historians as I look for legend antecedents or consider historical approaches to the expressions about priests. But the theoretical point of view projected by these disciplines, in general, is not one that would be readily accepted by folklorists. To a certain extent, the theories put forward by some of these disciplines are similar to our own, in that many anthropologists, especially those operating in the post 1960s era, consider power dynamics and class as part of their approach. Anthropologists, especially those who have considered the relationship between parishioners and priests, are often working in "exotic" cultures. While Lawrence Taylor did work in Ireland, he operated within the theoretical framework of anthropology and history. Anthropologists adopting this framework have found it limiting (as related to me in personal conversations with Thomas Nemecek and Lawrence Taylor) both because there is a negative connotation to suggesting that a person or community is anticlerical, and because the term does not adequately describe the state of affairs of regional comments about priests. Its unsuitability as a label has caused some to avoid using the

term or expanding on the context, especially when the situations are not overtly anticlerical.

Throughout this study, I propose the use of the term "counterclericalism" rather than "anticlericalism" in the modern (non-historical) study of vernacular expressions regarding priests. Although many of the methods used by anthropologists to elicit stories about priests and the fieldwork conducted to gather observations about community attitudes are methodologically sound to the folklorist, they are inherently flawed, from my perspective, by being framed by the term "anticlericalism." I suggest that anticlericalism and counterclericalism are, indeed, two different things. Historical studies of anticlericalism are valuable, and generally discuss major manifestations of dissatisfaction with religious hierarchy. These expressions may be disassociated from the community priest, or even the regional see or diocese. Typically, these expressions are major political sea changes: they are public group responses to class issues or perceived abuse of power.

Counterclericalism, on the other hand, is typically localised, and more personal or private. While stories which portray priests negatively may be told, they are usually told to insiders. Like many legends, they are often "floated" within a social situation to determine attitudes and belief. A large portion of counterclerical narratives are personal experience narratives, memorates and oral history, or historical legend. They function to build consensus and to educate new members of the group, or as an aetiological legend for the teller's relationship to religion today. As Lawless suggests with women's narratives about entering a religious life, counterclerical narratives can be found in "blocks" that are continually weighed for suitability in the social situation or legend-

telling event or personal experience narrative sharing event in which they are told (1991:41).

Anticlerical theories, methods and approaches have seemed to me to be more exclusionary than inclusive; a judgement for an expression of dissatisfaction or concern, especially as these terms grow out of the language used by the Catholic Church to label rebellious movements and its naysayers. Specific historians and anthropologists (as outlined in Chapter One) have attempted to develop new ways to look at expressions which counter the dominance of the priest in the community, but they have typically had to operate in the traditions of inquiry which were supported by their fields. The study of subversive means of operating within dominate cultures, counter-hegemony, and traditional ways of knowing and communicating are not at the centre of these disciplines. I would argue that in historical and anthropological studies, the people who make expressions about priests are further marginalized in their classification and the fact that they are singled out. This study has sought to prove that counterclericalism is pervasive in groups and individuals regardless of ethnic backgrounds, social status, or gender; and that it is found in regional, community and individual repertoires. Indeed, as I reached the end of this study, more examples were brought to me about the Mi'kmaq and Ukrainians of Cape Breton, and their independent counterclerical expressions.

In Richard Bauman's study of verbal art in LaHave, Nova Scotia, one of the first building blocks of his theory of verbal art as performance, he draws the conclusion that in that area of the province there is an economy of speech and that verbal art is not encouraged or appreciated (1972:340). Bauman then goes on to discuss the role of

language in the community and uncover a variety of complex ideas about the role of storytelling in the community. Similarly, from the outset of this project it seemed as though there was little anticlericalism in Atlantic Canada, and I was encouraged to focus on charges of sexual abuse that had been laid against clergy and the reactions that occurred in the communities after that. My interest has never been in the study of these catastrophic events, for a variety of reasons. I have always been interested in the precipitating expressions which erupt before these events are made public; what I call counterclericalism. It is clear to me that after the announcement of charges being laid against clergy members, expressions leave the "face-to-face communication in small groups" mode of transmission and become the focus of radio, television, newspapers, and other popular mediations. On the other hand, although often dismissed and seldom discussed outside of the community, from the time many Atlantic Canadian communities received their first priests, there was counterclericalism.

Folklorists are often concerned with representation. One of the first reasons I considered the term counterclericalism was that I felt it would be doing a disservice to the participants in this study to portray them as anticlerical. Many of the people I spoke to casually about this work who gave me a number of insights were employed in various positions in the Roman Catholic Church. In informal sessions, several people gave me a number of counterclerical narratives followed by narratives in praise of local priests. At one point it dawned on me that counterclericalism seemed to be about the *named* priest as outlined in Chapters Two, Three and Four (those that deal with Mount Cashel's Fr. Hickey, Mabou's Fr. MacDonald and my mother's Monsignor) and often took the form of

personal experience narratives and legends, while anticlericalism in many cases was publicly broadcast and had shades of issues with the Catholic church at large. Another “named priest” who is not included in this work was described to me by with counterclerical pieces of information that were shared as “protective” gossip by people with no real awareness of this project. This local priest had on occasion been on the wrong side of the law (accused of white collar crimes behind closed doors), was an “ideas man” (said with a negative connotation), and generally misogynistic (a member of the “old boys network”). It was with great surprise that I found myself warned of him and his behaviour from at least six different sources, all women, who pulled me aside and gave me snippets of information, usually in one-on-one situations at work, parties, and over coffee. Clearly, gossip about the “named priest” as well as women’s coping mechanisms for use of narrative to circumvent clerical power require further examination.

As outlined in Chapter Two, Newfoundland has provided a complex location for part of this study. Unlike the other examples, Newfoundland has had a very public inquiry into allegations of child abuse, the ramifications of which are ongoing as of January 2011. I have struggled throughout this thesis to avoid the “easy” task of associating counterclericalism to allegations of child sexual abuse. Of course, while Newfoundland’s history of these cases is quite well known, the issue is pervasive in the other regions I have studied. In the fall of 2009, Bishop Lahey of Antigonish (and previously of St. George’s Parish in Newfoundland) resigned amid charges of possession of child

pornography.<sup>51</sup> At about the same time, in an unrelated case, Fr. Noel of Northern New Brunswick pled guilty to sex charges involving young boys. While I do see a connection between mainstream acceptance of counterclerical narratives after an abuse case comes to light, I also know that the narratives predate abuse charges, are found among those who have never been abused by priests, and in areas where no such charges have ever been laid against priests. To simply say that anticlerical narratives or counterclerical narratives exist in present day Newfoundland is almost a redundant statement; reactive expressions are bound to occur after a community tragedy such as what the Catholic community has experienced. To say that they existed prior to Mount Cashel is somewhat insightful, although they did not cause large scale reactions, narratives about priests had a function before the inquiry. Perhaps because this counterclerical form of expression was widely accepted in local vernacular culture, it circumvented the need for an anticlerical eruption from the Catholic community in the face of deeper conflict with priests.

The Newfoundland example does show us that narratives, especially those that are extremely pervasive, can be an indication of deep-seeded issues or cultural concerns. Community narratives about priests, whether founded in truth or in rumour or gossip, are signs of deep conflict. At the very least, they are indicative of a community dialogue about power and its abuse. Similarly, this can be true for all institutional bodies where power dynamics are at play.<sup>52</sup> In an institutional setting, when a few people hold all the

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<sup>51</sup> I quote extensively from his history of the Church in the region (Lahey 2002) in Chapter One, written prior to the allegations coming to light.

<sup>52</sup> During my MA fieldwork at a university (McDavid 2002) I found a large body of narratives which critiqued the spending habits of the institution and the loss of community that was occurring with a large expansion. From the participants' point of view, administrators began to run the school "like a business"

power and determine the day-to-day lives of a community, rhetoric, narratives and behaviours can be understood as collective representations of reflections on that power dynamic.

ii. *Changes in the Field*

As illustrated in Chapter One, the study of counterclericalism in Folklore is a natural progression of the study of anticlericalism in History and Anthropology. The text, content and context are different, but what the expressions are illustrating –namely problems with clergy made manifest in folklore forms– are often similar. Folklore seems more capable of dealing with issues such as an individual or community's modern expression against power than these other disciplines do. Furthermore, Folklore often studies urban groups, or groups which are typically considered mainstream and non-exotic. While newer studies in Anthropology may encompass these groups, it is widely accepted that Anthropology previously had a bias towards the study of "foreign" or exotic cultures. Similarly, a bias of historical studies was that they preferred the written record to oral history (or, of course, legend). In many ways they would have no interest in the study of Fr. MacDonald, the fiddle burning priest of Mabou, because, while Fr. MacDonald did exist and the archival documentation illustrates many details of his life, the incident told of in the local cycle is unable to be stated as fact or fiction.

There are few historical accounts of counterclericalism, because of the lack of records of everyday people, or mundane events, as well as the dangers of challenging the

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that "doesn't care."

church or priest. I do believe that one could do a counterclerical reading of historical texts, although it would be another project. For instance, in the many historical documents related to the Inquisition, one would undoubtedly find those who had challenged clerical authority, and found themselves accused of other crimes (Ginzberg 1980). But such is speculation at this point and further research would be needed to examine this possibility. Another potential area for further exploration is the role of counterclericalism or anticlericalism in Protestantism. During my research I was exposed to a number of narratives about Protestant clergy, but few studies have been conducted among Protestants. Interestingly, there has been some forays into this area by British scholars whom have looked at anticlericalism in Anglicanism (Aston and Cragoe 2001).

Except for a few studies into anticlericalism in French Canada, the study of this phenomenon has not been explored in North America. From my point of view, this is due to the fact that counterclericalism as found in North American (and specifically Atlantic Canada) differs from European expression of anticlericalism. I have several thoughts as to why the expressions are dissimilar: anticlericalism as studied in Europe has been connected to specific events such as the Inquisition or the French Revolution, which do not have parallels in North America. In many of the European contexts Roman Catholics are in the majority, and therefore the faith is safe to criticise, or conversely, overwhelming dominant. In the Atlantic Canadian context, there was a history of church and state intertwining and a lack of government resources, with immigration occasioned in the first place to escape oppression. The Church offered many social services such as access to education, and financial assistance through allocation of church funds, and the

priest controlled this access.

Oftentimes, this power was instilled in him by the parishioners as part of their vernacular religion; they were not mandated by the Church to pursue the priest's opinion in financial matters, but his opinion was often sought in rural communities in all manner of contracts. Oral history accounts of 1940s Cape Breton cite incidents of the priests' control of matters beyond the purview of the Church, especially in financial matters. One such example is a young girl requesting the priest to draw up an agreement between her and her widower employer as an employment contract: during the discussion of this potential work situation, the priest manages to suggest a marriage instead. Despite not having plans in that direction, community reproof due to the short time period between the death of the first wife and the introduction of the second, and no attraction between the two, the couple subsequently married. In this instance, the priest also dismisses the date the couple sets and puts forward his own. It becomes clear that the priest sees a widowed man with three ailing elderly relatives and four children under the age of three as in desperate need of a partner, not an employee, despite the wishes of the family and community attitudes about the marriage (Caplan 1996: 11).

In all of the areas studied in this work the Church was not *the* oppressor, as the victims (by which I mean sexual, physical and emotional victimisation) of the priests were marginalised several times over. In vernacular interpretations of history, Acadians, Newfoundlanders and Cape Bretoners all left their homeland due to oppression, many were run off land in their new home, and struggled to survive with limited resources. Some may argue that they still do. All the studies also take place in areas where there was

another oppressive power. The power relationship in New Brunswick is between the North and the South of the province, in Cape Breton it is between the Mainland and Cape Breton, and in Newfoundland it can be seen as a power struggle between the rural and urban contexts. Most of these struggles are also divided along the lines of religion. The people discussed in the three chapters of these regions are marginalised in a variety of ways, and perhaps this is why their expressions against priests are typically counterclerical rather than anticlerical. When one is further marginalised by one's religious status, it may not be a sound policy to critique publicly one's own religion.

*iii. The Nuances of Counterclericalism*

Although I have found that counterclerical narratives and vernacular expression do follow on traditional lines and repeat common motifs, there are regional, community and individual variations. The text, context, and content vary on a number of points such as ethnicity, class, age, gender, and race. If the Church is necessary for the promotion of the community, culture and provision of services, as it is in Cape Breton, narratives may illustrate heroic or villainous priests. If Catholicism is the dominant religion, narratives may be more critical, because the faith is firm and safe in the community at large, and members may not feel the pressure to show a "united front." If access to education is lacking in the community and parishioners feel separated from their church by the priest, rather than included, narratives may be indicative of misunderstandings related to church doctrine. If priests have been the subject of criminal cases, counterclericalism typically makes the leap to anticlericalism, with public comments about priests on radio, television and popular literature.

From a genre analysis of the body of texts collected and witnessed, I feel that vernacular expressions about priests seem to be limited to forms such as legend, legend reports, jokes, memorate, personal experience narrative and dite.<sup>53</sup> It seems, although there are few regions where this can be fully explored other than Newfoundland (due to the general lack of folklore and oral history archives in the rest of Atlantic Canada), that the inclusion of these sentiments in popular culture is frequently done by “elite” representatives of the population, rather than presented in a medium such as folk art, (which seems to be celebratory, rather than expository), in these regions.

Priests are sometimes depicted in Newfoundland popular culture, but rarely in that of New Brunswick, perhaps a reflection on the minority position of French Catholic Acadians and Irish Catholics in that province. In Cape Breton they have been referenced in some novels, albeit, not consistently, perhaps because there is a great amount of weight placed on the role of social worker that many priests filled in the post 1930s era to the present day, as community representatives and members of the Antigonish Movement. Worthy of note is that, in the period between its July 2009 release and Christmas of that year, Sydney, Cape Breton, bookstores were perennially sold out of Linden MacIntyre’s *The Bishop’s Man*, his novel about a flawed priest Cape Breton priest and a young man dealing with childhood abuse.<sup>54</sup> Later in the Christmas season it was on the front shelves of local bookstores. In Cape Breton, there seems to be great effort spent in identifying

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<sup>53</sup> The term “dite” means a short belief statement.

<sup>54</sup> There have been other popular culture depictions of priests in Cape Breton: author Sheldon Currie provides some (1994; 2002), although the most well known depiction is probably that of the priest that attempts to molest Kiefer Sutherland’s character in the 1984 film *The Bay Boy*, set in Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia (Petrie 1984).

“good” priests from “bad” priests in a very black and white delineation. Only recently have some scholars pointed out that some priests who made positive strides for local life have had potentially negative motivations and “strange” politics (see Welton 2005).

Earlier in this work I talk about the “slow burn” of counterclericalism, versus the “flash fire” of anticlericalism. It seems that anticlericalism, a form of expression with which many people are familiar, is seen as the more dominant form of expression. While it is the more noticeable expression, it is not necessarily the predominant. Due to the form it takes, it is more widely noted when it comes to the forefront. But the magnitude of counterclericalism is more far-reaching, although it seems to cover a smaller range of more private genres. It is probably easier to study anticlericalism because it is typically expressed openly and publicly, but counterclericalism may be more indicative of issues central to individual’s lives. An awareness of counterclericalism may assist communities in addressing latent issues.

Studying modern anticlericalism, as expressed in relation to sexual abuse charges, seems to be opportunistic and problematic, and at times potentially unethical. To draw a comparison, one could look at other public expressions of extreme grief or challenges to worldview and the folklorist’s response. Several folklorists have addressed community responses to grief and loss, and most address the problematic issues that surface in this research (see Everett 2002; Tye and Goldstein 2006). Typically, these researchers have looked at the public responses of communities as expressed through material culture or performance. Some people who have counterclerical expressions in their repertoire do use them in their performance of life history and are comfortable in relating these narratives

to certain audiences. But unlike expressions of grief often studied by folklorists, where one can quickly ascertain the relationship between the deceased individual and the mourner, in the case of sexual assault charges, other than by identifying the victim, it is not easy to determine the life experience of each person with counterclerical sentiments. In fact, early on in my research I encountered a potential participant who likely had experienced clerical abuse. I had initially approached him to participate in the study because I knew they had been raised Catholic but no longer practiced. He politely listened and neither declined or affirmed participation. He was encouraged by others to participate. As time progressed I found that charges had been laid against a priest who had at one time been placed in his parish, and perhaps this had been part of his trepidation. I also had the responsibility of providing research access to the holdings of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, and met several young men who had interest in reviewing the contents of the holdings related to the Hughes Inquiry; for a variety of reasons it did not seem appropriate or ethical to approach them either.

It seems obvious to me that anticlericalism will spring up in communities after there have been inquiries into sexual abuse by priests, and a study of the form it takes may be valid; however, it also may be sensationalistic and obvious. Counterclerical narratives on the other hand, can be concealed and coded foreshadowing of anticlericalism; but they can create change, allow for humour, and provide real insight. They can function as a critique, a commentary on the nature of power, and a tradition of belief.

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