

Complaints about Priests in the Church of Sweden from 2001–2013

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Abstract

Media coverage of complaints about priests has generally focused on sexual misbehavior. This case study of complaints about priests in the Church of Sweden from 2001–2013 gives a much more varied picture. Documentation of all the complaints received during 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2013 was collected. In all, there are 199 complaints, which correspond to approximately 1.2% of priests every year. The rate of complaints rose and doubled, peaking in 2010. The complaints are categorized in three categories: general complaints, complaints that can lead to prohibition and other complaints. The most common complainant was the private individual (42%), although bishops and colleagues were also responsible for some of the complaints. During the years studied, private complaints increased. This finding is interpreted to reflect an increasing tendency in Swedish society to complain. Complaints about female priests are increasing and are now occurring at the same rate as for male priests. However, no female priests have been prohibited yet; only males have been. Sexual issues account for 15% of the complaints, which are outnumbered by other complaints. Decisions made by the Church chapters have changed during the studied years; earlier, the most common decision was to take no action, but later, the chapters generally decided on some type of action (for example, commissioning someone to talk to the priest or to give a statement).

Keywords: priests, misbehavior, professional misconduct, Church of Sweden

Introduction

It seems that there have always been complaints about ordained ministers (1 Samuel 2:12ss). It also seems that since the very early years of the Church, clerical authorities have been involved in taking care of different problems among the clergy (Brundage, 1987; Doyle, Sipe, & Wall, 2016). Many problems involving ministers are related to sexuality (Farrell, 2004; Flynn, 2003), but other common issues include addiction or economic irregularities (Ammerman & Schmitt, 2002; Lindegård, 1999; Ohlsson, 2002). Media coverage and discussion during recent years has mainly focused on the Roman Catholic Church and its failure to act against pedophilia among priests (Berry, 2000; Formicola, 2016). Clergy improprieties can be considered a breach of trust, which leads to painful situations both for the minister and

for the parish (Brewster, 1996; Crowell, 1995; Tanner, Zvonkovic, & Adams, 2012). Complaints may lead to the pastor leaving his/her parish, but there are certainly other outcomes that are painful for both the minister and the congregation (Becker, 1999; Hoge & Wenger, 2005).

The recent focus on Roman Catholic priests and sexual offenses has almost concealed the fact that clerical misconduct occurs in all churches and is not limited to sexuality. This paper is a contribution to the research on complaints about clergy, clerical (mis)behavior and the response from church authorities.

This paper maps out complaints about clerical misconduct and discusses decisions by church authorities. The research is conducted as a case study of the Church of Sweden after the disestablishment in 2000. The study is a follow up of a previous study (Hansson, 2010) investigating trends in complaints and in clergy misbehavior.

After a brief introduction to previous research within the field, the research aim is presented. Theoretical points of departure are discussed, followed by an account of the Canon Law of the Church of Sweden. Data collection is described, followed by the results of the investigation. Finally, the results and methods are discussed, and ideas of further research shared.

Previous research and research aim

Research on misconduct by clergy is mainly limited to sexual offenses in the Roman Catholic Church (Shupe, 2008; Shupe, Stacey, & Darnell, 2000). However, according to Ammerman and Schmitt (2002), clerical misconduct is a problem within all denominations. In a study of 76 ministers in 14 U.S. denominations, Ammerman and Schmitt suggest that sexual misconduct is “not as common as other ways clergy get in trouble with their congregations.” In their study on 14 different denominations’ non-sex-related incidents, for instance, failure to manage money, failure to protect confidentiality and incompetence outnumbered sex-related ones (55%). A majority of the sex-related incidents involved affairs between consenting—but unmarried—adults. Some (almost always) male pastors had a series of relationships with female parishioners in more than one church (Ammerman & Schmitt, 2002).

Lindegård mapped Swedish Canon Law regulations and priestly misconduct from the Middle Ages to the late 20th century (1999). In recent years, Ohlsson studied complaints about priests in the Church of Sweden in the 20th century (Ohlsson, 2002, 2012), and Hansson studied complaints about Swedish priests during the first five years after the disestablishment of the Church of Sweden (2000–2004) (Hansson, 2010). Klefbeck analyzed decisions by the dioceses and the Church of Sweden Appeal Commission (2012). Bursell published two overviews of decisions under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 in the Church of England (Bursell, 2007, 2009). Decisions made in the Church of Sweden and in the Church of England were compared by Hansson (2016). The research shows that complaints about the misbehav-

ior of Swedish clerics are substantially more frequent than ones made about Church of England ministers and that the most common decision in both churches is “no action” (Hansson, 2016).

In Sweden, however, there have been signs of increasing numbers of complaints and of new patterns of complaints and decisions; these outcomes call for a follow-up study.

The aim of this paper is to deepen the knowledge about complaints and decisions about priests and clerical misbehavior. It is a case study of the Church of Sweden and seeks to answer the following questions:

Is priestly¹ misbehavior increasing?

Are there changes in who is complaining?

What is the substance of complaints about clergy?

What are the decisions of the church authorities?

Are there any trends in the complaints and decisions?

Are there any gender differences?

The study is performed as a documentary case study of the Church of Sweden. All complaints about priests in 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2013 were collected and analyzed. Full records of the complaints were obtained from the diocesan chapters.

Theoretical points of departure

There are at least two possible theoretical points of departure derived from theology and studies on professions.

Theological aspects

From a theological standpoint, the Church of Sweden, along with most churches, argues that Christ instituted the ministry as a gift to the church (*BEM*, 1982). The important tasks are preaching of the gospel and administering the sacraments. During the reformation, the Swedish church retained the episcopal ministry and the medieval sees, and the chain of apostolic succession was unbroken. The ordination to priesthood is looked upon as a gift and a call to service. After required studies and examinations on the nature of the inner calling (*vocatio interna*) by the candidate, the ordination, with laying on of hands, occurs (*vocatio externa*). The call to service is not dependent on employment in the church, although most priests are employed in a local parish. All priests are called to faithfulness, knowledge and insight, loyalty and solidarity and to witness. In their letter on ordained ministry, the Swedish bishops stress that the testimony of life and deeds is important: “They are called, not only to bear witness

¹ The Church of Sweden preserved bishops and priests during the reformation and practices the threefold ministry with bishops, priests and deacons. These are the technical terms for the different ministers. This paper focuses on priests. For the sake of language variety, “clergy” and “ministers” are interchangeable with “priests” in this paper.

but also themselves to be witnesses of the gospel of love, reconciliation and hope. . . . Their private life is private only to a limited extent. It must not be allowed to compromise the reputation and credibility of the Church” (*Bishop, priest and deacon*, 1990: 60). However, the divine gifts are valid regardless of the worthiness of the ministers. After retirement, a priest is still a priest with full rights to preach and administer the sacraments, and with the same doctrinal and lifestyle expectations. A priest who has been prohibited will not be re-ordained if he or she is allowed to take up ministry again. However, the church has the right to oversee its ministers and to react if anyone does not meet its expectations. Many dioceses have *Codex Ethicus*—documents outlining the expectations of ordained ministers (see, for instance, *Codex ethicus. Stockholm*, 2003; Nordin, 2010).

Aspects from theory of professions

The discussion on professions has been ongoing in social sciences for almost a century. A profession is generally described by length of education (special knowledge), autonomy in work, voluntary associations organizing and controlling peers (both admission to the profession and exclusion), monopoly of certain vocational positions and a special ethos. The classical professions are physicians, lawyers and priests. Many authors (Abbott, 1988; Hansson, 2000; Karle, 2001; Koehn, 1994; Russel, 1980; Schmidt, 2008) argue that ordained ministry can be regarded as a profession even today. One important aspect of a profession is that it generally has a formal ethical code. This gives the profession an aura of altruism. Physicians, for example, have claimed a special ethos going back to the Hippocratic oath, which is still seen as a golden rule for physicians. According to Schmidt (2008), clergy ethos can be justified under two circumstances: the rite of ordination and the intrinsic goals of ministry or a practice-oriented approach. The intrinsic goals of ministry are related to the demands on the ordained expressed at the ordination. Generally, rites of ordination include vows of the candidate, the laying on of hands and a prayer to the Holy Spirit (Raun Iversen, 2006). The rite also includes promises to build up the church, to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, as well as follow and protect the order of the church and to “live among people as a witness to the love of God and of the mystery of reconciliation” (Church of Sweden Ordination Rite, 1986). It is thus possible to argue for a professional ethos for the clergy on the grounds of their ordination vows.

Many churches have ethical guidelines for their clergy. The Church of England has published both a committee statement (*Under Authority*, 1996) and guidelines in different versions (*Guidelines*, 2015). In Norway, a document on ethics was published by the Clergy Union (Morland, 1997). Several Swedish bishops have, as mentioned above, issued “*Codex Ethicus*” for the clergy in their respective dioceses (see, for instance, *Codex ethicus. Stockholm*, 2003; Nordin, 2010). The diocesan documents, which are very similar to one another, argue from both lines; the point of departure is in the ordination vows and the lifelong gift given to the ordained. This argument is followed by rather detailed advice on, among other things, faithfulness, knowledge and insight, loyalty and solidarity, relations, working hours, economic affairs and dealing with mass media. Although not explicitly mentioned, the

document is in line both with the theological expectations of ministers and with what is expected by a professional.

In a recent article, Tangen (Tangen, 2014) discusses ethics as a central part of leadership. Carroll (2011) argues that ministerial authority draws on both representing the sacred (ordination, personal piety) and expertise (certified and demonstrated) and seems to combine a theological and professional perspective. A special clerical ethos can evidently be advocated both from theological and professional theory.

Swedish Canon Law and clerical misconduct

One consequence of the disestablishment of the Church of Sweden 2000 was that the church had to establish new ways to supervise its priests, as the state would no longer do so. This does not mean that the church has obtained *privilegium fori*; priests are still under the ordinary courts. However, local priests are now employed by the parish, and the bishop and the diocesan chapter have a supervisory role and can act against clergy who do not live up to their ordination vows. Any person (not necessarily a church member) can make a complaint about a priest.

Any action against a priest must be founded on Canon Law Chapter 31 Para 11, 12, which states that the diocesan chapter can act against a priest under the following conditions:

The chapter *must* prohibit a priest who

- i. has abandoned the teaching of the Church;
- ii. has applied to be prohibited;
- iii. has resigned his/her membership (para 11);

The chapter *may* act against a priest if

- i. he/she has broken his/her ordination vows;
- ii. he/she has broken his/her professional secrecy;
- iii. he/she has lost his/her ability to fulfil his/her duties due to illness;
- iv. he/she has damaged the esteem of ordained ministry to a great extent. (para 12) (KO, 2016).

Priests are responsible to the local parish council in all other aspects of their employment; thus, they are under a dual structure of oversight. If the parish council receives any complaints about a priest and wishes to take action (such as admonition, notice to resign or dismissal), it must be authorized by the diocesan chapter. Authorization is given if the complaints do not pertain to the priestly vows. It is a complex system, but it ensures that all official complaints pass through the diocesan office. Hansson (2010) gives further explanation of the system.

The diocesan chapter can decide on the following actions: prohibition to officiate as a priest, (generally leading to dismissal), and from 2004, also admonition (rebuke) or a period of probation. The priest can appeal to the Church Appeal Commission and, in some cases, to the Swedish Labour Court. A priest who has been prohibited can resume ministry after a decision by the chapter and with the consent of the bishop.

The nature of the diocesan process is described as inquisitorial by Brodd (2016): i.e., “police,” “prosecutor” and “judge” are the same individuals. Their personal ideas about the

Church's teaching, a breach of the ordination vows or the esteem of ordained ministry seem to be crucial to the outcome of the procedure.

Data collection

All decisions by the chapters are public documents. To cover all complaints on priestly behavior during the period, all diocesan chapters were asked to send photocopies of all documents concerning complaints about priests submitted during this period. Documents concerning the years 2001 and 2004 were assembled in 2005, and documents from 2007, 2010 and 2013 were assembled in 2015. In all, the documents exceed 4,000 pages with a total of 274 cases. Some priests appealed the chapter's decision to the Church of Sweden Appeal Commission. Decisions by the Appeal Commission are not included in the study.

Applications by individual priests (N=10) to be prohibited (generally based on conversion to another church) or to resume ministry are omitted, as those do not include a complaint. All applications (N=65) from the employers to act against priests are also excluded, as those cases do not concern the ministry. Of these applications, 75% are approved, and most of the remaining cases were removed from the cause list on formal grounds. Thus, there were a total of 199 cases involving complaints about a priest. There were approximately 3,350 active priests in the Church of Sweden in 2007. The number of active priests is relatively stable over the period studied. Approximately 1.2% of these priests were under investigation each year.

The empirical data is divided into two groups: the earlier cases (years 2001 and 2004) and the later cases (2007, 2010 and 2013). Changes in complaint patterns and diocesan decisions will be mapped.

Results

Increasing number of complaints

The number of complaints has increased during the period studied (see Figure 1). In 2010, complaints peaked, but the reason for this may be coincidence. When categorized in different cases, it is obvious that complaints concerning the ministers' license to act as a priest (prohibition) has an increased over the years.

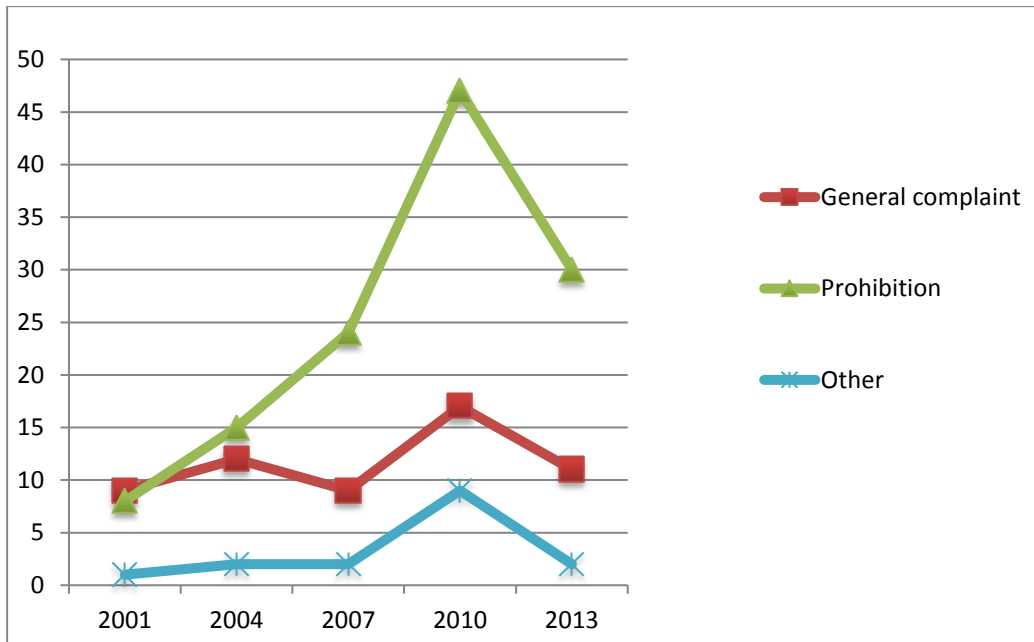


Figure 1. Complaints over categories and years.

Approximately 61% of clergy in active service are male and 39% are female. Men are overrepresented among the complaints, accounting for 74% of the total. However, there is a significant increase in complaints about women ($\chi^2(1, N = 198) = 4.113, p = .043$; see Table 1). In 2013, the rate of complaints about women is equivalent to their share in clergy at whole.

Table 1. Complaints over gender and year.¹

	2001		2004		2007		2010		2013		Sum
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Male	16	89	24	83	24	69	58	80	24	57	146
Female	2	11	5	17	11	31	16	20	18	43	52
Sum	18		29		35		72		42		198

¹Gender missing for one person

There are no significant gender differences in the complaints over complaint categories ($\chi^2(2, N = 198) = 0.349, p = .84$). Men and women are fairly equally distributed over the complaint categories.

Initiatives

There is a wide variety of people taking the initiative to complain (see Table 2). A majority of the general complaints are made by private persons. Private individuals are also the most common complainants in regard to matters that can lead to prohibition. There is no significant gender difference between whom they complain about ($\chi^2(4, N = 198) = 6.829, p = .145$).

Over the years, employers or Church councils have made fewer complaints and private individuals have made more ($\chi^2(4, N = 199) = 12.134, p = .016$).

Table 2. Complaints over complainants.

Complainant	General complaints (Col %) (Row %)	Prohibition (Col %) (Row %)	Other (Col %) (Row %)	Sum (Col %) (Row %)
Employer, parish council	2 (3.5) (15.4)	9 (7.2) (69.3)	2 (12.5) (15.4)	13
Bishop, diocesan chapter	1 (1.7) (3.7)	25 (20.0) (92.6)	1 (6.3) (3.7)	27
Colleague, the vicar	17 (29.3) (35.4)	30 (24.0) (62.5)	1 (6.3) (2.1)	48
Private person	35 (60.3) (41.7)	49 (39.2) (58.3)	0 (0.0) (0.0)	84
Other complainants ¹	3 (5.2) (11.1)	12 (9.6) (44.4)	12 (75.0) (44.4)	27
Sum	58	125	16	199

¹ Other includes pastors in other denominations, state authorities or groups of people

General complaints

A majority (60%) of the general complaints come from private persons, but colleagues and vicars have also brought complaints to church chapters. The complaints have been categorized as follows:

- minor breach of rules (29%)
- pastoral work (28%)
- lack of leadership (14%)
- theological issues (7%)
- freedom of e^xpression (7%)
- other (16%)

Minor breach of rules refers to things such as irregular changes in the service order or a priest doing pastoral work in another parish without the consent of the vicar. Other complaints are about staff issues or harassment.

Pastoral work can be rather tricky to define. One priest is reported for not taking part in a memorial hour after a funeral service, while another priest is reported for taking part in the memorial hour. Another complaint is that a priest “marketed God” in his/her funeral homily and spoke too benevolently about a deceased individual. A forgotten baptism led to another complaint. A disappointed couple complained about a double wedding; the priest mixed up the names of the brides and the grooms on several occasions.

Only vicars were accused of lacking leadership. Some of the notices seem to be more of a cry for help—the whole parish was in disorder.

Theological issues were rare. All these items concerned the response to a TV station that called priests to arrange a (fictional) baptism. The parents were introduced as a cohabitant same-sex couple. Three priests were reluctant to baptize under such circumstances and were reported. The chapter did not act, as the request for baptism was fictional.

Issues about freedom of expression also involve radio interviews or texts written by clergy, which were questioned by the complainant.

Complaints categorized as “other” included alleged fraud in a real estate affair, slander and a priest heavily advocating that the breaking-up ceremony at the end of the school year occur in the church, which led to major disagreements with the school authorities.

During 2001 and 2004, the most common decision by the chapters on general complaints was not to take any action (71%). Here, we find a shift: during more recent years, that figure is 36%. The most common decision currently is to take some kind of action. In 30% of the cases, the bishop or the area dean was commissioned to talk to the priest, and in 25%, the chapter made a statement or criticized the priest. It seems that the chapters wished to communicate that complaints about clergy are taken seriously, although their decisions are rather lenient.

Most of the general complaints concerned minor problems. Why those complaints are made to the chapter is not clear. It might be in part due to a complaining culture that wants to go as high up the chain of command as possible. However, complaints about minor breaches of rules, pastoral work and other issues could possibly be handled more quickly and effectively on the local level by the vicar (if the complaint is about a subordinate priest) or by the area dean.

Prohibition

Matters concerning prohibition (or from 2004, also admonition [rebuke] or a period of probation) account for almost 63% of all complaints (49% in the earlier period and 67% in the later period). However, there is no sign that this increase is due to new patterns of clerical (mis)behavior. Rather, the chapters acted in a new way and categorized more complaints as matters concerning prohibition. This can be seen two ways: it can be a signal that the chapter takes the complaints seriously, or it can be considered a concern for the legal rights of the individual (issues concerning prohibition are handled more rigorously in the presence of a judge).

These complaints have been categorized as follows:

- personal lifestyle (41%)
- major breach of rules (25%)

- freedom of expression (11%)
- preaching (8%)
- other (16%)

We first notice that there are no items on abandoning the teaching of the Church according to Canon Law Chapter 31 para 11. Any theological matters are instead handled as a major breach of rules (i.e., breach of ordination vows [para 12]). For example, a priest serving in a recently founded conservative denomination with its own bishops was not accused on theological grounds but on formal grounds (not allowed to serve another church without a permit according to priestly vows).

Personal lifestyle

Personal lifestyle issues seem to dominate this study. These included issues concerning human sexuality (patronizing prostitutes, adultery, sexual harassment, pornography on work computer, improper advances and in some cases alleged relations with young parishioners or sexual relations with trainees). These cases amount to 59% of the personal lifestyle category and approximately 15% of all complaints. We can also see that there were no complaints about cohabitation or divorce, per se. These issues are evidently so common that people do not complain. Even the bishops may be hardened to them. Registered partnership and same-sex marriages have been legal in Sweden since 1995 and 2009, respectively, and are accepted by the Church. There were no complaints concerning same-sex relations. The few complaints about adultery seemed to be filed as revenge by the offended party. There were no complaints in the material about pedophilia, but that is coincidental due to the selection of years. There was a limited number of cases in other years leading to prohibition.

Other lifestyle issues concerned the use of drugs (mainly alcohol): drinking too much or drinking when in charge of a youth group study tour abroad. There were also some economic irregularities categorized as lifestyle issues, such as using the office credit card as a means of strengthening one's liquidity, accepting a large legacy and buying a house at a presumably very good price from a parishioner.

Major breach of rules

The major breach of rules category was dominated by complaints about priestly confidentiality. Some employees filed complaints after a conversation with the vicar on job-related matters. However, priestly confidentiality is not applicable to those conversations, only to confessions and cure of souls.

Theological issues were generally handled as breach of the ordination vows. One priest allowed a student (a candidate to Holy Orders) to celebrate the Eucharist, including consecrating the elements, in contradiction to Church of Sweden doctrine and rules. The defense given was a theological view of the Eucharist, which was not in line with the Church's teachings. The chapter decided that this was a breach of the ordination vows to follow the teaching of the Church and decided upon a rebuke (Canon Law 31 para 12). It was, however, not considered abandoning the teaching of the Church (Canon Law 31 para 11).

Three priests were criticized for not reporting a colleague after witnessing him molesting another colleague. Some priests were reported for not taking communion when mass was celebrated by a female priest. Such reports seem to be an issue of professional cohesiveness rather than a breach of rules, as there is no Canon Law on taking communion.

Freedom of expression

Social media seems to be both fruitful and problematic. A few priests were reported for their nasty language or statements on the Internet. Although everyone has his/her constitutional right to freedom of expression in Sweden, the chapters find that there are some limitations for the clergy. These restrictions are grounded in what is appropriate for clergy and concern both wording and content. One priest who joked about the Swedish archbishop's German roots and made connections to Nazism was rebuked.

Preaching

Some issues were related to homilies. One priest complained about the parish as his employer in a homily, and another was reported for mentioning people by name and telling about their former problems.

Some complaints were not possible to categorize. One priest forgot a burning candle and the vicarage was destroyed by fire. Another priest took action in a child-custody case in contradiction to the order of the Court. Quite a few complaints were about rudeness and fits of rage.

Other complaints

Most of the complaints in this category were related to the laws concerning the priest officiating at weddings. Some priests had not checked the documents regarding impediments to marriage presented by the couple and wed them without legal grounds. Those priests were prohibited from officiating weddings for a period and were criticized.

Decisions

The decisions by the chapters in all matters can be found in Table 3, which includes a comparison between the earlier period (2001, 2004) and the later period (2007, 2010, 2013).

Regarding *general complaints*, the decision to take no action halved in the later period as the chapters became more inclined to take some action, such as commissioning someone (e.g., the bishop or the area dean) to talk to the priest or issuing criticism or a statement. Those decisions almost quadrupled in the later period. There is no sign that clerical misbehavior has increased, so this must be interpreted as a new decision pattern by the chapters. The chapters indicate that they take matters seriously although the sanctions are mild.

As mentioned, more complaints were considered to be about *prohibition*. However, the rate of enforcing prohibition was reduced from approximately 17% to 4%. The numbers of admonition and a period of probation also diminished from approximately 35% to 20%. On the other hand, decisions to take no action in those cases increased from 13% to 47%. This indicates

that more, but less severe, complaints were handled as issues that can lead to prohibition in the end. The chapters have changed their handling of complaints. It may also indicate that misbehavior among clergy has not become more severe than before.

Regarding decisions on *other issues*, the figures are so low that it is not possible to draw any conclusions from the material.

The chapters seldom state the reasons for their decisions. The regulations in the Canon Law are ambiguous; for example, the regulation “He/she has damaged the esteem of ordained ministry to a great extent” is especially difficult to interpret. This means that the personal views of the bishops and the members of the chapters determine who has damaged the esteem of ordained ministry. It seems that the chapters often refer to decisions by the Church of Sweden Appeal Commission or to the Codex Ethicus documents when making their decisions: the former decisions serve as guidance for the chapters. However, those decisions are also based on the same ambiguous regulations in the Canon Law, and at least to some extent, they mirror the personal views of the judges. The Codex Ethicus documents are problematic in the same way: they reflect the ideas of the authors.

Table 3. Decisions by the chapters over category and period.

Category Decision	General complaints		Prohibition		Other issues		Sum
	Earlier ¹ (Col %)	Later ² (Col %)	Earlier ¹ (Col %)	Later ² (Col %)	Earlier ¹ (Col %)	Later ² (Col %)	
No action	15 (71.4)	13 (35.1)	3 (13.0)	48 (47.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (23.1)	82
Commission to someone	1 (4.8)	12 (32.4)	3 (13.0)	5 (4.9)	2 (67.0)	0 (0.0)	23
Criticism, statement	2 (9.5)	9 (24.3)	5 (21.7)	23 (22.5)	1 (33.3)	7 (53.9)	47
Admonition period of probation	1 (4.8)	0 (0)	8 (34.8)	20 (19.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	29
Prohibited	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (17.4)	4 (3.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8
Other	2 (9.5)	3 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (25.0)	10
Sum	21	37	23	102	3	13	199

¹ 2001 and 2004

² 2007, 2010 and 2013.

Discussion

On the results

Ammerman and Schmitt (2002) suggested that other problems among clergy outnumber sexual misconduct. This investigation shows that approximately 15% of all complaints were related to sexual misbehavior; this value is less than one-third of the rate proposed by Ammerman and Schmitt. Other problems were much more frequent. However, different methods were used in these investigations, which may lead to the varying results. Ammerman and Schmitt asked the pastors themselves about problems, and our investigation maps all complaints about priests. The research is also conducted in different churches organized in different ways. The general view about sexuality may be more permissive in Sweden, which can lead to fewer complaints; divorce, cohabitation, same-sex relations and other sexual practices among clergy seem to be accepted (leading to no complaints). Those practices are not regarded as contrasting the teaching of the Church or the ordination vows or as damaging to the esteem of ordained ministry.

Although this investigation shows increasing numbers of complaints about Church of Sweden priests, there is no reason to conclude that clergy misbehavior has increased. Rather, we see a changing pattern in complaining about priests. More complaints are sent to the chapters, although many of the complaints could be handled by the vicar or the area dean. Most of the general complaints (29% of all complaints) are of this nature. This comes from the idea that anyone can complain about a priest, even if they are not personally concerned. In the Church of England, there is a stipulation that only those with proper interest have the right to make a complaint. The rise of complaints in Sweden should be interpreted as due to a general mindset to complain. Although complaints in some areas have diminished during the last few years (e.g., complaints against lawyers at high levels went from 15% per year in 2000 to 11% in 2013), complaints about schools and teachers have increased substantially during recent years (*Anmälningsärenden 2013, 2014*). There is no empirical support for the conclusion that clergy misbehavior has increased; the conclusion is instead that the tendency to complain has increased. The increasing numbers of private individuals and declining numbers of employers and Church councils complaining indicate that the reason for more complaints is an increased tendency to complain among the general population.

The legal right of freedom of expression is a problematic area for the church chapters. On one hand, everyone is entitled to his/her freedom of expression. On the other hand, the chapters argue that this freedom is restricted by the ordination vows and the expectation of certain behavior. This means that clergy cannot use just any kind of language; they must express their views in a manner that is becoming for the clergy.

In the earlier period, men were overrepresented when it came to complaints. In the later period, however, women have caught up, and across the categories, complaints between men and women are now distributed fairly equally. If women have had a honeymoon with parishioners during the first 50 years of being allowed to be priests, that seems to have come to an

end. However, although there are no statistically significant gender differences in the complaint categories or decisions, we can see that more men than women are accused of, and found guilty of, sexual misconduct. This finding is in line with general knowledge about men and sex-related problems. Only two women were found guilty and were criticized regarding extramarital love affairs. We can also see that only men have been prohibited. Women clergy, as well as women in general, do not engage in unbecoming sexual practices.

As mentioned above, the Canon Law is ambiguous on what it means to damage the esteem of ordained ministry. After the first years studied, the decisions of the chapters seem predictable: similar complaints get the same verdict. However, the chapters seldom refer to theological lines of argument and never to arguments on the nature of priesthood as a profession.

On the methods

The empirical data for this investigation are photocopies of all the complaint documents spanning five years. This means that we have only written documentation; no interviews or follow-up investigations were carried out. Any undocumented phone calls, interviews or email conversations are unknown to us, as are discussions among the diocesan staff. Any appeal to the Church of Sweden Appeal Commission is also omitted, as we investigated the decisions by the chapters. In addition, we don't know if there is a "holy hush" (cf Nason-Clark, 2000). However, regarding the objectives of this investigation (see above), the empirical data give an accurate picture of frequency, complainants, decisions and gender issues.

Another problem with written documentation is that we do not know the complainants' motives. There is probably a wide variety of motives, from revenge or hostility to a severe concern for individuals or for the Church.

However, these research concerns are incentives for follow-up studies that focus on interviews with bishops, complainants and priests rather on the findings of this study.

Further research

The results can be summarized as follows. Although complaints about clergy have increased, the number of complaints is low. There is no reason to believe that clergy misbehavior has increased; rather, the increase reflects a greater tendency among general people to complain. More complaints have been made by private individuals and fewer by employers. The complaints have been categorized as general complaints (about minor issues), complaints that can lead to prohibition and other complaints.

Complaints about female priests are now at the same level as for male priests. Church authorities have changed their response to complaints: it is more common in the later years of this investigation for the chapters to take some action. In the earlier period, "no action" was the most common decision. However, the actions are generally rather mild. Very few (only male) priests have been prohibited. Sexual misconduct is much less prevalent than suggested in the international discussion, which can reflect Swedish permissiveness in sexual matters.

The chapters seldom use arguments derived from theology or theory of professions. The Codex Ethicus and the Bishops Letter on Holy Orders seem to be more important. The decisions by the chapters seem to be predictable, but the reasons for the decisions are seldom stated.

There are several areas of interest for further research. One is a comparative perspective on the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic countries. Another is an in-depth study on decisions and their aftermath, presumably with interviews of different persons involved. A third perspective might be a comparative study with ministers in minority churches in Sweden or including other professions. This study, however, seems to be the first of one distinctive group of professionals and gives ground for further investigations.

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