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# Diversity as Tradition: Why the Future of Christianity is Looking More Like Its Past

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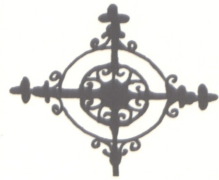
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# The Santa Clara Lecture

## Diversity as Tradition: Why the Future of Christianity is Looking More Like Its Past

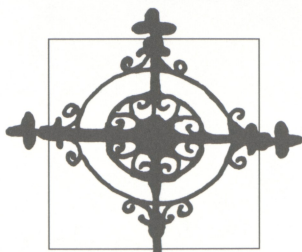
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## Horizontal Tradition

A number of excellent studies have appeared highlighting the diversity of the Christian tradition, most notably in the series edited by Peter Phan, "Theology in a Global Perspective." The majority of these texts emphasize the global nature of present theological perspectives. I would like to call this the horizontal approach to diversity. As one looks out at Christianity as it actually exists in the world, one sees a number of distinctive approaches differentiated either geographically (Asian Christianity, African Christianity, Latin American Christianity, Western European Christianity, and so forth) or methodologically (Feminist theology, Womanist theology, Latino/a theology, Process theology, Liberation theology, and so on) or denominationally (Orthodox, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, to name a few).

A somewhat different approach to diversity stresses the different historical traditions that have existed within Christianity. Here one is likely to emphasize the difference between the Christian thought and practices that grew up within the Roman Empire with those that grew up outside the Empire, especially the Christianity of the Persian and later Islamic empires, as well as those of India, Armenia, Nubia and Ethiopia. Here again, the approach is for the most part a horizontal, or at best parallel approach. Different traditions as they now exist are described as emerging from particular historical settings. Again, this is a valuable reminder of the oppressive and misleading emphasis on what Dale Irwin calls the Western master narrative of Christian history.

These are new and encouraging movements. Western scholars are slowly acknowledging that the story of Christianity includes more than the movement, for instance, from Nazareth to Rome, and from John and Paul the apostles to John Paul the Pope. To give but one example, according to David Barrett in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, until the middle of the fourteenth century less than half of the world's Christians resided in what is now known as Europe. The Persian Christian Church, meanwhile, grew to some twelve million

adherents by the year 1000.<sup>1</sup> What Irwin (among others) has named the Eurocentric meta-history of Christianity is being challenged more and more in theological circles.

As important as the recognition of horizontal traditions, however, is what I would term vertical diversity. That is to say that there is a great deal of diversity in the histories of each particular tradition. The present form of a tradition is not the form it has always had and is not inevitable. While the models of horizontal and vertical diversity can be applied to all of Christianity, my particular concern in this lecture will be with Catholicism. An examination of vertical diversity is extremely valuable as a reminder that Catholicism encompasses and has encompassed a wide range of practices and beliefs, despite over a century of attempts by the Vatican to standardize everything from liturgy to catechism. Tonight I would like to explore some of the ways in which the very diversity within our Catholic tradition can free us to face what is, once again, a particularly interesting and challenging time for Christianity, and more particularly for Catholicism.

## History

First, allow me to say a word about history.<sup>2</sup> Most people, for good reasons, assume history is what happened. As an everyday working definition, this isn't a bad one, but a little analysis quickly shows that history is in fact nothing of the sort. History is never just "telling it like it is," because history is not really the past. First of all, nothing about history is in the past. Every single history that historians currently write exists in the present. Every history that is still read, is read in the present. Moreover, every single piece of historical evidence (or at least evidence for that evidence) exists in the present; otherwise we would not even know about it. History, then, is irrevocably present. Secondly,

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Dale Irwin, *Christian Histories, Christian Traditioning: Rendering Accounts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 98, 109.

<sup>2</sup> This discussion on history first appeared in Gary Macy, "The Iberian Heritage of U.S. Latino/a Theology," in *The Future of Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*, eds. Orlando O. Espín and Gary Macy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 43-82 and idem, "The Future of the Past: What Can the History Say About Symbol and Ritual," in *Practicing Catholic: Ritual, Body, and Contestation*, eds. Bruce Morrill, S.J., Susan Rodgers and Joanna E. Ziegler (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan Press, 2006), 29-37.

history exists because of present interests. Somebody somewhere wants to know something about how they got to be who they are and why they are the way they are. A present concern prompts an investigation of the past data that still exist (in the present). Without some present interest on the part of some present person, no history would be written at all.

So all history is the concern of the present; all history serves some current concern, no matter how obscure. This concern, moreover, is not in the abstract. This somebody who is interested in an historical question comes from a particular society with a particular viewpoint; this somebody has a gender; this somebody belongs to a particular economic, social and religious group. Inevitably, these settings shape both the kind of questions this somebody asks and how they answer those questions.

History, if I may be so bold, turns out to be the stories that we tell ourselves so that we know better how we got to be who we are. So history depends a great deal on who "we" are. The story of the southwestern border between the United States and Mexico, where I lived for nearly thirty years, is often told quite differently on different sides of that border, even when historians on both sides use exactly the same set of sources. This means that there is no one "history" of anything or anyone, there are only "histories" which tell the stories of different peoples who may or may not share the same memories.

But doesn't that mean that history is pure fiction? Surely history is not just stories, but is facts based on evidence. Yes, and no. Yes, because historians do have a rigorous set of criteria and practices that are supposed to keep them from lying. No, because even these criteria and practices are hostage to inevitable problems.

First, evidence is often problematic. Sometimes there is far too little; and sometimes there is far too much. More than occasionally, historians find that there is just too little evidence to answer the questions they are asking; or at least to answer the questions with certainty. For instance, a friend of mine studies the families of Burgundy in the early Middle Ages. He came across the following description of Agnes, countess of Anjou, "she besieged the castle and

took it, as was her custom.”<sup>3</sup> At this, a thousand questions arise. Did she then normally lead an army, storm castles and collect them for a hobby? Did many women do this? What did men think of this? What did other women think? What is going on here? The story we usually tell ourselves is that that women of the time were helpless and oppressed and definitely did not knock over castles to pass the time. Maybe what we are telling ourselves is wrong. Actually Agnes produced a long line of extraordinary women, including her powerful and learned great-great-granddaughter, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Agnes may not have been the exception she seems at first sight.<sup>4</sup> However, this is the only reference we have of Agnes fighting and one of the few we have of women fighting. Are the references lost; deliberately destroyed? Or did they never exist? We may never know.

On the other hand, sometimes there is too much evidence. For example, the story is widely told (and believed) that veterans of the Vietnam War were spat upon when they returned home from war. The story has become important for certain groups in describing why the U.S. is the way it is. The problem is, the story may not be true. To check, one would have to review hundreds of newspaper stories, hundreds of feet of video footage from news reports, home videos where available and check hundreds of eyewitness accounts. Even then an incident could be missed. Sociologist Jerry Lembcke, himself a vet, undertook this monumental task.<sup>5</sup> He found no reliable instances of returning Vietnam vets ever being spat upon, even when he interviewed those who claim this happened to them. Does this settle the issue? Hardly; some despicable person somewhere may have spit on a

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<sup>3</sup> The story is mentioned in W. Scott Jessee, *Robert the Burgundian and the Counts of Anjou*, c. 1025-1098 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 19. Dr. Jessee has kindly provided me with the reference to this act of Agnes, “In hoc anno jam dicta nobilissima comitissa Agnes obsedit castrum Volventem et ut est sua consuetudo, cepit eum.” *Recueil des chartes de l’abbaye de Cluny*, eds. Auguste Bernard and Alexandre Bruel, 6 vols., (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1876-1903), vol. 4, no. 2855.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on Agnes and her descendants, see Jessee, *Robert the Burgundian*, 11-12, 24, 26-7, 30, 37-8, 42-3, 55-6, 76, 123.

<sup>5</sup> Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

returning vet; other equally disturbing incidents may have taken place.<sup>6</sup> However, serious doubts have now been raised about the story. Maybe we have been telling ourselves a story about ourselves that is not quite true.

Finally, no evidence survives by accident. Every piece of parchment, every book, every monument, every grocery list survives because someone cared first to create it and then someone cared to preserve it. This is extremely important for documents from the first fifteen centuries of Christianity. Only the wealthy were literate; only they could read; only they would care to own and preserve written documents. They decided what was worth keeping and what was not. Any history based on such biased evidence will be the history of the wealthy and literate. We don’t know (and probably can’t know) what the ordinary Christian of the second, sixth or eleventh centuries thought. They left no records. We only know what Justin Martyr or Gregory of Tours or Peter Damien said the ordinary people thought based on the writings of Justin or Gregory or Peter that other people thought it worthwhile preserving. Many of the writings of the great theologians Augustine and most of Origen, for instance, were lost either through deliberate destruction or simple neglect.

All evidence, then, is tainted. Worse yet, all evidence is used selectively by historians who all have agendas. Good historians try to use all the sources that have survived and to use them judiciously. Bad historians pick and choose their sources to fit an already conceived agenda. Both kinds of historians, though, are limited by their own social, economic and political setting, by the limits of the evidence available and by the social, economic and political settings that created and preserved that evidence.

History, then, is a political, social and economic activity that influences the present by highlighting a particular set of historical events and personages in order to justify or explain a present social, cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Lembcke notes that “... given the passion of the times and the wide range of personalities attracted to the anti-war movement, it would be surprising if some activists had not directed their political emotions toward the men who fought the war.” However, he concludes, “It is significant, though, that with all the research that has been done on the anti-war movement and the government’s actions against it, no evidence has surfaced that anyone ever spat on a Vietnam veteran.” *Ibid.*, 6-7.

or economic reality. We write history for a reason. We are interested in something NOW that can be explained by looking at certain events and persons THEN. This may seem so obvious as not worth repeating, but the idea of an "objective" history that simply relates indisputable facts in a disinterested fashion still dominates much scholarly work.

One often hears the phrase, "History will show . . ." Nothing could be further from the truth. History as some kind of Platonic self-existent entity is a myth; there are only historians who demonstrate the importance of some person or event for that historian's culture or society or economic grouping. History is what historians decide it is and those decisions inevitably take place within particular economic, social and political settings.<sup>7</sup>

For a study to become part of "history," however, it is not enough for a particular historian to be passionate, thorough and convincing. Her work also has to be accepted by a larger audience of scholars. To be published in a journal that will receive serious attention, for instance, the study will need to be reviewed by other scholars. These scholars are far more likely to find acceptable publications that already share certain assumptions of the larger academic community. For a study to be published as a book, the hurdles are higher still. Not only does the study need to pass muster with the other scholars who will review the study for publication, but the publisher must be convinced that enough people will be interested in buying the book that the publisher will make money in producing that particular volume.

An historian whose work cannot meet these requirements can, of course, put up their own web page or pay for their work to be published themselves. It is unlikely, however, that this work will reach

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<sup>7</sup> "Tradition is not merely or mainly the recall of the past or a reference to it. Rather, it is a present interpretation of the past in reference to the future. And, in doing this, the present 'creates' a past which is then declared to be stable, self-evident, 'objectively there,' and ready to be mined for justifications to the present's legitimization needs." Orlando Espín, "Toward the Construction of an Intercultural Theology of Tradition," *The Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 9 (2002): 52. "Redefining and reworking the heritage of the past actually creates the past, creates a new past, by creating the present which is to become the past that future generations will take over or reject on their own, and as their own." Dale Irvin, *Christian Histories, Christian Traditioning: Rendering Accounts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 14.

a large enough audience to change the dominant understanding of the past.<sup>8</sup>

This means that writing history is also inevitably a process of choosing. First there are the choices made by the historian herself. One could hardly relate all the events that happened at any particular moment (even if one had the data to do so). The relating would take longer than the happening itself. So an historian must pick and choose which events best explain how the society she is studying became the way it is. These events themselves are related in documents that have been chosen for production and preservation by others.

Secondly, there are the choices made for the historian. As already discussed, other scholars, quite possibly with other presuppositions and agendas, will decide whether or not an historian's work is worth dissemination. If these scholars do so decide, economic and political considerations will determine how widely a distribution that work will receive. Before printing, this meant how many manuscripts of a work would be produced in a process that was available almost exclusively to the wealthy. Since the invention of printing this means how many copies of a book a publisher decides must sell in order to make a profit on the printing of it. These products (manuscripts and books) then themselves become sources for further studies subject to the same exigencies. In short, the sources of history are already the result of economic and social forces before a scholar even begins her process of selecting sources and whether a scholar's work itself becomes a source will be determined by economic and social choices outside the scholar's control.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "... an individual cannot reform a tradition any more than an individual can change other social patterns like racism or sexism (which themselves can be understood as traditions). Any proposal for reformation must be accepted by the practitioners who put it into practice. If the participants in the tradition, through whatever mechanism from horrible coercion to completely free choice, put into practice the proposal for reform, then and only then, is a tradition reformed." Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 80.

<sup>9</sup> Tilley, relying on the work of Yves Congar, emphasizes that traditions can only survive by communication. "But essential to tradition, as Congar's definition highlights, is the fact that it is a process of the communication of tradition, what Congar calls transmission." *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 50-51. If there is no transmission, there can be no tradition and transmission is itself an act bound by the economic, social, political and cultural constraints.

Two important implications follow from these assumptions. First, different histories emerge from different perspectives. History depends on who is writing the history and for whom the history is being written, and also on who allows the history to be disseminated. Secondly, writing history is itself a political act, since it helps create the present insofar as telling us who we have been suggests who we are and who we can become.

These very same processes of choice are at work in a religious or theological tradition. To quote Dale Irwin, "We are always reinventing our traditions in order to make them relevant, for the changes that occur through the passage of time refuse us the opportunity to lay claim to the timeless relevance of an unchanging memory. We are always excluding some aspects of our collective memories, recalling others, and reinventing tradition as we contend with new questions that emerge to confront us in faith."<sup>10</sup>

Such an analysis suggests that to understand tradition as a multiplicity of histories and traditions in dialogue is more faithful to the actual global situation of Christianity than any search for a universal history of Christianity, or of Catholicism.<sup>11</sup> The assumption that there is one identifiable history or tradition of Christianity or Catholicism is actually an attempt to silence all other interpretations. More precisely, such an endeavor was, and remains, an attempt to universalize one particular Western European view of its history to all peoples in all places at all times. In Irwin's words, "... what is essentially a tribal theological tradition (variously described as 'the West,' 'Western Christianity,' or 'Christendom') has been universalized and thus has become an idol."<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that the creation of a universal and monolithic history of Christianity involves not only the choices made by a myriad of historians, as Irwin would seem to suggest, but also a scholarly community that can marginalize certain versions of history or of theology. When such versions are not simply silenced, they are

<sup>10</sup> Irwin, *Christian Histories*, 41; Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 66-86.

<sup>11</sup> Espín, "Toward the Construction," 38-51.

<sup>12</sup> Irwin, *Christian Histories*, 4.

relegated to a separate scholarly enterprise and to their own specialist journals. The creation of a "mainstream" theological tradition involves not only scholars, but journal editors, publishers and organizers of conferences. Some theologies and histories are just theology; others are hyphenated theologies or histories—Latino/a theology, feminist theologies, women's histories are not just theology or just history. Not so subtly, they are marginalized as not quite the real thing. They have their own journals, organizations and sessions separate from those of "real" theology or history. Now there may well be very good reasons why hyphenated theologies and histories choose to differentiate themselves from "mainstream" theology and history. Nevertheless, such separations inevitably identify hyphenated theologies and histories as marginalized and implicitly not theology or history per se.

This brings us to another important implication. Writing history and allowing that history to be disseminated are political, social, economic and ultimately moral acts. If the purpose of writing history is to help define who we are and who we can be, then it is essential that we not lie about who we were (and are) and yet recall that we have been (and therefore) can be different (and hopefully better) than we presently are. Education is freedom from the tyranny of the present. We can rewrite the past to recreate the present. Jacques Le Goff reminds historians of their moral obligation to create a history that liberates and not enslaves: "... we can, indeed we must, beginning with each and every historian, work and struggle so that history, in both senses of the word, may become different."<sup>13</sup> This means that historians have the moral duty to choose, out of the different possible histories supported by the data, "to act in such a way that collective memory may serve the liberation and not the enslavement of human beings."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 216. See also Irwin, *Christian Histories*, 4, 72 and Espín, "Toward the Construction," 28-30.

<sup>14</sup> Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 99. Le Goff's discussion is an important overview of historiography and its role in shaping culture. See also Otto Madura, "Dicho in otro modo, hacer historia escrita es hacer historia real, es una de las maneras de influir en la historia de un pueblo y de participar en la construcción de sus alternativas, de su devenir y de su destino histórico. Insisto: que le deseemos or no, que nos demos cuenta or no, así es." "Apuntes epistemológico-políticos para una historia de la teología en América Latina," in *Materiales para una Historia de la Teología en América Latina*, ed. Pablo Richard (San Juan, Costa Rica: Comisión de Estudios de Historia de la Iglesia en Latinoamericana, 1980), 19.



One important role that history can play in liberating our collective memories is to insist upon and to allow voice to a multiplicities of histories and traditions which demand mutual respect. To quote Orlando Espín: "There are no multiple particularities and one evident human universality; rather there are multiple historical, cultural, human universalities which can encounter one another, which can challenge one another, and which through intercultural dialogue might engage in the process of unveiling universally relevant truth."<sup>15</sup> In this particular case, then, it is a moral and liberating act to argue that all histories are culturally, socially, economically determined and all traditions are equally engaged in a process of dialogue which will hopefully enrich all of humankind. It is to expose one form of hegemony that is marginalizing, silencing and minimizing all voices but its own. "No culture, and no cultural situation, may be considered as the definitive locus of truth."<sup>16</sup>

Now that I have explained my perhaps idiosyncratic understanding of history, I would like to offer you at least one example of a lost but liberating tradition that can be recovered from the vertical traditions of European Catholicism. Actually, I would love to share several such recoveries with you. Picture Thomas Aquinas, for instance, not as the boring defender of the status quo into which the sixteenth and later the nineteenth centuries made him (what I like to call the "Uncle Tom" Aquinas), but the more realistic rebel of the thirteenth century who followed his teacher, Albert the Great, in a bold attempt to recover the best both from the pagan and banned writer, Aristotle, and from the Moslem and Jewish commentaries on Aristotle.<sup>17</sup> What an inspiring example of admiring and adopting the best of other religious traditions (not that Thomas always respected those he copied)! Then as the John Nobili, S.J. professor, I cannot help but mention the other Nobili and Jesuit, Roberto de Nobili, the first European to learn Tamil

and Sanskrit, who taught Christianity as a wandering Brahmin ascetic.<sup>18</sup> His fellow sixteenth century Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, is even better known for his deep appreciation and knowledge of Confucian thought.<sup>19</sup> Both de Nobili and Ricci offer extraordinary examples of a Jesuit tradition of deep appreciation of those values in other cultures from which present Catholicism can learn and grow. But rather than elaborate on these better know examples, and knowing my time and the patience of my audience is limited, I would like to offer a more recent recovery from vertical Catholic traditions.

## Ordination

Studies on the understanding within the Christian community of what it meant to be ordained have been immensely helpful in tracking the history of the distinction between clergy and laity. Thanks particularly to the research of Cardinal Yves Congar, it is now clear that for the greater part of Christian history, to quote Congar, "instead of signifying, as happened from the beginning of the twelfth century, the ceremony in which an individual received a *power* henceforth possessed in such a way that it could never be lost, the words *ordinare*, *ordinari*, *ordinatio* signified the fact of being designated and consecrated to take up a certain place or better a certain function, *ordo*, in the community and at its service."<sup>20</sup> In short, ordination (*ordinatio*) was the process by which an individual moved into a new role or vocation (*ordo*) in both ecclesial and lay society. Within the church, anyone who moved into a new ministry or vocation in the community was "ordained" to that new ministry.

Thus all the minor orders, as well as abbots, abbesses, deacons, deaconesses, priests, nuns, monks, emperors, empresses, kings, and queens were all considered ordained up until the end of the twelfth century. Furthermore, there was no distinction made between the

<sup>18</sup> For a recent estimation of Roberto de Nobili's life and works, see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., eds., F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) (hereafter ODCC), 470.

<sup>19</sup> For a recent estimation of Matteo Ricci's life and works, see ODCC, 1395.

<sup>20</sup> Yves Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972): 180.

<sup>15</sup> Espín, "Toward the Construction," 46-47.

<sup>16</sup> Espín, "Toward the Construction," 41.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent and readable summary of Albert's and Thomas' innovative and inclusive approach, see Thomas O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 13-15.

ordinations of priests, for instance, and abbesses. Ordination rites exist for all these posts, and they are designated as ordination rites in liturgical texts. All were equally sacramentally ordained, even if their functions and roles were separate and distinct.<sup>21</sup>

This understanding of ordination minimizes to a large extent the difference between laity and clergy. There was no one ordained vocation or role in the Christian community that was less “ordained” than any other one was. Further, this understanding of ordination appears not only in theological writing, but also in the letters of popes and bishops, as well as in surviving rituals for ordinations themselves. Even the word for clergy in Latin, *clericus*, would retain its original meaning of one who could read and write, well into the twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> Extensive evidence exists, then, that would indicate that the older understanding of *ordinatio* as the entire process by which one changed his or her function or role within the community was still widely accepted as late as in the twelfth century.

This means that for most of Christian history, ordination did not give one a portable, irrevocable power, but rather a role, a function, or better yet, a vocation within a particular community. One led the liturgy because one was commissioned by the community to lead the community, rather than, as a later tradition would have it, one led the community because one had the power to perform the liturgy. Edward Schillebeeckx put it pointedly:

In comparison with the ancient church, circumstances [in the scholastic period] have taken a fundamentally different direction: a priest is ordained in order to be able to celebrate the eucharist; in the ancient church it is said that he is ‘appointed’ as minister in order to be able to appear as leader to build up the community, and for this reason he was also the obvious person to

<sup>21</sup> For a thorough discussion of the meaning of ordination in the early centuries of Christianity, see Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-48.

<sup>22</sup> Numerous examples of the inclusive use of ordination in the early Middle Ages are given in Macy, *The Hidden History*, 26-41.

preside at the eucharist. This shift is of the utmost importance: at all events, it is a narrower legalistic version of what the early church believed.<sup>23</sup>

If the early understanding of ordination is much closer to our modern notion of vocation, and if the many different functions within the community were equally designed ordinations, how and when did the understanding of ordination change? In short, how did the ordained stop being almost everyone and start being a metaphysically distinctly elite?

The development of the concept of ordination as we now know it begin rather uneventfully at a minor council held in Benevento in 1091.<sup>24</sup> Only four canons were passed, a minor skirmish in the much larger battle that constituted the eleventh- and twelfth-century reform movement traditionally identified with one of its most ardent advocates, Pope Gregory VII. The first canon of the synod states “no one is to be elected bishop unless he has been found to be living devoutly in holy orders (*ordines*).” The law continues on to describe more precisely what that would entail. “We call sacred orders the diaconate and the presbyterate. These only the early church is read to have had; upon these alone do we have the commands of the apostles.”<sup>25</sup>

There is nothing radically new here. Bishops were usually, although not always, chosen from precisely the two *ordines* mentioned, those of the diaconate and the presbyterate. This canon was simply reinforcing the trend in the eleventh century to insist on a proper

<sup>23</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 58.

<sup>24</sup> This discussion of the change in the definition of ordination comes from Macy, *The Hidden History*, 89-110.

<sup>25</sup> “Nullus deinceps in episcopum eligatur nisi qui in sacris ordinibus religiose vivens inventus est. Sacros autem ordines dicimus diaconatus ac presbyteratus. Hos siquidem solos primitiva lege ecclesia habuit; super his solis praeceptum habemus apostoli. Subdiacones vero, quia et ipsi altaribus administrant, oportunitate exigente concedimus sed rarissime, si tamen spectate sine religionis et scientie, quod ipsum non sine Romani pontificis vel metropolitani licentia” (c. 1 in “The Canons of the Councils of Benevento [1091] and Troia [1093]” in *Pope Urban II, The Collectio Britannica, and the Council of Melfi*, eds., Robert Summerville and Stephan Kuttner [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996]), 303). The text is also given in Giovanni Domenico Mansi, et al., eds., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, 53 vols. (Paris: H. Welter, 1901-1927), 20:738.

progress within the diocesan orders.<sup>26</sup> The Council of Clermont-Ferrand in 1095 was more succinct: “No layman, cleric or even subdeacon is to be chosen as bishop.”<sup>27</sup>

This law, like all laws, was part of a larger history. The canon expressed the opinion, popular among the eleventh-century reformers, that Jesus only established two *ordines*, the diaconate and the presbyterate. All other orders were established later by the church, including the *ordo* of bishop. This theory was held in opposition to those who argued that the episcopacy was itself an *ordo* separate from the *ordo* of the presbyterate. The statement of the Council of Benevento on this issue was widely copied in the numerous French collections of canon law that were compiled in the first half of the twelfth century.<sup>28</sup> Gratian of Bologna, in turn copying them, included the law in his massive collection of church law known as the *Decretum*.<sup>29</sup> Gratian completed the first recension of his work before the 1130s; and in its second recension, c. 1150, it soon became the standard textbook for canon law schools throughout Western Europe and formed half of all church law at least until the Reformation, and for Roman Catholics up until 1917.

The canon would have another life, however, outside the world of canon law. In the early twelfth century, a *sententia* attached to the School at Laon would insist: “The presbyterate and diaconate only

are called sacred orders, because the Spirit is given only in them and therefore under no necessity ought they be received by inferiors, but others are possible, as the apostle can be read.”<sup>30</sup> Since the *sententia* is given without further context, it is difficult to be sure what is meant, but it would seem that something more is being said here than what was intended by the Council of Benevento. Here the meaning would seem to be that the only sacred orders that exist are the priesthood and the diaconate since only they receive the Holy Spirit, although the last enigmatic qualification might mean that exceptions can apply. If this is what is intended, then this is the first indication that the traditional definition of ordination was to be challenged by a new and narrower approach.

The canon of Benevento was copied into the influential canonical collections compiled by Ivo, the bishop of Chartres in the late eleventh century,<sup>31</sup> and both Ivo and the School of Laon became extremely important in the development of a theology of orders in the twelfth century.<sup>32</sup> Both influenced the important master, Hugh of St. Victor, who taught in Paris from c. 1120 until his death in 1141.<sup>33</sup> All of these authors supported the theology of the presbyterian approach to orders; that is, they believed that bishops were part of the *ordo* of priests and not a separate *ordo*. The teaching that Jesus only founded

<sup>26</sup> According to John St. H. Gibaut: “This canon is noteworthy in that it understands that the orders preceding election and consecration to the episcopate are ‘the diaconate and the presbyterate’ rather than the ‘diaconate or the presbyterate.’” (*The “Cursus Honorum”: A Study of the Origins and Evolution of Sequential Ordination*, Patristic Studies 3 [New York: Peter Lang, 2000], 253).

<sup>27</sup> “Ut nullus laicus, vel tantum subdiaconus in episcopum eligatur.” (c. 3 in *The Councils of Urban II*, vol. 1, *Decreta Claromontensia*, ed. Robert Somerville [Amsterdam: Adolf Hakkert, 1972], 74–75). On the complexity of the transmission of these decrees, see Somerville, *Councils of Urban II*, 3–19. On the relationship of this decree to ordination, see Gibaut, *Cursus Honorum*, 253.

<sup>28</sup> The debate whether the episcopacy is a separate *ordo* from the presbyterate in this and earlier periods is discussed by Roger Reynolds, “Patristic ‘Presbyterianism’ in the Early Medieval Theology of Sacred Orders,” *Mediaeval Studies* 45 (1983): 311–42. The history of the early diffusion of this law is traced by Francis Gossman, *Pope Urban II and Canon Law*, The Catholic University of America Canon Law Series, 403 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960).

<sup>29</sup> D. 60, c. 4 in *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2 vols., ed. Emil Friedberg (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 1:227. This canon is considered part of the earliest text of the *Decretum* by Anders Winroth. See his *The Making of Gratian’s Decretum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 202.

<sup>30</sup> “Sacri ordines tantum dicuntur sacerdotium et diaconatus, quia in illis tamen [lire: tantum] datur Spiritus, et ideo nulla necessitate possunt ab inferioribus tractari; sed alia possunt, ut Apostolus potest legi” (*Sententia* n. 390 in “L’École d’Anselme de Laon et de Guillaume de Champeaux,” in Odo Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles* [Gembloux: Abbaye du Mont César, 1959], 283). According to Reynolds, the canon from Benevento also appears in the *Sentences of Magister A*, a work closely associated with the School at Laon. Reynolds, “Patristic ‘Presbyterianism,’” 338n115.

<sup>31</sup> Ivo copied the law into his *Decretum* (completed in 1094), pars 5, c. 72, Jacques Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus . . . Series Latina*, 217 vols., (1844–1865, reproduced Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996–2006) (hereafter PL) 161:350D; and into his *Panormia* (compiled in 1095), bk. 3, c. 51, PL 161:1130C. On the dating of this work, see Gossman, *Pope Urban II*, 52–58; and *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (New York: Thomson Gale, 2003) (hereafter NCE) 7:680. On Ivo, see NCE 7:679–80.

<sup>32</sup> See Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 2: 616–618, especially 616: “The two quarters from which we first see the effort to develop a sacramental theology of holy orders, and a theology in which the way sacramental grace is seen to operate is differentiated according to the clerical rank involved, are Ivo of Chartres and the School of Laon.”

<sup>33</sup> “Sacri canones definiunt nullum in episcopum eligendum, nisi qui prius in sacris ordinibus religiose fuerit conversatus. Sacros autem ordines diaconatus et presbyteratus tantum appellandos censent; quia hos solos primitiva legitur Ecclesia habuisse, et de his solis praeceptum habemus apostoli.” Bk. 2, pars 3, c. 13 in *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, PL 176: 430B.

two orders—that of deacon and of priest—was fairly widespread among influential canonists and theologians by 1140. This teaching would have a long and successful career. An important step had been reached in what would prove to be a rather short march to a change in the understanding of ordination. All other orders could, and eventually would, be seen as not truly orders at all, and their ordinations as not ordinations at all.

Interestingly enough, this movement was taking place at exactly the same time as theologians were determining who possessed the power and authority to hear confessions, to preach and to perform the great miracle of transubstantiation. The movements are parallel and reciprocal. Only those *ordines* involved in service to the altar would be considered sacramental and only services conducted by those so empowered could be considered valid.

Peter the Lombard, in his *Sentences*, offered what is usually considered to be the first definition of the sacrament of orders: “If, however, one asks: what is that which is here called order, it can indeed be said to be a certain sign, that is, something sacred, by which a spiritual power and office is given to the one ordained. Therefore a spiritual character is called an *ordo* or grade, where the promotion to power occurs.”<sup>34</sup> The definition, although based on Augustine and earlier medieval writers,<sup>35</sup> breaks decisively with the earlier understanding of ordination. Here ordination became tied securely to power rather than to vocation. Ordination bestowed a power that could be used in any community at any time. No longer was it a vocation to a particular ministry in a particular church. Lombard’s definition would have a lasting impact on both theology and church practice.

#### The identification of orders with the liturgy of the Eucharist

<sup>34</sup> “Si autem quaeritur quid sit quod hic vocatur ordo, sane dici potest signaculum quoddam esse, id est sacrum quiddam, quo spiritualis potestas traditur ordinatio et officium. Character igitur spiritualis, ubi fit promotio potestatis, ordo vel gradus vocatur” Bk. 4, dist. 24, c. 13 in *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, 3rd. ed., 2 vols., Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 5 (Rome: Collegii St. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1981), 2:405.

<sup>35</sup> On the background of Lombard’s definition, see Kenan Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 205; Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 2:614–21; and Nikolaus Häring, “Character, Signum und Signaculum: Der Weg von Petrus Damiani bis zur eigentlichen Aufnahme in der Sakramentenlehre im 12. Jahrhundert,” *Scholastik* 31 (1956): 41–69, 182–212.

reached its full articulation in Alexander of Hales’s commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard. Alexander was the first of many Parisian theologians to lecture on the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard. Alexander’s commentary was written between 1220 and 1227.<sup>36</sup> For Alexander, orders was different from any of the other sacraments, even baptism and confirmation, the sacraments that also imprinted indelible characters on the soul. Orders not only imprinted such a character but also conferred spiritual power and the execution of that power to a particular member of the church.<sup>37</sup> The power that Alexander understood to be conferred was clearly the power to consecrate the Eucharist. So intimately connected are orders and the Eucharist, that Alexander defined orders as “a sacrament of spiritual power for some office established in the church for the sacrament of communion.”<sup>38</sup> All of the other *ordines* are somehow related to the priesthood, the highest of the *ordines*, since this is the *ordo* that can make Christ present in the liturgy.<sup>39</sup>

The link between orders and the Eucharist was dramatically portrayed in a story included by Robert Courson in his lectures given in Paris c. 1208–12/3:

For it proved this man was always a virgin when St. Thomas of Canterbury had lifted up St. Cuthbert from the earth in his coffin, and when he had patted each of [Cuthbert’s] limbs and his face and all of his members

<sup>36</sup> On Alexander’s life and work, see *Magistri Alexandri de Hales, Glossa in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, 4 vols., Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi 12–15 (Florence: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1951–57), 1:\*7–\*75.

<sup>37</sup> “Respondemus: per hanc definitionem separatur Ordo ab aliis sacramentis. Per hoc enim quod dicitur ‘signaculum,’ separatur ab aliis sacramentis in quibus non imprimitur character. Per hoc autem quod dicitur ‘in quo spiritualis potestas traditur,’ distinguitur ab iis in quibus character tantum imprimitur: non enim in Baptismo et Confirmatione spiritualis potestas traditur super membra Ecclesiae. Per hoc autem quod dicitur ‘et officium,’ intelligitur quod non tantum tradatur potestas, sed executio potestatis, quantum est de virtute Ordinis, licet aliter contingat ex inidoneitate personae” (bk. 4, dist. 24 in Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, 4: 400).

<sup>38</sup> “Potest autem assignari altera definitio Ordinis, ex qua magis potest perpendi quis sit Ordo et quis non. Et est talis: Ordo est sacramentum spiritualis potestatis ad aliquod officium ordinatum in Ecclesia ad sacramentum communionis” (ibid., 4:401). On the importance of this definition, see Osborne, *Priesthood*, 204, whose translation is used here.

<sup>39</sup> “Ex quod perpenditur: cum potestas Ordinis sacramentalis sit ad sacramentum communionis, et hoc pertinet ad Ordinem sacerdotalem, in eo debet stare omnis Ordo. Dignitas vero episcopalis, quae superadditur, est ratione causarum, et quia ibi suppletur potestas Domini in conferendo Ordinem sacerdotalem” (bk. 4, *distinctio* 24, in Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, 4:401).

so that he sensed no putrefaction. The king of that kingdom who was present, asked St. Thomas by what presumption he thus patted all the parts of the saint. He responded, "King, you should not be surprised about the fact that I touch this with my consecrated hands." Because by far the most preeminent of the sacraments, of course, the body of the most holy Lord handled by all priests every day on the altar, was entrusted to the ministries of the three ministers, of course, priest, deacon and subdeacon, as Pope Clement held in *distinctio 2, de consecratione, capitulo* "Tribus gradibus" (c. 23).<sup>40</sup>

Robert at least implied here that the power of a priest, deacon, and subdeacon surpassed that even of a king, and it was ordination that gave that power to those ministries established for the purpose of making present the body and blood of the risen Christ. To make his point, Robert markedly referred to canon law.

The definition of ordination that dominated the late Middle Ages and that is still the definition of orders accepted by most Christians was now complete.<sup>41</sup> Ordination was no longer a ceremony that marked the entry of a member of the church into some new service or ministry. Ordination was a ceremony empowering a member of the church for only one purpose, the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Any *ordo* that did not relate directly to that ministry (as did the diaconate) was not an *ordo* at all.

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<sup>40</sup> "Unde cum Beatus Thomas Cantuariensis archyepiscopus elevasset sanctum Cubertum de terra in feretrum et cum palpasset singulos eius articulos et faciem et omnia eius membra que nullam senserant putredinem eo quod vir ille virgo semper existerat. Rex illius regni qui presens erat quisivit a beato Thoma qua presumptione ita palparet omnia membra sancti, qui respondit, 'Rex super hoc non debes mirari si manibus meis consecratis hunc tango.' Quia longe preeminentius sacramentum sicut et alii sacerdotes singulis diebus in altari tracto videlicet corpus domini sacratissimum cuius corporis ministerium commissum est tribus ordinibus ministrorum scilicet presbytero, dyacono et subdyacono sicut ostendit Clemens papa in secunda distinctio, de consecratione, capitulo 'Tribus gradibus' (c. 23)" (*Summa*, Bruges MS 247, fol. 143r1-r2). The law Robert cited is from the *Decretum*, in Friedberg, *Corpus*, 1:1321. Gratian's source here was the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals; see Paul Hinschius, ed., *Decretales Pseudo-Isidoriana* (1863); repr. Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1963), 47.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the adoption of this understanding of the sacrament of orders by later theologians, see Ludwig Ott, *Das Weihenakrament*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, nos. 4, 5 (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 73-11; and Osborne, *Priesthood*, 204-18.

Henceforth, only the ceremony empowering a priest or deacon would be a true ordination, and anything called an ordination in the past that was not an ordination to the priesthood or diaconate was not an ordination. The older definition of ordination had been replaced and had been forgotten.

For the first time in Christian history, ordination was redefined to exclude all but the priesthood and the diaconate. As one can well imagine, this innovation was not at first widely accepted. Several theologians continued to use the older definition of ordination, and a few, most notably, Abelard of Paris, at the instigation of his learned wife, Heloise, wrote movingly against the new teaching.<sup>42</sup> The popularity of Gratian's *Decretum*, and of Peter the Lombard, as well as the support of the papacy carried the day. In time, the definition of ordination first put forward by the School of Laon would not only be the standard understanding of Western Christianity, but would be read back into all of Christian history. The more ancient tradition of ordination, an understanding that had shaped Christianity for over half its history would slowly fade from memory.

This important twelfth century debate, then, constitutes a crucial turning point in the relationship of clergy and laity. Only the priesthood and the diaconate were true sacramental orders (*ordines*) in the Church. All other vocations or ministries in the Church were henceforth merely jobs done by laity. More than ever, the priesthood (and to a lesser extent the diaconate) became the only mediators between the merely baptized and the divine. It is important to note, however, that this change was relatively late in the history of Christianity. For over half of Christian history, *ordinatio* meant something quite different from ordination as understood by later theologians and councils, particularly the Council of Trent. One cannot assume that since the term *ordinatio* was used in the fourth, sixth, eighth, or eleventh century, there existed a continuous practice of ordination, as it would be understood in the sixteenth, nineteenth,

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<sup>42</sup> For a full discussion of the defense of an older understanding of ordination by Abelard and Heloise, see Gary Macy, "Heloise, Abelard and the Ordination of Abbesses," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 57 (2006): 16-32.

or twentieth centuries. The word had shifted meaning so radically as to create an entirely new caste among the Christian community.

As we have explained, the new exclusionary definition of “ordination” was dependent on the function of the priest (and to a lesser extent that of the deacon and subdeacon) to preside at the Eucharist. The role of the priest as special mediator of God’s grace, moreover, rested on the power of the priest to lead the liturgy and, most importantly, to confect the presence of the Risen Christ in the Eucharist.

Just as important, therefore, as the redefinition of ordination in accomplishing a definitive split between clergy and laity, would be the theological assumption that only a properly “ordained” priest could make the risen Christ present in the Eucharist. At the beginning of the twelfth century, though, scholars were not at all in agreement that a priest alone could effect the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. At least three twelfth century scholars are known to have put forward the theory that the words of consecration themselves confect, regardless of who says the words.

Abelard, writing in his *Theologia christiana*, describes their position:

I know of two brothers who are numbered among the highest masters, the other of whom imputed such power to the divine words in the confecting of the sacrament that by whomever they are pronounced they have the same efficacy, so that even a woman or someone of whatever order or condition through the words of the Lord is able to confect the sacrament of the altar.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> “Novimus et duos fratres qui se inter summos connumerant magistros, quorum alter tantum uim diuinis uerbis in conficiendis sacramentis tribuit, ut a quibuscumque ipsa proferantur aequae suam habeant efficaciam, ut etiam mulier et quislibet cuiuscumque sit ordinis uel conditionis per uerba dominica sacramentum altaris conficere queat” (*Theologia christiana*, 1. 4, c. 80, in *Petri Abaelardi Opera Theologia*, ed., Eligius M. Buytaert, Corpus christianorum, continuatio mediaevalis, 12 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1969], 302).

The great medieval scholar Marie Dominique Chenu has identified these two brothers as the famous brothers Bernard and Thierry of Chartres.<sup>44</sup>

The Chartrians, however, were not the only theologians to teach that the words of consecration alone confect the sacrament. Teaching in Paris in the early 1160s, the liturgist John Belet describes the secret of the Mass in the following terms:

The secret is so-called because it is recited secretly, although in the past it was said aloud so that it was known by lay people. It happened, therefore, that one day shepherds placed bread on a rock which, at the recitation of those words, was changed into flesh, perhaps the bread was transubstantiated into the body of Christ since vengeance was most rapidly taken against them by divine agency. For they were struck down by a divine judgment sent from heaven. Hence it was decreed that in the future it be said silently.<sup>45</sup>

The story originally appears as a cautionary tale in the sixth century *Pratum spirituale* of John Moschus.<sup>46</sup> The story is repeated by the anonymous *Speculum ecclesiae*, written ca. 1160-1175. In this version, there is no mention of transubstantiation, however the shepherds are punished by divine vengeance for their lack of reverence for such a great mystery.<sup>47</sup> This version of the story was copied into

<sup>44</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Un cas de platonisme grammatical au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 51 (1957): 666–68.

<sup>45</sup> “Secreta dicitur, quia secreto pronuntiat, cum olim tamen alta uoce diceretur, unde et ab hominibus laicis sciebatur. Contingit ergo, ut quadam die pastores super lapidem quandam ponerent panem, qui ad horum uerborum prolationem in carnem conuersus est, forsitan transubstantiatus est panis in corpus Christi, in quos diuinitus factus est acerrima uindicta. Nam percussi sunt diuino iudicio celitus misso. Vnde statutum fuit, ut de cetero sub silentio diceretur” (c. 44 in *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. Heribert Doutel, Corpus christianorum, continuatio mediaevalis, 41A [Turnhout: Brepols, 1976], 78).

<sup>46</sup> C. 196, PL 74: 225C–226D.

<sup>47</sup> “In primitiua autem Ecclesia alta uoce proferebatur, donec pastores memoriter ex quotidiano usu uerba retinentes, in camnis eadem cantabant. Sed ipsi diuina uindicta ibidem percussi sunt. Unde Ecclesia consueuit propter reuerentiam tantum mysterium secreto agere” (*Speculum de mysteriis ecclesiae*, c. 7, PL 177:368C–D). On the dating of this work, see Gary Macy, *Treasures from the Storehouse: Essays on the Medieval Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press of America, 1999), 171.

the *De missarum mysteriis* of Cardinal Lothar of Segni c. 1195.<sup>48</sup> He was soon to be elevated to the papacy as Pope Innocent III. Although neither author speaks of the words of institution as consecrating of themselves, as did the brothers from Chartres and John Belet, they ascribe to the words great power apart from their enunciation by an ordained priest.

The power to consecrate the bread and wine in the Eucharist, as well as the power to hear confessions and to preach, were not reserved exclusively to the priesthood until the second half of the twelfth century. Once again, the present understanding of the role the priest, along with the present understanding of ordination, is only one tradition among the vertical traditions of Catholicism.

As usually happens in Christianity, this later tradition arose from political expediency, rather than divine inevitability. The innovations described so far did not appear in a vacuum. In many ways, they can be seen as the logical result and in some sense the culmination of reforms of the eleventh century. Central to this reform was the insistence of the supremacy of the priesthood and particularly of the papacy over the secular lords. Emphasizing the difference between laity and priesthood was essential to this claim.<sup>49</sup> Throughout much of the twelfth century, the claims were at best tenuous, as papal and imperial claimants for the papal throne fought for control. Not until 1177 would there be one pope accepted by all of Europe, a papacy dedicated to the implementation of the reform agenda. Only then could the councils of Lateran III (1179) and Lateran IV (1215) begin to consolidate and enforce the claims of the reform movement. The struggle for the control of the church between lay lords and the papal office must be seen as

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<sup>48</sup> "Caeterum ne sacrosancta verba vilescerent, dum omnes pene per usum ipsa scientes, in plateis et vicis, aiiisque locis incongruis decantarent, decrevit Ecclesia, ut haec obsecratio quae secreta censetur, a sacerdote secreta dicatur, unde fertur, quod cum ante consuetudinem quae postmodum inolevit, quidam pastores ca decantarent in agro, divinitus sunt percussi" (bk. 1, c. 1 of Lothar of Segni, *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217: 840C–D). On the dating of this work, see Macy, *Treasures*, 171.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth Dachowski, "Tertius est optimus: Marriage, Continence, and Virginity in the Politics of Late Tenth- and Early Eleventh-Century Francia," in Michael Frassetto, ed., *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York: Garland, 1998) 117–25. On Abbo of Fleury, Dachowski remarks: "Abbo was particularly concerned with differentiating the clergy from the laity, because he saw a tendency in his own day for the laity to become like clergy, in possessing church property, and the clergy to become like laity, in being married" (p. 125).

the backdrop to the redefinition of orders that took place in the twelfth century.

In order to effect this separation, the reform movement insisted on the continence of the clergy. According to the reformers, sexual intercourse polluted the priests who administered the rituals necessary for human salvation.<sup>50</sup> At first there was strong opposition to this demand from the married clergy who saw no need to change a centuries-old practice. They particularly objected to the disinheritance of their sons who could now no longer succeed them in what was in effect a family business.<sup>51</sup> At least in England, such hereditary clerical dynasties existed into the thirteenth century.<sup>52</sup>

Of course, the reformers would not have understood themselves as innovators. They assiduously pored over church law, creating vast collections of those laws, culminating in the *Decretum* of Gratian. Their goal was to restore the church to the state envisioned by the laws they collected. They did not simply collect ancient laws, however. They consciously or unconsciously selected and highlighted those laws that most strongly upheld the sanctity of the priesthood and the power of the papacy.<sup>53</sup> Among those laws was the frequent demand that married subdeacons, deacons, and priests live chastely and separately from their wives.<sup>54</sup> At first, the reformers sought merely to enforce those laws. By the time of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), however, the reformers began to despair of ever enforcing continence upon the married clergy. Instead, they began to insist that the higher

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<sup>50</sup> An interesting study of the background to the stand of the reformers is contained in Phyllis Jestice, "Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of a New Sexual Morality," in Michael Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, (New York: Garland, 1998), 81–115.

<sup>51</sup> See Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates*, Texts and Studies in Religion, 12 (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1982).

<sup>52</sup> See Christopher Brooke, "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1050–1200," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956): 1–21; and idem., "Married Men Among the English Higher Clergy, 1066–1200," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956): 187–88.

<sup>53</sup> See Kathleen Cushing, *Papacy and Law in the Gregorian Revolution: The Canonistic Word of Anselm of Lucca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), esp. 64–102; and Klaus Schatz, "The Gregorian Reform and the Beginning of a Universal Ecclesiology," *The Jurist* 57 (1997): 123–36.

<sup>54</sup> For details, see Macy, *Hidden History*, 53–80.

clergy be celibate, that is, that they never be married at all.<sup>55</sup> Finally, at the Second Lateran Council in 1139, any marriages contracted by the bishops, priests, deacons, subdeacons, canons regular, monks, professed lay brothers, and women religious were judged to be invalid.<sup>56</sup> In the end, the law was enforced only for subdeacons, deacons, and priests. If they attempted to marry, their wives would legally be concubines and their offspring bastards. This would provide a huge disincentive to women to marry priests and effectively undermined hereditary parishes and dioceses, as bastard children could not inherit without a special exemption of bastardry.<sup>57</sup>

Before that time, marriage was an acceptable lifestyle for deacons, priests and bishops. Based on the limited evidence available, one can speculate that clergy could choose two different approaches to living out the *ordo* to which the community had appointed them. Some bishops were married and seemed to understand the church as a kind of extended household or family. These bishops would certainly be open to married clergy and, moreover to the possibility that both spouses had a role in ministry.

Sidonius Apollinaris, for example, was the bishop of Clermont in the late fifth century and married to Papianilla, the daughter of Emperor Avitus. When he was asked his advice on the choice of a new bishop for Bourge, he strongly recommended Simplicius, another married man, objecting that a monastic candidate would not be able to

<sup>55</sup> See Barstow, *Married Priests*, 47–104 and well as James Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 214–23.

<sup>56</sup> “Ad haec praedecessorum nostrorum Gregorii VII, Urbani et Paschalis Romanorum pontificum vestigiis inhaerentes, praecipimus ut nullus missas eorum audiat, quos uxores vel concubinas habere cognoverit. Ut autem lex continentiae et Deo placens munditia in ecclesiasticis personis et sacris ordinibus dilatetur, statuimus quatenus episcopi presbyteri diaconi subdiaconi regulares canonici et monachi atque conversi professi, qui sanctum transgredientes propositum uxores sibi copulare praesumpserint, separentur. Huiusmodi namque copulationem quam contra ecclesiasticam regulam constat esse contractam, matrimonium non esse censemus. Qui etiam ab invicem separati, pro tantis excessibus condignam poenitentiam agant.” “Id ipsum quodque de sanctimonialibus feminis si, quod absit, nubere attentaverint, observari decernimus” (cs. 7 and 8 in Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:198.) The text is also given in Mansi, 21:527–28.

<sup>57</sup> Brooke, “Gregorian Reform,” 20–21; and Barstow, *Married Priests*, 102–4, 133–39. For an analysis of this change from an economic and social analysis see Robert I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 81–88.

deal with worldly affairs.<sup>58</sup> Part of his recommendation includes praise of Simplicius’s wife. With a character beyond reproach, she came from a prominent family and was herself the descendant of bishops. The fact that she and her husband had raised their children successfully boded well for his future as a bishop.<sup>59</sup>

The sixth-century poet Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–c. 610) wrote in praise of several of the bishops whose hospitality he shared.<sup>60</sup> At least two of their wives received particular notice. Venantius praised Eufrasia, widow of Namatius, bishop of Vienne (c. 599/60). Of noble birth, she entered the religious life upon the death of her husband and devoted herself to the care of the poor.<sup>61</sup> Placidina, wife of Leontius II of Bordeaux (c. 546–c. 573) received a great deal of attention by the poet. She was also a descendent of Emperor Avitus, as well as of Sidonius Appollinaris, and lived in continence (and contentment) with her husband as a model of virtue.<sup>62</sup> Placidina helped furnish churches, in this case with wall hangings, a chalice, and a gold and silver reliquary

<sup>58</sup> *Sidonius domino papae Perpetuo salutem in Gai Sollii Apollinaris Sidonii Epistulae et carmina*, bk. 7, no. 9, Christian Lvetjohann, ed., MGH, Auctores antequissimi 8 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1887), 112–17. On Sidonius, see NCE 13:104.

<sup>59</sup> “Uxor illi de Palladorum stripe descendit, qui aut litteram aut altarium cathedras eum sui ordinis laude tenuerunt. Sane quia persona matronae verecundam succinctamque sui exigit mentionem, constanter adstuxerim respondere illam feminam sacerdotiis utriusque familiae, vel ubieducta crevit vel ubi electa migravit. Filios ambo bene et prudenter instituunt, quibus comparatus pater inde felicior incipit esse, quia vincitur” (*Sidonii Epistulae*, 117; see also Brian Brennan, “*Episcopae*: Bishops’ Wives Viewed in Sixth-Century Gaul,” *Church History* 54 [1985]: 318).

<sup>60</sup> On Venantius’s life and poetry, see Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus, A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and idem., *Venantius Fortunatus, Personal and Political Poems* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Venantius Fortunatus wrote Eufrasia’s epitaph, bk. 4, no. 27 in *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati, Opera poetica*, ed. Friedrich Leo, MGH, Auctorum Antiquissimorum 6 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), 99. Brennan, “Bishops’ Wives,” 321. On Venantius’s epitaph for Eufrasia, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus, A Latin Poet*, 86–87.

<sup>62</sup> Venantius praised Placidina in his poem on her husband, bk. 1, no. 15, lines 93–110, in *Venantius Fortunatus, Opera poetica*, 18; and in his dedicatory poem to her, bk. 1, no. 17 in *Venantius Fortunatus, Opera poetica*, 21. Brennan, “Bishops’ Wives,” 319–20. On Venantius’s praise for Placidina and Leontius as well the career of both Placidina and Leontius, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus, A Latin Poet*, 31–32, 70–74.



cover.<sup>63</sup> Leontius's epitaph movingly recorded Placidina's love for him, "Sweet still to your ashes, Placidina gives to you a funeral observance, thus a consolation for her great love."<sup>64</sup> These bishops continued to live active married lives, at least in their younger years, and expected that their sons and daughters would continue to serve as bishops and wives of bishops inheriting the family business, as it were.

Other bishops placed a higher value on the ascetic and monastic model of the church. They would either be monks themselves, or married bishops who at some point decided to live lives of continence separated from their wives without hope of offspring to continue the episcopal line. These two competing models of the church would remain in tension until the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries eventually made clerical marriage impossible.

Here we have two models for understanding the church. One envisioned the church as an extended family that values marriage and is a ministry in the world, so to speak. The other model valued continence and understood the church as a monastery that stands over against, even if in service to, the larger world.<sup>65</sup>

Clergy existed in both models and both continued to function until clerical marriage was declared invalid in the twelfth century. From that point on, at least technically, no clergy were married in Western Christianity, and if clergy did wish their offspring to inherit their jobs, they had to apply for an exception for their sons from their state of bastardy. An era had passed.

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<sup>63</sup> Placidina's donation of wall hangings for the church of St. Martin was mentioned by Venantius in his poem on that church, in bk. 1, no. 6, in Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, 11. The inscription of the chalice she and her husband donated was written by Venantius and preserved among his poems, in bk. 1, no. 14, in Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, 15. The cover for the tomb of St. Bibianus was mentioned by Venantius in his poem on the church of the saint, in bk. 1, no. 12, lines 13–18, in Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, 14. Brennan, "Bishops' Wives," 320.

<sup>64</sup> "Funeris officium, magni solamen amoris, dulcis adhuc cineri dat Placidina tibi" (bk. 4, no. 10, lines 25–26, in Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, 87; translation provided by Brennan, "Bishops' Wives," 321.

<sup>65</sup> This distinction is different than the more usual division between the secular and the clerical state that is assumed in many discussions of the eleventh-century reform movement. The distinction I am making here existed within the clerical realm itself, understanding clerical in a broader category of ministry within the church. This is not a distinction between the church and some other "secular" realm, but a dispute over the very question of how the church should be envisioned and, more importantly, governed.

This admittedly modern construct that envisions competing models of the church operative in the early Middle Ages can be very helpful in understanding some of the tensions of the period, as well as in breaking open the sometimes monolithic model of the church presented in the traditional histories of ordination. The models suggested here, that of the church as an extended family within the world and the church as a monastery over against the world, do not capture all the complexity and subtlety that the sources present, but they do help frame the sources in a way that aids in opening up the possibility of other models of church structure in the present. And it is the present to which I now turn.

## The Present

As I explained earlier, this study was occasioned by a particular present problem, as indeed, all history is. You have, by now, probably guessed to which issues in the present church this historical enterprise is directed. The Catholic Church is experiencing a dramatic lack of priests, particularly in the United States. According to the study done on the shortage of priest by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2000, there were at that time 46,709 priests in the United States of whom approximately 27,000 priests were active in parish ministry. This is significantly fewer priests per person than in the past. The ratio of priests to people in 1900 was approximately 1:900. In 1950 the ratio was approximately 1:650. In 1999 the ratio was approximately 1:1200. Of special note is that the priest to people ratio in the western states was 1:1752. Further, the age of a priest in 1999 was substantially higher than it was in 1900. The average age of priests in the United States in 2000 was 57 years for diocesan priests, and 63 years for religious priests. There were 433 priests over the age of 90 and 298 priests under the age of 30.<sup>66</sup>

Although I do not have more recent comparable statistics on clergy, those statistics available indicate that these trends are continuing. In 2007, there are 41,449 priests in the U.S., 5,260 less than in

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<sup>66</sup> *The Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests on the Pastoral Ministry*, Executive Summary: June, 2000, <http://www.usccb.org/plm/summary.shtml>.

2000. The average age of the 475 potential ordinands this year is 35, indicating that the average age of priests is not declining. Meanwhile, seminaries graduate only one new priest for every three clerics who retire, die or resign.<sup>67</sup>

According to the U.S. Bishops' report of 2000, only 73 percent of the approximately 19,000 parishes in the United States have a resident pastor. There are 2,386 parishes that share a pastor, 2,334 parishes without a resident pastor, and 437 parishes entrusted to the pastoral care of a person other than a priest.<sup>68</sup> These trends have only accelerated. According to a report in the *National Catholic Reporter* in 2003, "more than 3,300 U.S. parishes are led by pastoral administrators, of whom nearly half are lay, a third women religious, and nearly 20 percent permanent deacons."<sup>69</sup> That would mean that 2,500 more parishes were administered by pastoral administrators in 2003 than were in 2000.

Although my concern here is with the situation in the United States, the worldwide is not significantly better. According to a 2004 Vatican announcement, while in 1961 there were 404,082 priests worldwide, in 2001 there were 405,067. Putting those numbers in perspective, Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, said that although the number of priests in the last 43 years has remained almost unaltered, the world population has nearly doubled.<sup>70</sup> A 2003 study by Bryan Foehle and Mary Gautier summarizes the global situation, "In short, the number of priests has not kept up with the number of Catholics. The result has been inevitable, dramatic increases in the number of Catholics per priest."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Data given by Mary L. Gautier, and Mary E. Bendyna, eds., *The Class of 2007: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood: A Report to the Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2007) and Joe Feuerherd, "Just how bad is it?" *National Catholic Reporter*, October 17, 2003, [http://ncronline.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2003d/101703/101703a.php](http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2003d/101703/101703a.php).

<sup>68</sup> *The Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests*.

<sup>69</sup> Feuerherd, "Just how bad is it?"

<sup>70</sup> "Overall, a Boom Time for Seminaries," Vatican City, April 6, 2004 (Zenit.org).

<sup>71</sup> Bryan Froehle and Mary Gautier, *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *The Catholic Church Today*, 2 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 32.

While the number of priests in the United States has seen a precipitous and continuing decline, the number of lay ministries has seen an equally dramatic increase. From 1973 to 2003, enrollment in ecclesial ministry programs more than tripled from 10,500 to over 35,000. If all those enrolled are certified, they will double the number of fully certified lay ecclesial ministers in the United States. This means that in 2003, there were more lay ecclesial ministers working in Catholic parishes than diocesan priests in the country.<sup>72</sup> The number of women involved in these ministries is equally striking. According to figures gleaned by the National Institute for The Renewal of the Priesthood, women comprise 25% of all diocesan chancellors, 80% of all parish lay ecclesial ministers, 40% of all parish liturgy planners, 65% of all parish music ministers, 88% of all parish religious educators, 54% of all parish RCIA directors and 63% of all participants in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs.<sup>73</sup> In 2005 lay women made up 64 percent of all lay ministers while religious women added another 16 percent.<sup>74</sup>

The laity have in fact already taken over the running of the Catholic church in the United States and will continue to do so. Few of these lay leaders and perhaps most of the bishops have not yet realized or accepted it, but the structure of the Church has changed, probably irreversibly. Moreover, according to the 2001 study, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment*, the majority of Catholics in the United States believe that they have a right to participate in church decisions. In a 1999 survey, 66% of respondents favored more democratic decision-making on the parish level, 61% favored such participation on the diocesan level and 55% percent even felt the Vatican should be democratized.<sup>75</sup>

The lessons that history brings to bear on this situation by now must seem obvious. The ecclesial structure created during the Gregorian

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<sup>72</sup> John L. Allen Jr., "Lay ecclesial ministry and the feminization of the church," Weekly Column, created June 29, 2007 - 08:53 Published on National Catholic Reporter Conversation Cafe (<http://ncrcafe.org/node/1201>).

<sup>73</sup> 2006 statistics taken from the *Official Catholic Directory* and CARA's National Parish Inventory and Catholic Ministry Formation database quoted by The National Institute for the Renewal of the Priesthood, <http://www.jknirp.com/minist.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, "Lay ecclesial ministry."

<sup>75</sup> William d'Antonio, James Davidson, Dean Hoge and Katherine Meyer, eds., *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001), 119-123.

Reform has run its course. Another structure, much more similar to the twelve hundred years that preceded the Reform now seems to be rather rapidly developing from the ground up. Parishes are choosing ministers from among their own ranks to serve in several different ministries. Pastoral associates are, in effect, leading the liturgy because they have been chosen to lead the community rather than because of any power they have to consecrate the bread and wine. There are differences, of course. History never really repeats itself. Ministers now are professionally trained and certified. Although they most often do come from the communities they serve, they can be hired from the outside due to this certification process. Nevertheless, something new is emerging, and this future is looking more and more like a certain version of the past.

The only thing that has not changed is the realization that things have changed. Partly this is due to the belief, perpetrated by the majority of the magisterium that the Gregorian system is divinely inspired and dates back to the beginning of the church. History, as I hope I have demonstrated, should free us from any such illusions. The twelfth-century experiment was a politically expedient structure, and we are certainly just as free as our ancestors to choose a structure that serves our needs, just as they choose a structure that served their needs. We are free to choose from among our traditions, and we have at least two traditions concerning ordination from which to forge our future.

More entrenched is the belief that only a priest can actually (really) make the risen Christ present in the liturgy. Again, as I hope that I have demonstrated, this has not always been the belief or teaching of Christianity. This teaching is rather part of the entire Gregorian reform package, an attempt to concentrate ministry in one *ordo*, that of the priesthood. Returning to the older tradition of ordination could go a long way in demythologizing this approach. First, there would be no need for one *ordo* to exercise all sacramental functions. These functions could be shared out according to the needs of the community and the charisms of different ministers. Certainly this is a more democratic approach, since all ministries are, in this understanding, equally ordained. None of the *ordines* are metaphysically differentiated by an indelible character, but rather differentiated only by function. We have

the authority of one of our traditions to make such changes. Whether we in the end choose to do so or not will take a great deal of serious deliberation, prayer and pastoral sensitivity. But it is essential that we be constantly aware that we are free to make those choices, to choose our future based on our multiple traditions.

Catholics claim all of Christian history. As such, they are heirs to many traditions. Catholics who claim to be “traditional” and then fixate on one period as normative and authoritative for all times and all places, are not really “traditional” at all. They are historical bigots who in reality exclude all but a tiny minority of our ancestors the right to be Christians. “Tradition is democracy extended through time.” Chesterton once harrumphed. “Tradition means giving the vote to that most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. Tradition is the democracy of the dead.”<sup>76</sup> The universality that is “catholic” should allow all the Christians of the past to counsel, comfort, illuminate, disquiet, upset, and most importantly, liberate us. In the end, we can and do choose our present from our many pasts, even if some who do so, do not choose to admit they are doing so.

We are free, if we so choose, to honor the longer tradition of a lay church, a church that values all vocations, all *ordines* rather than placing all authority and all duties on one *ordo*, the priesthood. From the standpoint of this tradition, we can see that we have no shortage of vocations, no shortage of leaders. Our classrooms are full of them.

As Catholic educators at a Catholic and Jesuit university, we need to tell the students that they are the new leaders, show them the many traditions of the Church to demonstrate this, train them for this leadership and then let them do it.

Let me end by pointing out that this is but one example of how the studies of Christianity’s (and Catholicism’s) history reveals many traditions that can suggest ways to create a more liberating future. For create that future we will, and present understandings of the past can free us to think more boldly, more creatively about the future we wish to have. In fact, our tradition is to do so.

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<sup>76</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 85.