

EDITORIAL ESSAY

A Priest, a Ranch, and *los Muchachos*: A Study of Race and Clerical Abuse from New Mexico

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Father Ed Donelan came to New Mexico from Massachusetts. The priest worked as a chaplain at a facility for “juvenile delinquents,” and later ran a home for boys he called the Hacienda de los Muchachos. Donelan sexually abused youth at both facilities. This essay considers how Donelan leveraged New Mexico’s juvenile justice and habilitation systems, and racial inequities baked into them, to abuse young people. Within those systems, a Catholic culture of clericalism granted Donelan unlimited access to youth, and enabled him to move unchecked between spiritual and quasi-parental forms of authority. Donelan’s story shows that clericalism is not a one-size-fits-all problem; it manifests differently in relation to different communities. Here clericalism intersects with place-based power structures of race and colonialism to damage in locally specific ways. Donelan’s case demonstrates that scholars who study clerical sexual abuse need to pay attention not only to priests, but also to church and state institutions that rendered certain populations of children especially vulnerable to their bad actions.

Keywords: sexual abuse, race, New Mexico, clericalism, priests, children, prisons

JUST after Christmas in 2022, a federal judge approved a \$121 million bankruptcy settlement for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, the largest Catholic diocese in New Mexico and oldest in the US Southwest. The settlement is part of the unfolding crisis of clerical sexual abuse in the United States; it addresses claims from 400 survivors that priests and other religious personnel

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Competing interests: The author declares none.

in the Santa Fe archdiocese abused them as minors.¹ The Santa Fe settlement is enormous given the small population of the archdiocese, and so too is the list of men who abused young people there. By the archdiocese's own account, eighty-one men—predominantly priests, but also deacons, religious, and seminarians—have credible accusations of sexual abuse, dating mostly from the second half of the twentieth century.² This number suggests that the per capita population of abusers in the Santa Fe archdiocese during that era was twice as high as a larger jurisdiction like the Archdiocese of Boston.³

Even a cursory look at the Santa Fe list suggests that race has something to do with the problem of clerical sexual abuse in New Mexico. During the twentieth century, like today, the vast majority of Catholics in New Mexico were Hispano or Native.⁴ In sharp contrast, approximately 70 percent of the men credibly accused in the archdiocese have Anglo (neither Hispano/Latino nor recognizably Native) surnames.⁵ Many other places in the United States with unusual numbers of accused priests follow a similar pattern: the accused are mainly white clerics who worked within racialized (Black, Hispano/Latino, or Native) communities. This pattern is especially egregious when it comes

¹ "US Bankruptcy Court Approves \$121M Clergy Abuse Settlement," *US News & World Report*, December 29, 2022, <https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2022-12-29/us-bankruptcy-court-approves-121m-clergy-abuse-settlement>.

² "Archdiocese of Santa Fe List of Priests, Deacons, Religious, and Seminarians Credibly Accused of Sexual Abuse of Minors," Archdiocese of Santa Fe, last modified March 28, 2023, https://files.ecatholic.com/17613/documents/2023/4/230328_List%20of%20Priests%20Accused%20of%20Sexual%20Abuse-6.pdf?t=1681251589000.

³ The Archdiocese of Boston list includes the names of 132 men. The website BishopAccountability.org, which employs a standard of publicly accused (versus credibly accused) lists 302 men accused of abuse within the Boston archdiocese. Although both numbers are higher than Santa Fe's tally, the Catholic population of Boston was nearly seven times that of Santa Fe during the 1960s, seventies, and eighties ("Categories of Archdiocesan Clergy Accused of Sexual Abuse of a Child," Protection, Prevention, & Healing: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, <https://commitment.bostoncatholic.org/categories-of-archdiocesan-clergy-accused-of-sexual-abuse-of-a-child>; "Archdiocese of Boston, MA," BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/dioceses/usa-ma-boston/>; "Archdiocese of Santa Fe" and "Archdiocese of Boston," Catholic-Hierarchy.org, <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/>).

⁴ As of 2016, 62 percent of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe were Hispanic, 25 percent were Native, and 16 percent were Anglo or white ("Key Demographic, Social, and Religious Statistics for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe," V Encuentro, <https://vencuentro.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/1318-Santa-Fe-EN.pdf>).

⁵ "Archdiocese of Santa Fe List of Priests, Deacons, Religious, and Seminarians Credibly Accused of Sexual Abuse of Minors."

to Catholic priests and religious who ran and staffed missions among Native communities.⁶

To point out a pattern, though, does not explain why it happened. In New Mexico, journalists, survivors, and lawyers who want to explain the “how and why” of clerical sexual abuse often rely on the model of a dumping ground. This model suggests that bishops and other church officials relocated priests with track records of abuse to places like New Mexico, as a tactic for offloading them among populations they considered less valuable, or at least less likely to complain (and have their complaints heard). One local attorney compared the practice of dumping priests in New Mexico to decisions by the federal government to test nuclear bombs and dump radioactive waste in the region. New Mexico “was ground zero of ecclesiastical pedophilia in the world,” he concluded.⁷ The racial logic embedded across this analogy—one by which church and state alike determine it is “less harmful” to deposit toxic materials in nonwhite communities—is clear.

The dumping ground model has evidence supporting it. In places where abusive priests clustered, it is not hard to find examples of men who showed up after causing trouble in other, whiter locales. This is certainly true for New Mexico. Beginning in the 1940s, priests who pursued sex with young people in other parts of the country relocated to a Catholic retreat center in the Jemez Mountains west of Santa Fe. Tucked away in a canyon, upstream from Jemez Pueblo and the village of Jemez Springs, the Via Coeli Monastery promised these men the chance “to make fresh and vigorous something that is worn or broken.”⁸ For decades the Servants of the Paraclete, the religious order that ran the center, collaborated with the Archdiocese of Santa Fe to send Via Coeli’s “guest priests” into parish work in New Mexico. At least a dozen priests who

⁶ This pattern holds true in places such as the Diocese of Gallup (New Mexico and Arizona) and the Diocese of Fairbanks (Alaska). Jack Downey and I have demonstrated how Catholic priests accused of abuse clustered at Native-serving missions (See Jack Downey and Kathleen Holscher, *Desolate Country: Mapping Catholic Sex Abuse in Native America*, data as of February 10, 2021, <https://www.desolatecountry.com/>).

⁷ David Margolick, “Sex Abuse Cases Threaten to Bankrupt an Archdiocese,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/22/us/sex-abuse-cases-threaten-to-bankrupt-an-archdiocese.html>.

⁸ “Retreat for Renewal: The What and Why of Via Coeli Monastery” (n.p., n.d.), BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents/single/paraclete/servants-2497-2498.pdf>. For additional documents related to Via Coeli, see “Servants of the Paraclete,” BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/treatment/Servants/>. BishopAccountability.org is also a physical archive, located in Waltham, Massachusetts.

were eventually accused of abuse in Santa Fe spent time in residence at Via Coeli.

But if we want to understand the racial history of clerical sexual abuse, and specifically, why so many white priests acted out sexually toward young people from racialized communities, dumping grounds are only the beginning. In New Mexico, as in other places, race factored in abuse in other ways too. Here I share a devastating story of abuse that has plenty to do with race but not much to do with dumping grounds. Father Ed Donelan came to New Mexico from Massachusetts through his own volition, as a seminarian with a clean record. He received ordination in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. “Father Ed” (Donelan always refused to use a surname) founded and ran Hacienda de los Muchachos, a “home for wayward boys” in the northeast part of New Mexico. Donelan engaged in sexual behavior with teenagers at his facility. Boys told people about the things Donelan did to them, and adults who saw his behavior firsthand also reported it. If we believe these reports, which we should, it seems likely that Donelan abused dozens of victims under his care.

Ed Donelan took advantage of New Mexico’s juvenile justice and habilitation systems, and racial inequities baked into them, to abuse young people. He came to New Mexico to work with disadvantaged populations, and he found state agencies that relied on residential facilities to manage their youth. As a Catholic priest, Donelan received a warm welcome at those facilities, and eventually he opened his own. Residential facilities presented a unique opportunity for Donelan to abuse. Within those spaces—first at a juvenile detention center called the New Mexico Boys’ School, and later at Hacienda de los Muchachos—Donelan used his priesthood to assert custody over boys. A Catholic culture of clericalism, composed of dense layers of power and deference, granted ordained men unlimited access to youth, including the ability to move unchecked between spiritual and quasi-parental forms of authority. And so Donelan made himself into a substitute father for institutionalized youth. In this way, he undermined already-stressed familial units, consolidated his power over residents, and pulled victims into his own ménage.⁹

Prison abolitionist-scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”¹⁰ During the twentieth century, Native populations and the Hispano population in New Mexico experienced this vulnerability in different but overlapping ways. New Mexico was annexed by the United States from Mexico in 1848. For Hispanos,

⁹ Susanne Burks, “Abuse Suits Name State,” *Albuquerque Journal*, March 1, 1995.

¹⁰ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

a century of US political control, accompanied by Anglo-controlled land transfers, economic activity, and educational policy, produced difficult living conditions. By the twentieth century, Hispano land grants in northern New Mexico had lost millions of acres to speculators and the US government.¹¹ Rural Hispano communities faced systemic disadvantages in education, including inequitable school funding formulas and forced English-language instruction.¹² As late as 1940, New Mexico had the nation's highest infant mortality rate, with the death rate of Hispano infants nearly triple that of Anglo infants.¹³ Two decades later, in 1960, roughly 40 percent of Hispano families in the state still lived below the poverty line.¹⁴

Like youth from other disadvantaged populations in the United States, Hispano young people, and boys in particular, got caught up in the carceral system.¹⁵ To use language from the era, social and economic hardship produced “wayward” youth—kids who dropped out of school, fell out with their families, ran away or with the wrong crowd, and committed petty crimes. And wayward youth ministry was a mid-century Catholic specialty. Across the United States, priests, as well as men and women religious, worked with “delinquent” and otherwise troubled children and teenagers in various institutional settings, including correctional facilities, but also boarding schools,

¹¹ See Phillip Gonzales, “Struggle for Survival: The Hispanic Land Grants of New Mexico, 1848–2001,” *Agricultural History* 77, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 293–324.

¹² See Kathleen Holscher, *Religious Lessons: Catholic Sisters and the Captive Schools Crisis in New Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 41–47.

¹³ Sr. M. Lucia Van der Eerden, SCMM, “Maternity Care in a Spanish-American Community in New Mexico” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1948), vii–viii.

¹⁴ “1960 Census: Subject Reports, Persons of Spanish Surname: Social and Economic Data for White Persons of Spanish Surname in Five Southwestern States,” United States Census Bureau, modified October 8, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1965/dec/population-pc-2-1b.html>, 37. For the 1960 US poverty threshold, see Gordon M. Fisher, “The Development and History of the Poverty Thresholds,” *Social Security Bulletin* 55, no. 4 (1992), <https://www.ssa.gov/history/fisheronpoverty.html>. On New Mexico's economic transformation and its effects on Hispano communities, see Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ Elsewhere in the United States attention has rightly been given to incarceration as a “system of racialized social control” especially in regard to Black men; see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: New Press, 2012). In New Mexico this extends to Hispanic men; approximately 60 percent of the state's incarcerated population is Hispanic, compared to roughly 15 percent of its residents (“New Mexico Profile,” Prison Policy Initiative, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/NM.html>).

orphanages, psychiatric hospitals, and counseling centers.¹⁶ Many, though not all, of these youth came from racially and/or economically disadvantaged communities. Sometimes these ministries were private ventures, but often Catholic personnel collaborated with (and received money from) state agencies to manage juveniles. Sometimes this meant priests or sisters staffing state facilities, and sometimes it meant priests or sisters running their own facilities with financial support from the state.

Ed Donelan found this work in New Mexico. Donelan was a son of Irish immigrants to Massachusetts. After serving in the Marines during World War II, he began to study for the priesthood close to home in Connecticut. Soon, though, Donelan applied for admission to the Santa Fe archdiocese in hopes of ministering to Native Americans. "There is nothing I would like better than to spend my priesthood working among the American Indians," he wrote to Archbishop Edwin Byrne of Santa Fe in a letter. "According to the Catholic directory, this type of work is carried on in your diocese."¹⁷ Byrne accepted Donelan to his archdiocese, but he immediately directed the seminarian toward Hispanic ministry instead and sent him off to learn Spanish.¹⁸

Donelan was ordained in 1956. Two years later, Archbishop Byrne appointed him chaplain at the New Mexico Boys' School. The Boys' School, located in the northeastern town of Springer, was run by the New Mexico Department of Corrections to "provid[e] habilitation, training, education, and

¹⁶ While the vast majority of Catholic personnel who worked in this capacity did not sexually abuse, one can re-create this Catholic history of work with at-risk youth through archival material related to sexual abusers. See, for example, Paul Shanley from the Archdiocese of Boston, who ministered to "alienated youth," or Viatorian priest John J. Burke, who worked at a jail and abused a teenager released from custody into his care, or the Jesuit John Morse, who abused youth in his capacity of foster parent at St. Mary's Mission School on the Colville Reservation at "Comprehensive Selection of Shanley Documents," BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/docs/boston/shanley/doclist.htm>; Office of the Illinois Attorney General, "Report on Catholic Clergy Child Sex Abuse in Illinois 2023," BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/reports-2023-05-23-IL-AG-Report.pdf#page=339>, 339; K. C. Mehaffey, "Former Omak Mission Children Sue State over St. Mary's Sex Abuse Case," *The Wenatchee World*, November 23, 2011, https://www.wenatcheeworld.com/news/local/former-omak-mission-children-sue-state-over-st-mary-s-sex-abuse-case/article_ddcec7cd-9ce7-5cde-bd1b-7a7a9f0c385f.html.

¹⁷ Edward Donelan to Edwin Byrne, May 1, 1949, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5539>.

¹⁸ Edward Donelan to Edwin Byrne, April 30, 1955, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5510>.

related services to . . . adjudicated delinquents from throughout the state.”¹⁹ During Donelan’s time there, just over 60 percent of the institution’s 200 residents were Hispano (compared to a 24 percent Anglo resident population). A slightly larger number were Catholic.²⁰ In the late 1960s, the Department of Corrections created a composite sketch of the “typical boy” at the Boys’ School during that era. In addition to being of “Spanish” origin, he was sixteen years old and had an eighth-grade education. Although he was a Catholic, he was missing his sacraments and lacked knowledge of the mass and rosary. He was there by court order, committed for the crime of breaking and entering.²¹ By the time Donelan started his chaplaincy, his desire to work with this type of a young man was already clear. “With your interest in boys, I am sure that you will be very successful in this work,” Byrne wrote to Donelan, “and that you will spare no effort to train them to be worthy children of God and good citizens of our country.”²²

Ed Donelan remained at the Boys’ School for a decade. But even as he worked there, he began to plan a similar facility of his own. The priest envisioned a “boys ranch” that “would be a home and school for homeless, neglected, underprivileged, and rejected boys regardless of their race, creed, or color.”²³ Despite his ecumenical language, Donelan clearly saw his new project as a Catholic one. After all, he wrote in a letter to Byrne, “the greater part of our juveniles who get in trouble and need help are Catholics.”²⁴ Donelan likewise predicted that most of the charges at his future ranch would be Hispano. “It seems to me that the majority of boys would be of Spanish-American heritage,” he explained in a 1965 “youth project” proposal to the

¹⁹ Robert Pasternack, Robert Portillos, and Henry Hoff, “Providing an Appropriate Education to Adjudicated and Incarcerated Juvenile Delinquents,” *Journal of Correctional Education*, 39, no. 4 (December 1988): 154–59, here 154.

²⁰ The demographics of this incarcerated population deviated from state census numbers, which recorded 40 percent of the state’s population as Hispanic, and just over half as non-Hispanic white (i.e., Anglo). State of New Mexico Department of Corrections, *New Mexico Boys’ School 1968–1969 Statistical Report* (n.p., n.d.), 25, 19; “Chapter C: General Social and Economic Characteristics New Mexico,” United States Census Bureau, https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1970/population-volume-1/1970a_nm-02.pdf, 33–105.

²¹ “Chapter C: General Social and Economic Characteristics New Mexico,” 29–31.

²² Edwin Byrne to Edward Donelan, June 23, 1958, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5565>.

²³ Edward Donelan, “La Hacienda de los Muchachos,” March 14, 1965, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5577-5584>.

²⁴ Edward Donelan to Edwin Byrne, March 28, 1961, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5558-5559>.

archbishop. Thus “the general theme of the ranch would be based on the Spanish culture.”²⁵

Archbishop Byrne gave Donelan permission for the project. The priest purchased an old adobe school and adjacent land in the unincorporated community of Gladstone, on the high plains east of Springer, and Hacienda de los Muchachos opened in 1967.²⁶ Over the next decade, the ranch housed between a half dozen and a few dozen teenagers at a given time.²⁷ Many of these youth were indeed Hispano, though plenty of Anglo surnames populate facility records too. Donelan funded his ranch mainly through private donations, but the facility held a license from the New Mexico Health and Social Services Department, which categorized it as an Institution for Delinquent and Dependent Children.²⁸ By the mid-1970s, the state was compensating the ranch \$123 per month for every child it placed in Donelan’s care. Youth came from across the state, at the recommendation of various agencies and organizations.²⁹ Donelan’s focus at the Hacienda was boys whom “the judge and community wanted . . . out of the way.”³⁰ Residents might or might not qualify as “delinquents,” but either way they were youth who “could not ‘make it’ in the normal social setting or other institutional settings: those who . . . would require special considerations because of their [social, intellectual, or emotional] problems.”³¹ The ranch stayed open until 1976. It continued to operate after complaints about its founder surfaced. By 1971 the Department of Corrections had recorded allegations of sexual behavior dating back to Donelan’s time at the Boys’ School, and it shared those allegations with the Archbishop of Santa Fe.³²

²⁵ Donelan, “La Hacienda de los Muchachos.”

²⁶ Edward Donelan, “Hacienda de los Muchachos,” n.d., BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5597-5603>.

²⁷ Eileen Stanton, “Throw-Away Boys: Who Salvages Them?,” BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5414-5420>, 4.

²⁸ Robert Sanchez to Edward Donelan, March 15, 1976, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-4402>; M. E. L. Olson and Janet E. Bryan, “Report on the Hacienda de los Muchachos,” March 12, 1976, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-4409-4413>.

²⁹ Scott Eaton, “Approval Withdrawn, Complaint Issued,” *Raton Range*, April 29, 1976, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-4404-4405>.

³⁰ Donelan, “La Hacienda de los Muchachos.”

³¹ Donelan, “La Hacienda de los Muchachos.”

³² James P. Davis to Howard C. Leach, March 22, 1971, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-4400-4401>.

At Hacienda de los Muchachos, “Father Ed” tried to build a family. He established himself as the sole parent at the ranch, and he did everything in his power to transform its residents into his sons. The identity and function of priests as spiritual fathers has been integral to Christianity since the early church, and Catholic history is full of priests exercising this spiritual parentage in ways that converge with more worldly—social, biological, and legal—forms of family. In the twentieth-century United States, the fatherly priest was a beloved personality. From Father Edward J. Flanagan, the real-life cleric made famous by Spencer Tracy in *Boys Town* (1938), to the fictional Father Charles O’Malley, brought to life by Bing Crosby in *Going My Way* (1944), American Catholics and non-Catholics smiled at stories of clerics embracing parental responsibilities. But this blended model of fatherhood has also taken darker historical forms, especially when church authorities have judged preexisting families as immoral or otherwise unacceptable. In seventeenth-century New Mexico, Spanish Franciscans waged a “protracted struggle . . . to become father and mother to the Indian children and to turn juveniles against their parents.”³³ Later in the United States, Catholic boarding schools worked in similar fashion, to disrupt the rhythms of Native kinship and bring Native youth under the twenty-four-hour-a-day care and custodianship of new sisters, brothers, and fathers.³⁴ More recently, state agencies piggybacked *de jure* parenthood upon spiritual parenthood by granting priests legal guardianship over children. While these foster arrangements could benefit children, they also created opportunities for sexual abuse.³⁵

Donelan recognized that “habilitation” facilities, where boys landed with little say from their families, allowed him to play substitute father. While he was at the Boys’ School, Donelan began referring to inmates as “my boys.”³⁶ By the time he was running Hacienda de los Muchachos, the priest had taken

³³ Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 80.

³⁴ On boarding school initiatives to reconfigure Native kinship, see Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁵ Priests accused of abuse while acting in the capacity of a foster parent include Fr. Samuel Lupico of the Archdiocese of Boston, Deacon Donald Patrick Dickson of the Archdiocese of New York, Fr. Dennis Muehe of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Fr. Steven Girard of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Fr. Hubert Mann of the Diocese of Manchester, Fr. Edward Olszewski of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Fr. Francis Hoefgen of the Diocese of Saint Cloud, Fr. Terrence Healy of the Diocese of Marquette, Fr. Barry Ashwell of the Archdiocese of Seattle, and Fr. John Morse of the Society of Jesus. For records related to these men, see BishopAccountability.org.

³⁶ Edward Donelan to Edwin Byrne, July 12, 1961, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5541-5542>.

to calling residents his sons. “Father Ed and his three youngest ‘sons’ went on a pleasure-business trip back East,” he wrote (using the third person) in 1969 to then-Archbishop James Davis of Santa Fe.³⁷ A glowing account of the ranch from this period, penned by an Albuquerque resident and titled “Throw Away Boys: Who Salvages Them,” describes Donelan’s process of adopting boys as sons with stomach-churning detail:

Teddy has never received even the most ordinary attention from his family. He was so filled with hate that he would not tolerate any kind of relationships with people. . . . At eleven, Jimmy has failed three times at school. He has failed twice already at home, first when his natural mother put him up for adoption, and later when his adoptive mother bore a son of her own. Far away from the scene of his failure, he has found tasks he doesn’t fail at—taking care of ducks and chickens and picking up the front area of his new-found home. He has also found a new father who loves him and shows it, who cares enough about him to spank him when he needs it. . . . Teddy and Jimmy live at the Hacienda with about twenty other boys. There a burly, six-foot-five inch priest in dusty pants, boots, and a cowboy hat put his arm around Teddy’s shoulder and told him, “Thanks for being my son.”³⁸

To build a family, it wasn’t enough for Donelan to call teenagers his sons. He also had to ensure that preexisting families would not disrupt things. To this end, the Hacienda had rules restricting visitation, especially on occasions that might reinforce or rekindle “outside” familial bonds. Boys were never allowed to visit family off the ranch.³⁹ And family members were prohibited from visiting during the Christmas season, over Thanksgiving, and on weekends adjacent to a boy’s birthday. When families sent things to children, Donelan sent them back “with notes explaining if they (parents, relatives) could not support the boys, they could not afford gifts.”⁴⁰

Almost a decade passed before Donelan’s methods at Hacienda de los Muchachos attracted scrutiny. Then, in January 1976, a twelve-year-old boy ran away from the ranch and froze to death.⁴¹ Shortly thereafter, the local

³⁷ Edward Donelan to James P. Davis, December 24, 1969, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5593>.

³⁸ Stanton, “Throw-Away Boys.”

³⁹ Edward Donelan to “Friend and Benefactor,” n.d. (c. 1973), BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5612-5613>.

⁴⁰ “Guidelines for Visiting Boys at the Hacienda de los Muchachos,” n.d., BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5425-5426>.

⁴¹ Eaton, “Approval Withdrawn, Complaint Issued.”

office of the New Mexico Social Services Agency (SSA) opened an investigation “because of an increase of problems and incidents at the Hacienda.” In March the office issued a five-page complaint. The agency noted a high number of runaways—up to four or five in one week—and it commented on a long list of irregular policies at the ranch, including Donelan withholding medication from residents and housing young boys with disruptive older counterparts. The agency cited a total lack of privacy at the facility, including toilets without doors. It singled out too “Father Ed’s policy of ‘joining the Hacienda Family’ and almost completely severing all familial relationships.” This family replacement model, the complaint’s authors stressed, “is diametrically opposed to agency policy and is detrimental to the boys placed there.”⁴²

One month before the SSA complaint, a former volunteer at the ranch sent a letter to the newest archbishop of Santa Fe, Robert Sanchez.⁴³ Like SSA staff, Pierre Nichols described the exclusive family Donelan tried to build. “A boy’s parents were most often outlined as being thoughtless, even mean,” Nichols explained. The boy’s “past world now became . . . too bad to hang onto.” “Where the boy’s past was shattered and the future looked dismal, Father Ed took over.”⁴⁴ And Nichols also observed more damning things. “The titles ‘Father and Son’ do not mean as in the sense of Christian brotherhood, but take on a serious and intentional physical meaning,” he warned. Nichols went on to describe a day in 1974 when he walked in on Donelan in his private room “outfitted with fur rugs and a tv.” “When I stepped into the room, I looked ahead . . . and saw Father Ed naked on the fur rugs lying on his side, embracing one of the boys.”⁴⁵ In his letter to the archbishop, Nichols included a typed transcript of an exchange he had with a fifteen-year-old resident of the ranch. In the conversation, the boy described to Nichols how Donelan had masturbated him, and he gave Nichols names of several boys the priest had treated similarly.⁴⁶ Donelan departed Hacienda de los Muchachos several months later, during the fall of 1976, and the ranch closed soon after.⁴⁷ But Archbishop Sanchez

⁴² Olson and Bryan, “Report on the Hacienda de los Muchachos.”

⁴³ Archbishop Robert Sanchez later faced his own accusations of sexual relations with young women, some of them minors; see “Fr. Robert F. Sanchez,” BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/accused/sanchez-robert-f-1959/>.

⁴⁴ Pierre Nichols to Robert Sanchez, February 20, 1976, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5636-5647>.

⁴⁵ Pierre Nichols to Robert Sanchez, February 20, 1976.

⁴⁶ Pierre Nichols to Robert Sanchez, February 20, 1976.

⁴⁷ Edward Donelan to “Friend and Benefactor,” September 1976, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5726-5728>.

reassigned Donelan to parish work. “Father Ed” remained in active ministry in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe until a lawsuit was filed against him by a former ranch resident in 1994.⁴⁸

Around the same time Nichols wrote his letter, a married couple who had once been friendly with Donelan, and regular visitors to his ranch, wrote their own letter to the archbishop. Charles and Crucita Todd defended Donelan, at least in part, but they agreed he should no longer be “the sole source of authority, love, faith, and comfort” to youth in his charge.⁴⁹ The Todds also recalled attending Mass at the ranch, during which Donelan delivered a strange and “unforgettable” homily:

The gist of it was that . . . we should feel sorry for priests, and do more to help them; that priest[s] carried a terrible burden and responsibility in that they, . . . above all other men, have been chosen by God as His priests; that during the consecration, the priest had the authority, and the responsibility to command God to be present at the altar; that God, because he had allowed this man to be a priest . . . must obey the priest and transubstantiate the bread and wine; and that we, the miscreant parishioners, must do everything we can to support our priests as they face this experience daily.⁵⁰

If the Todds’ memory is trustworthy, then Donelan characterized his own power in a way so extreme he broke orthodoxy. Within mid-century Catholicism, priests *were* regarded—by the church hierarchy, as well as the laity—as special and “above all other men” by virtue of their ability to mediate God’s presence in the Eucharist. Lording over his Hacienda, and taken by a fit of histrionics, Donelan had declared that his clerical power extended to command over God himself.

Historians and theologians frequently cite clericalism as a root cause of clerical sexual abuse. “To say ‘no’ to abuse,” Pope Francis wrote in a 2018 letter, “is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”⁵¹ And clericalism saturates the story of Ed Donelan, like it does stories of other abusers. The special glow that Donelan walked around with because he was a priest gave him access to “his sons.” It supercharged the patriarchal authority he

⁴⁸ Michael Sheehan to Doug Raun, February 14, 1994, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5686>.

⁴⁹ Charles and Crucita Todd to Robert Sanchez, April 13, 1976, BishopAccountability.org, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/documents-BA-Servants-of-the-Paraclete-5616-5619>.

⁵⁰ Charles and Crucita Todd to Robert Sanchez, April 13, 1976.

⁵¹ “Pope Francis: Letter to the People of God,” Vatican News, August 20, 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-letter-people-of-god-sexual-abuse.html>.

claimed and exercised at the Boys' School and the Hacienda. It informed the tendency of lay adults to look the other way when he draped his arms around boys, and the gentle treatment he received from three Archbishops of Santa Fe. But Donelan's story also demonstrates that clericalism is not a one-size-fits-all problem; the "scourge" of clericalism varies between time and place, and in relation to different kinds of community. Specifically, clericalism intersects with place-based power structures of class, gender, race, and colonialism, and when it does, it damages in locally specific ways. In New Mexico, Ed Donelan enacted a clericalist project of substitute fatherhood—and concomitant abuse—on mainly Hispano boys. Donelan's clericalism took this local form because the racial, as well as imperial and economic, dynamics of twentieth century New Mexico presented a situation in which non-Anglo youth wound up institutionalized in disproportionate numbers.

The story of Father Ed Donelan and the Hacienda de los Muchachos doesn't fit the "dumping ground" model of clerical sexual abuse in New Mexico. It shows us there is no exhaustive way of accounting for race as a factor in sexual abuse during the twentieth century. But race still matters enormously to this history. The case of Hacienda de los Muchachos demonstrates the need for multiple stories. In telling these stories, scholars need to pay attention to the racial biases of mid-century clergy. But we should attend too to a bigger picture, one that includes institutions of both church and state that rendered some children especially vulnerable to their bad actions.