

## INTRODUCTION

“Bishop Explains Vatican’s Criticism of U.S. Nuns” (NPR 2012b); “A War on Nuns?”; “Vatican Reprimands U.S. Nuns Group” (Goodstein 2012)—in the spring of 2012 media headlines across the country brought attention to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s (CDF) issuance of a formal Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), an association of female religious congregational leaders who represent 80 percent of the fifty-seven thousand nuns in the United States (LCWR 2017a). “The Assessment,” as it was commonly referred to, called for the renewal of the leadership organization, claiming the nuns were in doctrinal error and citing three key areas of concern: (1) the “problematic” content of addresses at the LCWR’s Annual Assemblies, which the Catholic Church argued not only posed a challenge to “core Catholic beliefs” but was a “rejection of faith” and “serious source of scandal . . . incompatible with religious life”; (2) the policies of corporate dissent surrounding questions of female ordination and homosexuality; and (3) the themes of radical feminism. Furthermore, while acknowledging the nuns’ work on issues of social justice,<sup>1</sup> the report criticized their heavy emphasis on these efforts while not promoting the Church’s right-

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to-life mission, particularly noting their silence on abortion. The Assessment was also critical of an affiliate of the LCWR, the Catholic social justice lobby, NETWORK (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2012).

Throughout the document outlining the Assessment were calls for obedience and allegiance of religious congregations to the bishops and for greater collaboration between the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the LCWR. The two calls cannot be dissociated since the Assessment expressed concern in regard to public statements by the nuns that the CDF argued challenged positions “taken by the Bishops, who are the Church’s authentic teachers of faith and morals” (Vatican 2012). As a result, the Assessment declared a period of “renewal” of the organization to be overseen by bishops in the United States. Three members of the USCCB were appointed with this task: Bishop Leonard Blair of Toledo, Ohio, Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain, and Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois (Vatican 2012).

In a statement responding to the rebuke, the LCWR called the claims “unsubstantiated,” expressing concern that it could “compromise” the nuns’ work in fulfilling “their mission.” In a July 2012 interview with National Public Radio, then president of the LCWR, Sister Pat Farrell, noted that the report was more concerned about what the nuns were not speaking out on and was critical of their efforts on issues of social justice (NPR 2012a).

At issue in this dispute is the idea that Catholic women religious are aware that, by institutional design, they do not have formal “authority” to change official doctrine on issues or to change the Church’s priorities. This fact cannot be separated from their gender. Therefore, as I explore in this book, some female religious take markedly different approaches in navigating institutional constraints in an effort to live out their religious vocation and impact social policy. These approaches are rooted in their experience as women religious working more directly with the laity than the hierarchy. They derive authority from their professional expertise and from the reforms of Vatican II, which called religious congregations to more authentically live out the mission of their respective orders and adapt to the needs of contemporary society (*Perfectae Caritatis* 1965).

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Female religious have long been viewed as caregivers. Due to this experience and the level of expertise noted above, female religious have grown to possess a sense of authority in issues impacting the laity, engaging in social issue-oriented activities. Meanwhile, religious institutions have traditionally viewed men as the decision makers, designing the structure and legalistic rules of the faith (Finlay 1996; Heyer-Gray 2000; Lehman 1994; McDuff 2001; Watling 2002). These factors can cause tension between the male hierarchy and female religious, as both make claims to areas of authority and argue their actions come from authentically living out the faith.

Therefore, the purpose of this book is to examine this very tension of policy and authority within the gendered nature of the Catholic Church and evaluate the level of influence female religious have on various social policy issues. The Assessment of the LCWR, along with an examination of female religious leadership, provides an opportunity to look at how women religious work to fulfill their vocations and make claim to areas of policy expertise, meanwhile navigating institutional constraints of the Catholic Church, some of which are a result of their gender and inability to be members of the clergy. Women have often been viewed as subordinate to male dominance in religion and previous studies have examined this type of gender inequality and tactics women of faith employ to work around institutional barriers, but none have yet to examine this within the context of the Assessment or how policy statements and approaches of female religious may influence the laity (Charlton 1997; Chaves 1997; Dufour 2000; Finlay 1996; Holm and Bowker 1998; Nesbitt 1997; E. Thompson 1991; Watling 2002).

In looking closely at the accusations of the Assessment via a comparison of policy statements between the LCWR and the USCCB, I argue that in most areas of social concern the two groups are not dissimilar in their positions. However, on key issues such as health care, homosexuality, and gender roles, the two organizations differ due to this tension between policy and authority, resulting in the LCWR taking more inclusive positions rooted in their call to social justice.

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This came to a crescendo with the LCWR's support of the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA), to which the bishops at that time were deeply opposed due to their concerns that the bill would federally fund abortion and require religious employers to cover reproductive care, such as birth control. Both groups spoke of and prioritized health care differently. The sisters' position was rooted in their gendered perspective and the nonclerical role they have working with the laity. For the bishops, their stance was rooted in the institutional positions on procreation and conception. Some women religious and laity suggest it is these disparate positions that really prompted the call for the hierarchy to formally issue the Doctrinal Assessment against the LCWR. However, I argue this does not mean that these women religious were in complete opposition to the Church as the Assessment claims.

I weigh in on this debate by asking two critical questions: (1) Are the sisters and the male clergy in fact in disagreement? and (2) Do women religious have influence? I address these questions through a series of interviews, showing how female religious navigate institutional constraints in the face of scrutiny and within a Church that does not have a consistent culture of promoting female leadership. Furthermore, through a national survey of Catholics, I conduct an experimental analysis, demonstrating that the laity can still be resistant to social policy messages and cues from female religious leadership and authority via a direct examination of statements from the LCWR and USCCB. Last, I provide insight on where the role and influence of women religious is headed in the twenty-first century in the American Catholic Church.

### The Assessment: Timeline and Key Groups Involved

In examining the Assessment, it is first important to provide a brief context of the key groups involved, along with a timeline of related events. As mentioned above, the Vatican's CDF officially released the Assessment of the LCWR in April 2012. A doctrinal assessment is issued if an organization within the Catholic

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Church is taking positions that are considered counter to official Church teaching. As a result, the organization and its publications, activities, and governing bodies come under review. As stated by Saint John Paul II, “The duty to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is to promote and safeguard the doctrine on the faith and morals throughout the Catholic world: for this reason everything which in any way touches such matters falls within its competence” (Vatican 1988). The roots of the Assessment stem back over a decade, starting in 2001, when representatives of the LCWR were warned and asked by the CDF to report on their organization’s reception of Church teaching regarding the priesthood, homosexuality, and the CDF’s 2000 document, *Dominus Iesus*, which summarizes the Catholic faith, emphasizes the ecclesiastical role of the magisterium, and reaffirms the revelation of Jesus Christ as definitive (Levada 2009; Duin 2009; Fox 2009).

The Vatican’s Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life began a three-year investigation in 2008, referred to as an “apostolic visitation” of U.S. women religious, and submitted a final report to Rome in 2011. During this time, in early 2009, the then prefect of the CDF, Cardinal William Levada, issued a letter to the LCWR, notifying the sisters that his office had begun the process of assessment of their leadership organization. In the spring of 2009, the LCWR informed its members of the assessment and met with members of the CDF in Rome. At its Annual Assembly in August 2009, the LCWR issued a request for more information as to the cause for the investigation and affirmed its cooperation. The LCWR would continue meetings with the CDF in 2010, along with Bishop Blair, a member of the USCCB (*National Catholic Reporter* 2014).

On April 18, 2012, the Vatican’s CDF officially released the document outlining the Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR, discussing its cause for investigation and process for the organization’s renewal. The official document called for a five-year renewal period, along with the coordination of the USCCB and the three delegate bishops appointed to oversee the mandate in working and cooperating with the LCWR in achieving the

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Assessment's goals (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2012).

On March 13, 2013, Pope Francis was elected pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church; by April, to the disappointment of the LCWR, he reaffirmed the Assessment under the leadership of the new prefect of the CDF, Archbishop Gerhard Muller (McElwee 2013). The Assessment would continue for two additional years, when on April 16, 2015, the CDF accepted a final joint report on the renewal by the LCWR and U.S. delegate bishops, concluding the period of oversight of the organization (Carey 2015).

Although the Assessment has officially concluded, there is still much to be learned about its claims, the gendered-institutional dynamics in which it took place, and what it says about the tension on issues of policy and authority that exist between some female religious and the male-dominated clergy. No study to date has sought to examine the statements of the LCWR to determine if (and how far apart) they were from Church teaching, particularly the USCCB, as mentioned several times in the Assessment (Vatican 2012). Moreover, the influence of Catholic female religious on the laity is under-studied and the context of the Assessment and the leadership issues it relates to provides an opportunity to fill in these gaps. Therefore, it is in this spirit I press on in discussing the key groups noted in the Assessment and part of this examination.

### *The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

The influence of the U.S. Catholic bishops stems back to the American Revolutionary War period, as clergy looked to demonstrate that Catholicism was compatible with American democracy. However, the American Conference of Bishops first began to officially formalize in 1919 during World War I as the National Catholic War Council (NCWC), as a response to a number of economic and social issues. In the same year at the request of Pope Benedict XV, the National Catholic War Council reconfigured to better promote Catholic interests in the United States and became known as the National Catholic Welfare Council (Warner 1995). The next major era for the American bishops came during the Second Vati-

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can Council (Vatican II), which consisted of an assembly of Roman Catholic bishops from 1962 to 1965, concluding with a series of reforms to modernize practices in the Church among the clergy, religious, and laity. During the council, the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* was issued, advocating the creation of offices for services of dioceses and regions. In the United States, the bishops interpreted this to mean the establishment of a national conference to assist them in promoting Catholic social policy. In 1966, the bishops reformed the National Catholic Welfare Council, which became the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), an organization under canon law, and also simultaneously established the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) for commenting on public policy and civil law. As these coexisting organizations progressed, so did the American bishops' body of social teaching (Warner 1995). Finally, in 2001, the NCCB and USCC combined, becoming the USCCB. The USCCB represents the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the United States. The bishops themselves (some of whom have been promoted to the status of cardinal) constitute the members of the conference and in representing various dioceses of the American Catholic Church are largely secular priests, meaning they do not belong to a religious order but are ordained from a particular diocese and hence representatives of the institutional Church (Catholic Answers 2011; USCCB 2017a).

It is important to note that even though religious priests and nuns may not serve a particular diocese and report directly to their congregations' superiors, they still technically fall under the authority of the bishop in the area in which they reside and work (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2010; Vatican 1965a). Moreover, the USCCB is part of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church and, as discussed above with regard to the Assessment, the reason why three American delegate bishops from the conference were tasked with overseeing the renewal of the LCWR (Vatican 2012).

### *The Leadership Conference of Women Religious*

The evolution of the LCWR stems back to the 1950s and 1960s when nuns began to get more engaged in how religious, the insti-

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tutional Church, and the laity would respond to the modern and changing world. The first leadership organization of women religious on a national level in the United States, the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW), was formed in 1956 and by 1963 moved its headquarters to Washington, DC. During this time, the CMSW began to apply the reforms called for by Vatican II, held annual assemblies among their members, and, in 1968, formed a liaison committee that would serve as a mechanism of communication between the sisters and the American bishops. By the early 1970s the name of the CMSW was changed to the LCWR. However, a conservative splinter group from the original organization, the CMSW remained, expressing concerns that the LCWR “was deviating from authentic church teaching about the essentials of religious life” (LCWR 2017b).

The LCWR has maintained an active presence in the American Catholic Church, representing female religious throughout the country as a membership organization, consisting of fourteen hundred women religious who are leaders of their congregations in the United States. The members of the LCWR are either elected or appointed leaders of their respective religious congregations and come from a variety of orders. It is through these leaders that the LCWR represents 80 percent of the total fifty-seven thousand women religious in the country.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the LCWR represents well over a hundred different congregations of women religious (LCWR 2017c).

The primary purpose of the LCWR is to serve its members and congregations. In doing this it focuses on leadership development by offering mentorship, along with programs and workshops that focus on spiritual leadership. These activities are done with the goal of helping women religious better address issues of social justice in the United States through their work with the laity and other efforts, such as advocacy and education to help shape public policy.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Catholic Lobby NETWORK and Nuns on the Bus*

It was December 1971 when a group of forty-seven Catholic sisters, inspired by the women’s movement, arrived in Washington,



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DC, to open up a Catholic lobby promoting social justice policy at the federal level. The decision to create the lobby was a response to the bishops encouraging Catholics to not just carry out acts of charity but get involved in systemic change on issues of social justice. The nuns also saw forming the lobby as a way to live out the reforms of Vatican II, which called for the creation of a more just world. These nuns decided the best way to form their political lobby was to network among already existing social justice organizations and together build relationships with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to affect federal policy. Over the years, the makeup of NETWORK has grown more diverse to include the laity as well as people of all faiths or no faith at all.<sup>4</sup>

As noted in the Assessment, NETWORK as an affiliate of the LCWR came under scrutiny by both the Vatican and the U.S. bishops. Part of this was a result of the 2010 health care debate. In a show of support for the bill on behalf of Catholic female religious, who have a history of building hospitals in the United States and working with vulnerable populations to access affordable care, Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of NETWORK, wrote a letter to Congress endorsing the ACA. The letter was signed by over fifty sisters in leadership positions, including the LCWR (NETWORK 2017; Catholic Medical Association 2010). Again, the USCCB had a long-standing position against the ACA due to its belief that it federally funded abortion and its dislike of the Department of Health and Human Services' mandate for insurers to cover contraception, both of which are against Church teaching. The women religious who signed the letter felt the bill had protections against these issues, particularly for religious employers. Moreover, due to their experience in working with lay women and children, the nuns felt that the bill addressed important elements of reproductive care.<sup>5</sup> This showing of support by NETWORK and the LCWR created more tension between their organizations and the bishops. This tension was evident in a press release the USCCB issued regarding the Assessment, which noted criticism of the LCWR's long-standing relationship with NETWORK (NETWORK 2017; USCCB 2012b).

As noted above, the story of the Assessment became national news and Catholics around the country began showing their sup-

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port for the nuns, holding rallies and prayer vigils (O'Malley 2012). Seeing this as an opportunity to showcase the social justice work of women religious as well as their lobby, NETWORK decided to launch a “Nuns on the Bus” tour in the summer of 2012. By traveling throughout the country, NETWORK was able to bring attention to its causes and work to consolidate support among the laity regarding the Assessment (NETWORK 2017).

It is important to note that NETWORK, though mentioned in the Assessment, came under criticism but not formal rebuke and review by the hierarchy, unlike the case of the LCWR. Therefore, in this book I examine the LCWR's policy statements and actions but at times discuss the work of NETWORK and other dynamics of the American Catholic Church that are related to issues and challenges of female religious leadership.

### Lingering Tension: Religious vs. Clerical Interpretation of Vatican II

Before addressing some of the scholarship that this work relates to and builds on, along with how the analysis of the book proceeds, it is imperative to address some context and lingering issues of Vatican II, because it lays the foundation for the tension between the nuns and the hierarchy that the Assessment captures. In 1959, Pope John XXIII called for an *aggiornamento* (update) of the Church to bring the faith into modern times. As Western Europe was becoming more secular, the pope saw a need to reform some of the practices of religious life and also call for an increased role among the laity in the life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council commenced in 1962 and would bring forth a series of meetings among the Church's bishops, lasting until its completion in 1965 (Seaman 2013). Notably, women religious were not part of the decision-making process of the council. However, fifteen women in faith leadership positions (seven lay and eight religious) were permitted to attend Vatican II as official observers. The only American nun to attend was Sister Mary Luke Tobin, then president of what would become known as the LCWR (LCWR 2017b). In a 1987 interview with *U.S. Catholic Faith in*

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*Real Life*, Sister Tobin noted that there was excitement around the gathering of Vatican II and her congregation was eager for her to attend the meetings, encouraging her to find out what it meant for religious communities and particularly women.

For these sisters, the answer to these questions would come in the council's release of the 1965 document, *Perfectae Caritatis* (The Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life). Issued by Pope Paul VI,<sup>6</sup> this document is essential to understanding the tension between policy and authority among the nuns and the hierarchy, because both groups interpreted the reforms of Vatican II somewhat differently. For example, women religious, such as those associated with the now LCWR and affiliates like NETWORK, saw the decree as empowering, affirming the freedom of religious life as opposed to the clerical life of the institutional Church. The document called on the religious to take key steps in modernizing their congregations according to their unique histories and characteristics. It also reaffirmed the leadership of their organizations, noting that the religious were first subordinate to their congregations' superiors. The document also emphasized that the religious' primary responsibility was to live out the Gospel by more directly engaging the laity and working among them. These action steps would be interpreted by the nuns as an opportunity to not only reexamine the missions of their respective congregations but also increase their level of professionalization and education, which the document directly called for. Nuns were supported by their congregations and the Church to become as educated as possible; this ensured that they receive college educations and qualify for various professional careers. Thus, Vatican II brought forth religious women who saw their work not just in terms of a religious calling and duty but in terms of any profession they embarked on being part of their religious vocation if it were used to improve the conditions of people (Ebaugh 1993). This professionalization of American Catholic sisters arguably allowed them to use their professional skills in their social justice work and equipped the nuns with a policy expertise and ability to work in high levels of administration (M. Thompson 1986). As Ebaugh (1993, 404) argues, "Catholics and non-Catholics alike not only accepted the fact that nuns were career women but came to expect

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excellent service from them . . . In many instances, nuns paved the way for women into new professional areas. This is the case, for example, with hospital administrators, accrediting boards for various institutions, university professors, scientific researchers, university presidents and administrators of social work agencies.” Occasionally, this dynamic would put women religious in opposition with the institutional Church, subjecting them to scrutiny, because the hierarchy saw the reforms of Vatican II differently.

This difference in interpretation of the Vatican II reforms can also be seen in the council’s 1965 statement, the *Decree on the Pastoral Authority of the Bishops*, and the 2012 document outlining the Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR. This 1965 decree affirmed that the bishops were not only members of the hierarchy but part of the teaching and governing authority of the Church. The document tasks the bishops with the authority to ensure that evangelization activities be supported by Church teachings and that the religious, though part of different congregations, still be subject to the ordinary authority of local bishops and it emphasized their need to consult with the hierarchy.

Furthermore, in referencing Vatican II, the CDF’s Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR, noted that the indictment against the nuns came during the fiftieth anniversary of the council. In the Assessment, the CDF did not recognize the freedom of religious life, as interpreted by the nuns’ understanding of Vatican II, but instead called for their yielding to Church authority stating, “The Second Vatican Council clearly indicates that an authentic teaching of the Church calls for the religious submission of intellect and will” (Vatican 2012). Overall, the Assessment was making it clear that the nuns’ focus on social justice, along with some of their publications and speeches “that disagree with or challenge positions taken by the Bishops,” was taking the reforms of Vatican II too far in the eyes of the institutional Church (Vatican 2012).

### Discussion and Overview of Chapters

In proceeding with an examination of the Assessment and the tension between policy and authority that can exist between

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male and female religious leadership groups within the Catholic Church, Chapter 2 provides a firsthand look at how nuns navigate the institutional Church to impact social policy. Through a series of interviews with male clergy and female religious (including representatives from the LCWR and NETWORK), this chapter shows the various ways nuns utilize their position outside of the official hierarchy to influence policy and demonstrates the institutional scrutiny they face at times when doing so (e.g., the Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR). This chapter also highlights some of the differences between religious life and clerical life, which adds to the gender dynamics and tension experienced between the nuns and the hierarchy. The analysis also demonstrates how the gendered nature of the Catholic Church can at times create an environment of lay resistance to female leadership.

Where Chapters 1 and 2 lay the foundation for the tension that can exist between female religious and the male-dominated hierarchy, Chapter 3 begins a direct examination of the Doctrinal Assessment's claims by analyzing the policy statements of the LCWR and the USCCB to evaluate whether the nuns were in fact taking positions counter to Church teaching and calling their audiences to mobilize on these issues. This is important to examine as some researchers find that statements by religious elites can increase engagement and spur political mobilization (Campbell 2004). Clergy use their religious organizations and platforms to inform, bring together, and activate their flocks on a variety of social and political issues (Djupe and Calfano 2014; Olson, Guth, and Guth 2003; Wilcox and Jelen 2003; Wilcox and Sigelman 2001). Wilcox and Sigelman (2001) specifically examine how religious institutions encourage their congregants to vote via placing voting guides in their churches. Moreover, the USCCB clearly states in their key civic engagement publication, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (2007), that "during election years, there may be many handouts and voter guides that are produced and distributed. We encourage Catholics to seek those resources authorized by their own bishops, their state Catholic conference, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops" (10).

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Focusing more on Catholic women religious, Brigham (2015) argues that mobilized activities such as the LCWR's traveling *Women and Spirit* exhibit, highlighting the work of American Catholic nuns was a way for the sisters to mobilize and engage the public, gaining support for the social service work they do. And as previously noted, the Catholic sisters participating in Nuns on the Bus used the tours to mobilize the public on a variety of issues, such as immigration reform and health care. These tours also encourage people to vote on and advocate for an end to unlimited campaign spending (or what is referred to as "dark money") by political action committees via the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*. This particular tour, launched in the fall of 2014 consisted of holding seventy-five events in over thirty-six cities across the country, prompting even the attention and attendance of then vice president Joe Biden (Jenkins 2014).

These examples demonstrate that both male and female religious have mobilized on political and social issues and, at times, have called the laity to participate in their efforts. Therefore, in analyzing leadership groups within the American Catholic Church, it is important to assess whether their statements call their congregations to mobilize and, if so, on what issues. It is also important to examine if they call their audiences to certain types of activities. This helps answer a couple of significant questions: (1) Does the LCWR mobilize on issues counter to those of the USCCB (and hence the Church)? (2) Are there differences between these two groups in terms of how they mobilize and/or what issues they prioritize in their mobilization efforts? Overall, this examination adds to the literature on how religious institutions mobilize their flock on political issues and sheds light on any gendered differences in these efforts.

Continuing with the content analysis of the LCWR and USCCB's policy statements, Chapter 4 turns its attention to the language style and frames used by these groups in their messages. This chapter continues examining the claims of the Doctrinal Assessment to identify if these factors add to the belief that the nuns' stances were in conflict with the bishops and hence the Church. This chapter poses the question, Do the language

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styles and frames (e.g., points of emphasis) in these organizations' policy statements differ and, if so, how? For example, does the USCCB employ a more orthodox and masculine language style and the LCWR a more feminine and progressive language style? Do either or both of these organizations emphasize frames in their statements to bolster their positions, such as Catholic social teaching, natural law, or conscience protection? What does this tell us about the claims of the Doctrinal Assessment, as well as differences between these two leadership groups?

Through a national survey experiment of over one thousand Catholics, Chapter 5 poses the question, Do the LCWR's and the USCCB's policy statements influence lay public opinion? It is important to examine if Catholic religious elites have the potential to influence the laity on policy issues, as Catholics comprise about 20 percent of the electorate and are the largest single-faith group in the United States (Gray 2015). Scholars argue that religious leaders are in the position and have the capacity to influence public opinion (Campbell 2004; Djupe and Calfano 2014; Djupe and Gilbert 2002; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005; Wald 1992). However, compared to Protestant religious elites, analyses on Catholic clergy's influence on the laity via their policy statements is still very much developing. This effort is even more scant with regard to Catholic female religious. Regarding Catholic clergy, Wald (1992) found that there was an increased (though short-lived) level of support among Catholics for a decrease of defense spending with the issuance of the American bishops 1983 statement, *The Challenge of Peace Pastoral: God's Promise and Our Response*. In examining the influence of Pope John Paul II, Mulligan (2006) found that Catholics who found the pontiff favorable were more likely to share the Church's position against the death penalty and abortion. Furthermore, on the issue of capital punishment, Bjarnason and Welch (2004) found that Catholic priests yield significant influence, especially among parishioners who are more spiritual and less politically and socially conservative. Calfano and Oldmixon (2016) discuss how the bishops' influence over Catholics is inconsistent and limited with regard to priests' political behav-

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ior. In looking at material distributed to parishioners in Florida dioceses during the 2012 election, Holman and Shockley (2017) found as information is filtered down from the USCCB to state conferences of bishops and to local parishes, the political messages received by the laity from priests varies. The authors argue this complicates providing a congruent message on the Church's teaching and positions on political issues. However, this study and others have not accounted for the bishops' (nor the nuns') level of influence when Catholics are immediately exposed to their messages and/or statement source cues.

Chapter 5 helps fill in these gaps in evaluating if Catholic religious leadership groups, such as the USCCB and LCWR, have the ability to influence Catholic public opinion via direct and immediate exposure to their statements. Furthermore, this chapter connects back to the theme and discussion on the tension of policy and authority between the nuns and the hierarchy, as it examines if lay Catholics are more willing to be influenced on social issues by either a male or a female leadership group within the Church. Being a gendered institution that places a premium on male clerical leadership, are Catholics more prone to be influenced by policy messages and cues by the bishops or the nuns? Who do laity see as an immediate authority upon exposure to their social policy statements? Moreover, as the Catholic Church is an institution rooted in a culture of authority, hierarchy, and patriarchy, are lay Catholics with a predisposition to authority more likely to be influenced by the USCCB or LCWR, particularly on key issues addressed in the Assessment, like homosexuality and female ordination? Chapters 3 and 4 provide a sense of whether or not the hierarchy had valid concerns for issuing the Assessment through an examination of the nuns' and bishops' policy statements, but Chapter 5 provides insight into whether the hierarchy needed to be concerned that the LCWR had the potential to influence lay Catholics in the direction of their positions. Overall, was the LCWR a threat to the gendered dynamics and authority of the hierarchy?

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the key takeaways and findings from this analysis, showing what can be learned from the claims



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of the Doctrinal Assessment and about female leadership in the American Catholic Church. Dealing with the realities of a clergy and nun shortage, along with a decreasing number of practicing Catholics, what impact if any do the USCCB and female religious leaders, like those affiliated with the LCWR, have on the laity and the Church in general? In looking at Pope Francis's new Commission on the Female Diaconate, will female religious' position of authority in the Church be elevated or will they need to continue to navigate institutional constraints indefinitely? Essentially this final chapter brings together a discussion on what was learned from this examination of male clergy and female religious in the American Catholic Church, along with what challenges still exists and where the faith is currently headed in terms of leadership models and roles.