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Chapter of Faults as a Tool of Power in Contemporary Catholic Orders

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Abstract

The monastic practice of confessing faults communally (*capituli culparum*) was partially altered following the Second Vatican Council. Additionally, new forms emerged that emphasise analysing and correcting improper conduct and reinforcing desirable behaviour, rather than merely engaging in self-criticism and penance. Both the classical *capitulum culparum* and its derived forms occur with varying frequency. Sociologically, an order manifests features of a Goffmanian total institution. This article aims to present a broad spectrum of practices from the political perspective, discussing both their intended goals, and above all, their real meaning as an instrument of power. This study is based on documents from religious communities in Poland and individual interviews with its members.

Keywords: chapter of faults, power, self-criticism, discipline, total institutions, Catholic orders, monasticism
Słowa kluczowe: kapituła win, władza, samokrytyka, dyscyplina, instytucje totalne, zakony katolickie, monastycyzm

Introduction

The chapter of faults (Latin: *capitulum culparum*) and related practices are defined here as formalised self-criticism sessions moderated by the superior, conducted within the context of a Catholic religious community, and focused specifically on offences against internal regulations (rules, constitutions, and lower-ranking regulations) and communal life. This practice, along with its spiritual and ascetic dimensions, may serve as an instrument for exercising authority within the order, facilitating behavioural control and enabling the superior, as well as, potentially, other community

members, to provide instruction and guidance. Ultimately, it may help individuals deeply internalise the community's rules. In the perception of consecrated persons, it may also serve psychological purposes as a tool for resolving conflicts and addressing feelings of guilt associated with transgressions. Due to the broad scope of the chapter of faults, this paper will focus specifically on its disciplinary dimension.

The concept that best suits a chosen aspect of the research is a total institution. This is "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life"[1] – characterised by the following features: (1) the institution is separated from society as a whole; (2) members fundamentally function as a cohesive group, with limited privacy and without the barriers that separate different spheres of life, such as home and work; (3) the lives of members are regulated by internal rules; and (4) there exists a clear division between superiors and ordinary members.[2] According to Erving Goffman's typology of total institutions, the monastery serves as an example of the fifth and final type – a (voluntary) one, designated for spiritual purposes:[3] (1) in the case of convents under papal enclosure, the separation from society is manifested physically, whereas in other scenarios, it may simply be manifested as a general enclosure; (2) members of the convent function as a group, not necessarily "large"; (3) the rules governing the lives of its members are the community's own law and Church Canon law; (4) the division between superiors and other members exists but is less pronounced in monastic[4] settings than in many other total institutions. According to Canon law, it is intended to be, or at least should be, temporary. Also, Goffman's concept is not a complete and closed list of features relevant to all cases, but rather a cluster of features which tend to occur typically.[5] As previously discussed, religious communities exhibit variation in how they adhere to certain structural features, following the conceptual framework of total institutions as outlined by Goffman and further expanded by Christie Davies.[6] These features include the following: the degree of openness or closedness, which is contingent on the type of community and its interpretation of "closure"; the explicit purpose of the institution – though inherently religious, this purpose may differ widely between apostolic communities, which engage in "external" missions, and cloistered communities, which are typically isolated from such engagements; and the dominant methods for ensuring compliance. While all members of religious communities take vows of obedience, the degree of strictness varies across communities.

The chapter of faults and related practices function as (1, 2) a process in which participation is restricted to members, and in some cases, to specific subgroups

[1] E. Goffman, *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, London–New York 2017, p. xxi.

[2] *Ibidem*, pp. 5–7.

[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 4–5.

[4] This term is used here in a broader sense, concerning Catholic orders in general.

[5] E. Goffman, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[6] Ch. Davies, *Goffman's Concept of the Total Institution: Criticisms and Revisions*, "Human Studies" 1989, vol. 12, no. 1–2, p. 83.

within the community, but more importantly, it reduces the privacy of the members and favours the integrity of the group; (3) a mechanism for verifying compliance with established norms; and (4) a meeting chaired by the superior. This paper will discuss this connection with the main features of total institutions, taking into account others that are somehow related to the chapter of faults, like the formation of candidates.

I will seek to address the following questions: (1) What does the chapter of faults and related practices look like today in regulations and in practice? This will involve examining current practices and theoretical perspectives on self-criticism within Catholic orders. (2) What are the differences between orders that are important from the point of view of community discipline? This will involve a comparative analysis of how different religious orders implement the chapter of faults and related practices, focusing on their unique disciplinary approaches and adaptations. (3) What do religious think about such practices and why? Understanding the perspectives of community members will shed light on the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the chapter of faults, as well as the rationale behind their beliefs. (4) How is this opinion related to their personal experience? This inquiry will consider how individual experiences within the community shape members' views on the chapter of faults and self-criticism.

State of research

The chapter of faults, as a phenomenon per se, is yet to be comprehensively described. Most authors mention the chapter of faults primarily within its historical context, such as Terrence G. Kardong in his commentary on *Benedict's Rule*,[7] or David Knowles in his book on the monastic order in early medieval England.[8] Louis Sojka devoted his unpublished graduate paper specifically to the origins, history, and practice of *capituli culparum*[9] Bożena Szewczul's[10] relatively recent paper addresses the contemporary chapter of faults from a general theological and Canon law perspective. While it highlights this concept in the post-Vatican II religious life, it lacks detailed descriptions that consider various orders.

This article aims to demonstrate how the chapter of faults and its modern iterations serve as mechanisms for controlling conduct, disciplining, and influencing members of religious communities through self-regulation, peer interaction, and oversight by superiors. The novel contribution of this article lies in examining this issue from a social science perspective, specifically political science, by analysing

[7] T.G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, Collegeville 1996, p. 369.

[8] D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England. A History of Its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council 940–1216*, Cambridge–London–New York–Melbourne 1950, p. 430.

[9] L. Sojka, *The Chapter of Faults: An Examination of its Origins, History, and Practice*, graduate paper, Saint John's University 1989.

[10] B. Szewczul, *Ascetyczna praktyka kapituły win w instytutach zakonnych*, "Studia Redemptorystowskie" 2012, vol. 10, pp. 476–485.

how the chapter of faults and related practices function as tools for maintaining discipline within voluntary groups, such as religious orders. Additionally, it addresses the "original" monastic practice of group self-criticism in its current forms, considering various regulations and numerous religious opinions.

Methodology

The methods applied in this article include: (1) analysing documents from the relevant laws of religious orders, with a focus on provisions concerning the chapter of faults and similar practices, and (2) examining statements from in-depth semi-structured interviews with religious individuals from various types of communities – both male and female, as well as strictly monastic[11] (including cloistered) and active – emphasising individuals in positions of authority. Additionally, surveys were also taken into account. The documents were sourced from church and university libraries and were sometimes provided by members of the orders during the interviews. The interviews took place in the interviewees' cloister, one in a café (pertaining to a former sister), and one online. Each interview lasted an average of 90 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. The surveys were completed online.

This article is structured as follows: the first section discusses the origins of the chapter of faults and the changes following the Second Vatican Council. The second section provides an overview of the legal regulations governing communities that practice the chapter of faults or similar forms of self-criticism, examining their various forms and stated functions. The third section analyses in-depth interviews concerning typical faults and the pros and cons of public self-criticism within the community.

The sources of the chapter of faults and the changes after the Second Vatican Council

The monastic practice known as the chapter of faults, derived from the Latin word for "guilt" (*culpa*), involves the public confession of transgressions during a meeting of the monastic community. This practice is one of the traditional ascetic disciplines of monastic life, tracing its origins back to the beginnings of cenobitic monasticism. Theologically, it relates to the evangelical practice of fraternal admonition and the confession of sins before others (cf. Gospel of Matthew 18:15–17; Epistle of James 5:16).[12] The practice is mentioned in the Rule of St. Benedict from the 6th century.[13]

[11] I used this term here in a narrower sense – to describe specific order anonymously and to underline its more traditional profile.

[12] B. Szewczul, *op. cit.*, pp. 477–478.

[13] *Rule of St. Benedict*, 46, https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/50040/pg50040-images.html [access: 18.09.2025]. For Vatican and Canon law documents all numbers mark the chapters, not pages.

According to the Vatican *Norms* of 1901, self-accusation was limited to external faults.[14] This limitation arises from the fact that rules, religious constitutions, and minor documents of particular law are not binding under sin.[15] Consequently, these do not inherently pertain to the realm of sacramental confession unless their violation stems from contempt for religious law, a formal order issued based on the vow of obedience is involved, or the offence concerns the vow of chastity, which constitutes a sin regardless of the profession.

Following the Second Vatican Council, this practice underwent further changes aimed at simplifying and softening its approach, moving away from the meticulous observance of regulations. During this period, the classic chapter of faults was partially replaced by practices termed as revision of life, chapter of renewal, and other similar terms – terminology that varies among communities. The Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* by Paul VI, which established implementing regulations for certain decrees of the Second Vatican Council (specifically *Perfectae Caritatis*, the decree on the renewal of religious life adapted to contemporary times), urged religious communities to focus particularly on penance and mortification. It also called for the revision of penitential practices in religious orders to ensure that, after considering Eastern and Western traditions and contemporary circumstances, they could be effectively practiced, including the adoption of new forms.[16] The 1982 document of the International Theological Commission, *Penance and Reconciliation*, lists the chapter of faults and revision of life as forms of spiritual practice with a reparative character for sins.[17] In the 1994 Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*, revision of life and other traditional forms, along with fraternal correction, are cited as ways to transmit the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the community for its edification.[18]

Viewed from the perspective developed for this paper, these newer forms of *capituli culparum* address similar issues but emphasise analysing and correcting improper behaviour within the total institution. They also reinforce desirable behaviour and allow for greater interaction among participants, rather than solely focusing on self-criticism in the community forum and receiving penance from the superior, as was typical in the classic version.

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[14] Sacra Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium, *Normae secundum quas procedere solet in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium*, 1901, 168.

[15] B. Szewczul, *op. cit.*, p. 478.

[16] Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae. Motu proprio implementing the following decrees of Vatican Council II: Christus Dominus, Presbyterorum Ordinis, Perfectae Caritatis, Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 1966, 22, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19660806_ecclesiae-sanctae.html [access: 18.09.2025].

[17] International Theological Commission, *Penance and Reconciliation*, 1982, C.1.2, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1982_riconciliazione-penitenza_en.html [access: 18.09.2025].

[18] Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor. Fraternal life in community*, 1994, 32, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccscrlife/documents/rc_con_ccscrlife_doc_02021994_fraternal-life-in-community_en.html [access: 18.09.2025].

Contemporary religious regulations concerning the chapter of faults and related practices

In this section, I discuss the theoretical framework based on documents from 36 religious communities in Poland, predominantly female, where practices such as the chapter of faults or revision of life are mentioned and can be identified as forms of community self-accusation. While the names may vary, I use them as they appear in the documents. The analysis focuses on aspects important to this article's scope, such as the forms, significant circumstances, and declared functions of these practices, while disregarding the irrelevant ones.

The practices in question come in a variety of forms; in some orders, multiple types are observed, such as both the classic chapter of faults and the revision of life. In this study, I assume the following conditions are necessary for a practice to qualify as chapter of faults: (1) the meeting is structured and takes place at the initiative and under the leadership of the superior; (2) it involves a confession of specific external transgressions or a general self-criticism by a specific person in relation to community life and religious law; (3) it occurs in the presence of the entire community. There are also individual self-accusations before superiors,[19] between the members involved,[20] individual requests for penance for material damage caused,[21] or in various circumstances such as leaving the community house,[22] which, however, fall outside the scope discussed here.

Both the classic *capitulum culparum* and other forms derived from it occur with varying frequency, often regularly or sometimes only on special occasions, such as during Advent, the Great Lent, retreats, vows, visitations, specific holidays, at the end of the year, or tenure. Frequency is important due to the level of control in a specific community; however, not all accessed documents mention the frequency of the meetings. These practices may be connected with other activities, such as requesting minor permissions. They are most often linked with a prior examination of conscience, similar to confession. Sometimes the assumption is expressed that the seriousness of the violation of religious law concerns the life of the community and not any sin that may be connected with it.[23] In a cloistered convent it may also happen that after making their accusations, novices and junior sisters leave the chapter.[24] In apostolic

[19] E.g., *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek Posługujących Ubogim*, Kraków 2006, 130; *Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Najświętszej Duszy Chrystusa Pana*, Kraków 1988, 163. In Appendix, both communities are marked as ZSAPU and CACh.

[20] E.g., *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Reguła i Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Franciszkanek od Cierpiących*, Warszawa 1988, 102. In Appendix, this community is marked as CSFA.

[21] E.g., *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Miłosierdzia św. Karola Boromeusza w Trzebnicy*, Trzebnica 1989, 86. In Appendix, this community is marked as SCB.

[22] E.g., *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Opatrzności Bożej*, Przemyśl 1997, 251. In Appendix, this community is marked as SDP.

[23] *Konstytucje Mniszek Zakonu Kaznodziejskiego*, Warszawa 1987, 70–71. In Appendix, this community is marked as OP Nuns.

[24] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji Najświętszego Sakramentu*, Warszawa 1988, 46. In Appendix, this community is marked as OSBap.

communities, novitiate sisters typically live in separately under the leadership of the novice mistress.

In some orders, various forms of *capituli culparum* coexist: a chapter of faults in the form of classic self-accusation and a community meeting known by various names, the most typically a revision of life – less formal, dialogic, and potentially also taking into account positive aspects as well. In some communities, only such newer, dialogic forms are practiced. Some communities practice various forms for various situations.

The differences between traditional and newer forms of the chapter of faults[25] are discussed based on the regulations of the Congregation of Albertine Sisters,[26] where both types of meetings coexist. This example well reflects the main differences between the old and modern types of self-accusation meetings, which are also present in other religious communities. In general, the meeting takes place every three months, while the modernised version is scheduled for every six months and can replace an ordinary community meeting. This indicates that the order favours the dialogic form, as it is ensured to occur at least twice a year, even at the expense of other activities:

Table 1. Comparison of Traditional Chapter of Faults and Modernised (Dialogic) Chapter of Faults

Traditional chapter of faults	**Modernized (dialogic) chapter of faults**
	Preparation
	Preparation during the preceding week involves focusing on a specific topic assigned by the superior (reading religious and Church documents); one may also meditate by considering prescribed texts from the Bible
	On the day of the chapter, the sisters engage in meditation on the announced theme (the superior may read the introduction to the meditation aloud)
Actual Meeting	
Communal prayer with Psalm 50 "Have mercy on me, O God"	Communal prayer to the Holy Spirit (either spontaneous or guided), along with the reading of a biblical passage or excerpts on a given topic
Accusation is made according to the formula (see below), each individual kneeling in succession	The conversation is moderated by the superior; with individuals sequentially offering thanksgiving, accusation, and apology related to the discussed topic
Penance is imposed by the superior (e.g., a prayer). The sister remains silent and kisses the ground	

[25] The names used in the quoted regulations are "traditional chapter of faults" and "chapter of faults in the form of a community meeting". However, as previously mentioned, the names are less important than the overarching idea of modernised, dialogic version, which also incorporates positive aspects.

[26] *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek…*, *op. cit.*, 500, 502–504.

The superior provides instruction and, if necessary, a rebuke at the end, after all the sisters have made their accusations	Observations and comments from the superior
Communal prayer "Before Your eyes, O Lord"	Communal prayer or song

Source: own elaboration based on *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek…*, *op. cit.*

An example of a self-criticism formula during a traditional chapter of faults is "Before Almighty God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, all the Saints, and you, dear sisters, I accuse myself of faults committed against the religious regulations: (the confession of one's shortcomings follows). For all this, I sincerely regret, I beg the Lord Jesus for forgiveness, I apologize to you, dear sisters, and I humbly ask the superior sister for penance". In large communities, this form can be recited together.[27]

A scheme for a dialogue form of the chapter includes the following questions: (1) What values are hidden in a given aspect of religious life? (2) Do we realise them and, if so, how? (3) What good do we see in the community in connection with the topic being discussed? In what do we see someone's effort and goodwill? What are our successes, joys, and sources of help? What are our infidelities, neglects, failures, and weaknesses? What causes us the greatest difficulty? (4) What is God calling us to do? What are the founders calling us to do? What does fidelity to the Constitutions require of us? (5) What desires and resolutions awaken in us?[28]

The most visible differences in the given example are the expanded and moderated preparation, the lack of penance, and the interactive form of the second type of chapter, taking into account that this is just one specific community.

What exactly are "external offences"? The list below is based on the constitution of the Benedictine Nuns of the Blessed Sacrament – the only accessible community document that precisely classifies external offences, as opposed to simply mentioning one, such as breaking silence:[29] (1) negligent performance of the Divine Service; (2) disobedience and undermining the authority of the superior; (3) disrespecting objects and premises, disposing of items without authorisation; (4) disturbing the silence, evading work, loitering around the monastery, interfering in others' affairs; (5) entering others' cells and offices without permission, indiscretions in community matters, defending one's own or someone else's guilt, lying about important matters, stubbornness and imposing one's opinion, writing letters without the superior's permission; (6) speaking harshly and haughtily to the sisters, deliberately arousing someone's anger, gossiping and slandering, going a day without reconciling with a sister, not granting forgiveness, reproaching someone for a mistake already corrected or forgiven, indiscretion regarding the sisters' personal affairs; (7) the most serious

[27] *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek…*, *op. cit.*, 501.

[28] *Ibidem*, 505.

[29] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Dominikanek Misjonarek Jezusa i Maryi*, Zielonka k. Warszawy 1989, 88. In Appendix, this community is marked as OP Missionaries.

offences are considered to be these: persistent refusal to obey the superior, soliciting outsiders to defend disobedience, strenuous efforts to obtain privileges that exempt one from basic obligations of the order, plotting against the superior or failing to disclose a known plot, revealing the serious shortcomings of the community or the sisters to outsiders, creating fractions within the monastery, forging the monastery seal, or letters of the superior.[30] Importantly, the most serious offences are considered those fundamentally and directly related to acts against legitimate religious authority. It indicates that the chapter of faults may play an important role in maintaining discipline among members and respecting the significance of the superior's position.

The specific regulations from various orders will be shown in the Table A1 – Frequency of Various Practices in Different Communities (see Appendix). This table is organised by the frequency of a meetings, which seems to be the most important factor from the perspective of (self-)control. The lack of detailed description – except for the order discussed above – prevents an analysis of other factors directly related to discipline, such as types of transgressions or the intensity of the meetings themselves. Still, some regulations explicitly express their disciplinary dimension – "the goal is to maintain discipline, respect the rules, and seek reparation for the Holy Trinity".[31] However, this may not necessarily be the primary focus: "for the sake of the obligation to convert, correct mistakes, maintain discipline, and revive the apostolic and monastic spirit",[32] or the concept of the chapter of faults under the direction of the inspector following an inspection in a specific convent.[33]

It is not clear if these are a kind of chapter of faults or similar practices: community inspection of communal life and apostolates,[34] and periodical revision of life and apostolates[35] or statement that each house should decide on the form of public self-accusation.[36]

The goals and desired outcomes of the chapter of faults and other forms of self-criticism in the community forum, according to the community's own law documents, include: (1) growing in humility; (2) making reparation to God, and also for the sins of the world, as well as the community; (3) preventing unrest by clarifying problematic issues – through reconciliation and apologising to fellow sisters/brothers; (4) undertaking penance; (5) verifying the life of the individual and the community within the principles of the Gospel; (6) deepening the interior life; (7) providing opportunities to experience spiritual love; (8) taking responsibility for the community;

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[30] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji…*, *op. cit.*, 46.

[31] *Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Najświętszej Duszy…*, *op. cit.*, 162.

[32] *Konstytucje* [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Opatrzności…*, *op. cit.*, 172.

[33] *Dyrektorium* [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Wynagrodzicielek Najświętszego Oblicza*, Warszawa 1990, 220. In Appendix, this community is marked as WNO.

[34] *Reguły Zakonu Szkół Pobożnych*, [Kraków] 2018, 66.

[35] *Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Misji*, [Kraków] 1984, 27; *Konstytucje Małego Dzieła Boskiej Opatrzności*, Warszawa 1990, 77.

[36] *Statuty*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Statuty Zgromadzenia Sióstr Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, Szymanów 1990, 32.

(9) setting a good example for others; (10) shaping a mature personality; and (11) renewing life.

None of the accessed documents mention potential dangers or "safety measures" regarding the chapter of faults in its various forms. These concerns are expressed only occasionally, such as an explicit ban on accusing other persons,[37] mentioning already repaired faults of another sister, behaving in a mean way toward fellow sisters due to the faults they express,[38] or an explicit call for discretion and mutual respect.[39]

None of those documents specify if the superiors also accuse themselves.

Chapter of faults in practice

This chapter will explore the practical aspects of the chapter of faults and related practices. As part of the broader umbrella project, all female (153) and male (66) religious communities in Poland were approached, either at the convent house or provincial level. This section draws upon 50 individual interviews, primarily with individuals who have taken perpetual vows.[40] Furthermore, a male group interview involved 3 members simultaneously, and another group interview involved 2 sisters. In both group interviews, the superiors participated as well.[41] The interviews were analysed using MAXQDA 24 software.

I also examine 7 online surveys[42] designed for individuals who did not agree to be interviewed but still wished to participate in the research. All other interviews and surveys where respondents denied participation in such practices or did not provide specific details or opinions about them were disregarded.

All interviews and surveys were conducted and collected between 2023 and 2025. The ages of all participants range from 23 to 80 years old, and the number of years since their first (temporal) profession varies from 52 to less than 1 year. The terms used by respondents for these practices are not as strict as those mentioned in the documents; names are either altered or not specified, following the commonly used

[37] *Konstytucje Mniszek Zakonu Kaznodziejskiego*, *op. cit.*, 71.

[38] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji…*, *op. cit.*, 46.

[39] *Konstytucje*, [in:] *Reguły św. Augustyna i Konstytucje Zakonnic Nawiedzenia Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, Warszawa 1993, 77. In Appendix, this community is marked as VSM.

[40] These include interviews with 13 individuals from 12 convents across 10 male active communities and 4 individuals from 2 convents of a monastic order (including 1 junior brother). Additionally, interviews were conducted with 16 individuals from 7 convents representing 6 female active communities (including 1 former junior sister and 3 current junior sisters) and 17 individuals from 10 convents across 7 contemplative orders (including 1 junior sister).

[41] Both group interviews were conducted in the additional orders beyond those previously listed.

[42] Surveys were completed in 3 female contemplative orders (all of them were previously counted), in 5 convents – in 3 of them interviews were also conducted. Additionally, 6 surveys from 1 female apostolic convent belonging to another community were completed, and the responses regarding the presence of the chapter of faults varied. However, the descriptions provided by those who confirmed the presence of such practices suggest that they primarily involve discussing problematic issues informally on an ongoing basis, which does not align with the definition adopted for this study.

phrase by interviewers, "chapter of faults or similar practice". In general, most respondents who participate in such practices described them as a form of community dialogue under various names. It is important to note that most respondents come from different communities than those discussed in the second chapter. This discrepancy is unintentional and results from limited access to documents. In general, the 3 orders where it was possible to compare the regulations with their practical application were found to be generally in line with their laws regarding this topic. An additional 2 communities (cloistered female and active male – the Dominican friars[43]) mentioned penitential practices in a very general way, which respondents explicated in their interviews as a chapter of faults or related rite, depending on the specific convent. The constitutions of another community (active female), where an interviewee reported taking part in such a practice, do not mention it at all. This means that they are probably regulated provincially (provincial regulations were not available) or are entirely informal and customary for a particular convent, which is less probable when considering the general practices of fairly centralised active female communities. One other community (active male), as confirmed by 2 interviewees from the same convent, does not practice what is described in their documents as "review of life" in the form of a dialogue; it is more about superiors expressing their general admonitions.

General conditions, times and places

Some people, when asked about the chapter of faults, regard the practice as completely extinct ("we moved away from the Council of Trent…"), or even as outright banned by the Second Vatican Council. Interestingly, some respondents believe that the traditional chapter of faults is qualitatively different from newer forms, perceiving a shift from a predominantly penitential focus to a more holistic approach that encompasses both individual and community life ("yes, we have something like a revision of life" – this was stated after this particular sister had strongly denied the existence of the chapter of faults just a few minutes earlier). This new perspective places greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships at the expense of strictly legalistic monastic discipline. Several respondents noted that their communities are currently seeking new forms of this practice and striving to find an optimal balance.

During the period of formation, instances of *capituli culparum* occur more frequently, although not consistently. One respondent recalled his novitiate period, during which, in addition to confessing one's own faults, it was customary to point out the faults of other brothers, with oversight from the novitiate master to prevent crossing into verbal abuse. None of the other respondents mentioned accusing fellow community members during the chapter of faults throughout their consecrated lives. However, 3 respondents from different houses of the same cloistered order indicated that (1) such practices occur in some locations (without specifying a particular

[43] *Księga konstytucji i zarządzeń Braci Zakonu Kaznodziejów. Tekst i komentarze*, Warszawa–Poznań 2022, 7 §II. Due to the significant number of their convents and members in Poland, I have decided to make an exception here and disclose the name of the community where the interviews were conducted.

monastery), with one case attributed to the great maturity of the community – though it is unclear whether this pertains to the same order or a broader context – and (2) it is possible that such practices exist elsewhere, even within the same order, as the regulations of autonomous convents fall under the responsibility of their respective convent chapters. Another sister from the same order reported that she had not encountered such practices.

The act of holding a chapter of faults does not necessarily require participants to speak out or address all transgressions. Some respondents mentioned that only two to three faults were typically discussed. Order of participation can be either voluntary ("We always value the first one who dares to…") or determined by the seniority within the community, starting from the youngest one. One respondent explicitly mentioned that accusations may also involve superiors.

The typical locations for this practice include the chapter house, chapel, or refectory. One respondent, a former apostolic sister who is now a nun, noted that her previous community mandated such meetings, while her current community does not. She also observed differences in her new community, citing the shift from the chapel to the refectory as facilitating more personal contact.

Examples of offences

Examples of misconduct mentioned in the interviews can be divided into two groups: (1) violations of daily schedule and household order and (2) failures in relationships with others.

The first group includes the following: oversleeping; being late for prayers or meals; slacking off at work; dozing off during the day; failing to pray the rosary as required by the constitutions; disorder in the cell; breaking something; slamming doors; breaking the silence; mismanagement – such as leaving a light on or overusing something; accidentally turning off the light during the liturgy; forgetting something; eating something without permission.

The second group encompasses failures in relationships with others, including ignoring requests for help; engaging in unnecessary discussion; raising one's voice (also at protégées, for example); conflicts; setting a bad example – behaviour that has upset or shocked others; and inappropriate behaviour towards others. In some female communities, this also relates to addressing fellow members as "you" instead of "sister + name".

Some respondents mentioned that they are not specific, i.e. in case of mistreatment they do not add the name of fellow members hurt by that situation, or, that they are even more general: instead of "I spoke badly" they say rather about charity in words. Speaking out about the unintentional small damages sometimes meets criticism, also from superiors, as irrelevant.

Benefits and risks

Many benefits or potential benefits were mentioned by the respondents. An atmosphere of openness is fostered within the community and closer relationships are built through mutual confession of faults (identified with a declaration of love), along with the opportunity to understand another person's perspective, which helps to erode facades and make relationships more authentic (24 times). Humility is learnt, understood as recognising the truth about oneself before God and others (15 times). They feel a sense of cleansing from guilt and catharsis associated with confession, leading to a sensation of starting life anew (9 times). They take responsibility for the community's atmosphere (6 times) and support each other in overcoming weaknesses (6 times). It can be considered as an absolute must-have for the community or at least very important tool (3 times), which serves a formative function (3 times) – where younger community members learn that certain behaviours are undesirable, while the others recognise that their mistakes have been observed and are being addressed, rather than being solely acknowledged by the superior. A junior brother from a monastic order pointed out that, without public self-criticism, it remains unclear to what extent monastic discipline applies to brothers older in terms of seniority and age, providing an official resolution and closure to conflicts within the community on both human and supernatural levels (1 time). The benefits mentioned by respondents are, generally, in line with the goals presented in aforementioned documents.

Threats mentioned by respondents include the risk of manipulation – inducing someone else's guilt and emotional abuse – though some respondents noted that previous generations were mentally stronger. This critique is directed not at the practice itself but at the individuals participating in it (9 times). It is necessary to speak about unintentional "faults" concerning trivial matters that may divert attention from more significant issues, as it is easier to admit to minor faults than to confront real conflicts (4 times, e.g., superior's comment "You stood there breaking those needles? Well, obviously not!"). There is a risk of provoking or inflaming existing conflicts instead of resolving them (3 times). If not performed voluntarily, it can be harmful (2 times). People risk being ridiculed as evidenced by the juxtaposition of offences from different levels, with anecdotal quotes such as "I broke the brush and silence" or "I broke obedience and the chamber pot" circulating as monastic legends (2 times). Reputations may be damaged (1 time). Awareness of others' wrongdoings can have a destructive effect on community life and mutual attitudes towards one another (1 time). Speaking in public with no interaction diminishes the individual, personal nature of reconciliation, which is essentially true for the traditional version of *capituli culparum*, although not necessarily for newer forms (1 time). There is an excessive focus on transgressions on a daily basis, as mentioned by a former member of the community where the chapter of faults is practiced daily (1 time). Issues too specific for a general community meeting can lead to misunderstandings (1 time).

General opinion of the consecrated persons

The approach of the consecrated persons to communal self-criticism is not unequivocal. Taking into account only individual expressions, 4 respondents (just 1 of them takes part in this procedure) are against such practices. 30 people recognise them as positive or rather positive (all of them participate apart from 2 sisters from a house which is too small to follow the general rule of their community regarding this practice). 23 opinions can be described as neutral (with 13 of the respondents participating currently or in the past). Current and former superiors were rather approving of such practices – out of 23 such persons, 9 were neutral or did not express any specific opinion, and 1 was against. In a group interview, nuns who actually take part in *capitulo culparum* expressed a neutral opinion. A male group interview revealed a positive opinion by the superior – and this was the only clearly positive opinion of a male religious. The second member was not against but raised some general reservations, not concerning their community ("I personally know one sister […] who left the community because of the chapter of faults, where she felt very strongly manipulated"), while the third one did not express any opinion. This community also practices group self-criticism.

What is interesting, in general the opinions of members taking an actual part in the chapter or faults (or similar practice) are more positive than those coming from members of communities that do not include this practice in their community schedule. Those who deny the validity of formalised practices of this type sometimes emphasise the need for free public self-criticism on important issues, as well as the role of individual admonition or simple one-on-one conversations. Supporters, primarily women, often reference their own positive experiences and a sense of cleansing, starting anew, and, paradoxically, the community-building nature of such practices. The arguments for and against primarily raise psychological aspects related to the chapter of faults, its consequences for the individual, and subsequently, the shape of the community, rather than purely disciplinary or organisational concerns, even in the case of superiors.

Conclusion

After investigating the regulations, interviews and surveys, we can observe a general prevalence of dialogic forms over the traditional chapter of faults. In fact, the earlier delimitation of topics possible in modernised forms serves as a tool of control itself, even if these newer forms are better suited for younger generations, as mentioned by the interviewees. *Capitulum culparum* and related practices are most commonly observed in female and cloistered communities, they are often integrated into a regular monthly/yearly schedule and can also be part of rites of passage associated with vows, the New Year, or retreats. In cloistered communities, where novices and junior sisters may confess first and then leave the chapter before the accusations begin, the chapter of faults may limit younger sisters' access to the true nature of the

community. The traditional practice of accusing fellow-members is probably rare but not entirely abandoned. Due to a lack of direct testimonies, this remains a matter for further investigation, as does the specific position of the zealot, who accuses *ex officio*. This role was (or still is) closely linked to discipline, understood as maintaining regulations and viewing the community as a unified body rather than just a group of individuals.

Actual participants evaluate this practice much more positively than those who have only heard about it. Most of the current and former superiors expressed positive or neutral views on the matter. At the same time, the psychological and, to a lesser extent, spiritual aspects are considered more important as pros and cons compared to strictly disciplinary factors. In fact, many of those factors can be described from different perspectives – psychological, spiritual, and disciplinary – simultaneously. Perhaps the rules are so deeply internalised among actual participants that they no longer perceive self-criticism as a tool of control. The primary benefits include fostering openness and relationship-building, learning humility – a more religious aspect – and experiencing a sense of cleansing. These benefits align with those generally mentioned in the communities' regulations, although they view this practice more as a spiritual tool. The main threats indicated by the interviewees include the risk of manipulation, an emphasis on unintentional "faults", and the potential for provoking or inflaming conflicts. The documents analysed do not explicitly mention any threats, but they sometimes caution against, for instance, discussing matters related to the chapter of faults after a meeting.

The prevalence of these practices in female communities raises questions that warrant further investigation. It is possible that these communities view their direct superiors not merely as "managers" organising daily life but also as spiritual leaders, a perception that may be different in male communities. Additionally, consecrated life for women tends to be more communal and less individualistic than for their male counterparts, with stronger bonds within the group being significant according to Goffman's theory. Furthermore, due to a more conservative daily life – at least in Poland – these communities may retain ancient monastic traditions in newer forms, alongside a more traditional understanding of obedience to superiors.

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Appendix

Table 2. Frequency of Various Practices in Different Communities[1]

Frequency	Community document	Female or male?	Type of the meeting also including other types, if applicable or interchangeable	Specific circumstances	Comments
Once a month[2]	OSBap*	Female	Chapter of faults	-	Sisters after perpetual vows – at least once a month
	OSB Missionaries*	Female	Chapter of faults	Not in Sundays or holidays	
	CSNJ	Female	Chapter of faults	-	
	ABMV	Female	Chapter of faults or revision of life	Day of the monthly recollection or the other day	Chapter of faults each month or rarelier and with a positive content; in a formation convents additional exercises more often than once a month

[1] In the table, I used *sigla* – abbreviations of community names, if necessary with the documents' short titles. In cases of multiple abbreviations, those adopted in English-speaking countries were used. For communities without established abbreviations or with ambiguous ones, shortened names were used.

[2] [OSBap] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji…*, *op. cit.*, 46; [OSB Missionaries] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Benedyktynek Misjonarek*, Otwock 1989, 160; [CSNJ] *Konstytucje*, [in:] *Reguła i Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Najświętszego Imienia Jezus pod opieką Maryi Panny Wspomożenia Wiernych*, Warszawa 1986, 119; [ABMV] *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Służebniczek Najświętszej Maryi Panny Niepokalanie Poczętej*, Stara Wieś 1993, 135–139; [CMBB] Zgromadzenie Córek Matki Bożej Bolesnej (Serafitek), *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Reguła, Konstytucje, Dyrektorium*, Kraków 1987, 80; [SSCJ] *Statuty*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Statuty Zgromadzenia Służebnic Najświętszego Serca Jezusowego*, Kraków 1984, 147; [CSS] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Kanoniczek Ducha Świętego de Saxia*, Kraków 1988, 64–65; [OP Nuns] *Konstytucje Mniszek Zakonu Kaznodziejskiego…*, *op. cit.*, 70; [CSP] *Statuty Zgromadzenia Sióstr Męki Pana Naszego Jezusa* Chrystusa, Płock 1983, 110; [SDP] *Konstytucje*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Opatrzności…*, *op. cit.*, 172; *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *ibidem*, 248–249; [MIC] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, Rzym 2018, 75; [SCB] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Miłosierdzia św. Karola Boromeusza…*, *op. cit.*, 84; [SICB] *Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Niepokalanego Serca Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, Kietrz 1995, 141; [Servants of Greater Poland] *Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Służebniczek Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, Luboń 1990, 76; [WNO] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Wynagrodzicielek…*, *op. cit.*, 115.

	CMBB*	Female	Chapter of faults or revision of life	-	
	SSCJ	Female	Chapter of faults or revision of life	-	
	CSS	Female	Act of reconciliation with confession of faults	-	
	OP Nuns	Female	Revision of life	Self-criticism or another form during convent chapter	At least once a month
	CSP	Female	Revision of life	-	
	SDP	Female	Revision of life		As a form of a control of life, making resolutions that will be reviewed on a subsequent occasion
	MIC	Male	Revision of life	Convent chapter	
	SCB	Female	Revision of life with a penitential service	Day of retreat	
	SICB	Female	Control of life with a common act of penance	-	
	Servants of Greater Poland	Female	Renewal of spirit – a chapter of faults, a revision of life or a penitential service	-	
	WNO*	Female	Chapter of faults	If it is a novena in a given month, the chapter of faults should take place then	
Bimonthly[3]	OP Sisters of St. Dominic	Female	Chapter of faults	-	As an accusation or a dialogue

[3] [OP Sisters of St. Dominic] *Zarządzenia*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Zarządzenia Zgromadzenia Sióstr św. Dominika*, Kraków 2020, 47.

Every three months[4]	OSBap*	Female	Chapter of faults	-	Novices and junior sisters join at least four times a year
	ZSAPU*	Female	Chapter of faults		Classical
	CSSE	Female	Chapter of renewal or penitential service		
	SMI	Female	Chapter of renewal – 1 of its 4 forms is chapter of faults, maybe a community conversation is its dialogue form		
	FDC	Female	Revision of life		
	ABVM	Female	Revision of life with confession of faults and a chapter of reconciliation	During Advent before the day of the Immaculate Conception, during the Great Lent before the St. Joseph's Day, during the week before Pentecost, and in September before the Feast of the Cross	In some provinces with the repentance service
Semi-annually[5]	ZSAPU*	Female	Chapter of faults		Dialogue, can replace a community meeting
	CSFA	Female	Chapter of faults	During the Great Lent and before the St. Francis Day	

[4] [OSBap] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji…*, *op. cit.*, 46; [ZSAPU] *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek…*, *op. cit.*, 129, 500–501; [CSSE] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Świętej Elżbiety*, Rzym 1987, 57; [SMI] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Maryi Niepokalanej*, Katowice 1984, 68; [FDC] *Dyrektorium Prowincji Polskiej Zgromadzenia Córek Bożej Miłości*, Kraków 1991, 43.1.1; [ABVM] *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Służebniczek Najświętszej Maryi Panny Niepokalanie Poczętej (Służebniczki Śląskie)*, Wrocław 2010, 51.

[5] [ZSAPU] *Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek…*, *op. cit.*, 502–506; [CSFA] *Dyrektorium* [in:] *Reguła i Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Franciszkanek od Cierpiących…*, *op. cit.*, 107.

Annually[6]	DC	Female	Revision of life	Yearly retreat of the community	
	CMBB*	Female	Confession of guilts	A general, collective confession of guilts at the end of the year	
	OSBap*	Female	Begins like a chapter of faults	End-year chapter of peace	
Not known[7]	OP Missionaries	Female	Chapter of faults		
	VSM	Female	Chapter of faults		
	WNO*	Female	Chapter of faults	Led by a visitator at the end of the visitation	
	CSSJ*	Female	Chapter of faults		
	CSSJ*	Female	Revision of life		In uniform groups, held according to "seeing – evaluating – acting"
	CSSJ*	Female	Penitential service with possibility of self-accusation		
	ECMC	Male	Chapter of faults		
	CACh	Female	Chapter of faults, revision of life or penitential service	For example during Advent or the Great Lent	
	OSB Nuns	Female	Revision of life		Encouraged but without a direct order

[6] [DC] *Oddane Bogu dla służenia Ubogim. Konstytucje i Statuty Sióstr Miłosierdzia Świętego Wincentego a Paulo*, Kraków 2004, K.21.d; [CMBB] *Ceremoniarz Zgromadzenia Córek Matki Bożej Bolesnej (Sióstr Serafitek)*, Kraków 2014, 8–13; [OSBap] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji…*, *op. cit.*, 46.

[7] [OP Missionaries] *Konstytucje*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Dominikanek Misjonarek…*, *op. cit.*, 92; [VSM] *Konstytucje*, [in:] *Reguły św. Augustyna i Konstytucje Zakonnic Nawiedzenia…*, *op. cit.*, 77; [WNO] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Wynagrodzicielek…*, *op. cit.*, 220; [CSSJ] *Zwyczajnik Zgromadzenia Sióstr Św. Józefa*, Kraków 2006, 10; [ECMC] *Konstytucje Kongregacji Pustelników Kamedułów Góry Koronnej*, Kraków-Bielany 1991, 117; [CACh] *Konstytucje Zgromadzenia Sióstr Najświętszej Duszy…*, *op. cit.*, 162; [OSB Nuns] *Konstytucje Kongregacji Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny Mniszek Benedyktynek w Polsce*, [Żarnowiec] 1994, 61; [OSB Missionaries] *Dyrektorium*, [in:] *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Sióstr Benedyktynek Misjonarek…*, *op. cit.*, 160; [SFT] *Konstytucje*, [in:] *Reguła i Konstytucje Sióstr Tercjarek Franciszkańskich Córek św. Franciszka z Florencji*, [Watykan] 1997, 38 §2; [CSFN] *Dyrektorium Prowincji Najświętszego Imienia Jezus*, Warszawa 2016, 3.2.2; 6.7.7; [OSBap] *Reguła Świętego Benedykta i Konstytucje Polskiej Federacji Klasztorów Mniszek Benedyktynek od Nieustającej Adoracji…*, *op. cit.*, 21.

	OSB Missionaries*	Female	Revision of life	Not in Sundays or holidays	In uniform, voluntary groups no bigger than 7 sisters, held according to "seeing – evaluating – acting"
	OSB Missionaries*	Female	Moment of honesty or penitential service with possibility of self-accusation	Not in Sundays or holidays	
	SFT	Female	Revision of life	Convent chapter	
	CSFN	Female	Chapter of faults or revision of life	Additionally a group self-accusation before the vows	
	OSBap*	Female	Begins like a chapter of faults	Chapter of the appointment of the officials	

* There is more than one type of meeting in this community.