

Clerical Marriage and the Eleventh-Century Reformers

by

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Dr. Christopher M. Bell
1966 - 2024

May you live on in the hearts of those who knew you,
and may your scholarship inspire future historians

**List of Eleventh and Twelfth Century Popes
(Including Antipopes)
c. 1049 - 1150**

Name:	Reign:
Leo IX (b. 1002 - d. 1054)	1049 - 1054
Victor II (b. 1018 - d. 1057)	1055 - 1057
Stephen IX (c. 1020 - d. 1058)	1057 - 1058
*Benedict X (Antipope) (b. ? - d. c. 1073/80)	1058 - 1059
Nicholas II (c. 990-95 - d. 1061)	1059 - 1061
*Honorius II (Antipope) (c. 1010 - d. 1072)	1061 - 1072
Alexander II (c. 1010-15 - d. 1073)	1061 - 1073
Gregory VII (c. 1015 - d. 1085)	1073 - 1085
*Clement III (Antipope) (c. 1029 - 1100)	1080 - 1100
Victor III (c. 1026 - d. 1087)	1086 - 1087
Urban II (c. 1035 - d. 1099)	1088 - 1099
Pashchal II (c. 1050/55 - d. 1118)	1099 - 1118
*Theodoric II (Antipope) (b. ? - d. 1101)	1100 - 1101
*Adalbert (Antipope) (b. ? - d. 1101)	1101

*Sylvester IV (Antipope) (b. ? - d. 1111)	1105 - 1111
Galasius II (c. 1060/64 - d. 1119)	1118 - 1119
*Gregory VIII (Antipope) (b. ? - d. 1121)	1118 - 1121
Calixtus II (c. 1065 - 1124)	1119 - 1124
*Celestine II (Antipope) ¹ (b. ? - d. ?)	1124
Honorius II (b. 1060 - d. 1130)	1124 - 1130
Innocent II (b. ? - d. 1143)	1130 - 1143
*Anacletus II (Antipope) (b. ? - d. 1138)	1130 - 1138
*Victor IV (Antipope) (b. ? - d. 1139) ²	1138
Celestine II (b. ? - d. 1144)	1143 - 1144
Lucius II (b. ? - d. 1145)	1144 - 1145
Eugene III (c. 1080 - 1153)	1145 - 1153

¹ Celestine II was elected pope but resigned before being consecrated and enthroned.

² Victor IV died sometime after April 1139.

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Introduction

One may be surprised to learn that until the eleventh century, clerical marriage was widespread in Western Europe. Clerics marrying and having children continued for many centuries despite numerous councils and synods prohibiting the practice. By the eleventh century, clerical marriage (or “nicolaitism”) came to be seen as an “abuse” by the reformers. This raises the question: why, after it had been common practice for so long, did eleventh-century reformers devote so much time and effort to ban clerical marriage and enforce celibacy? More importantly, exactly how did reformers argue that clerical marriage was an “abuse” that needed to be eradicated?

This thesis will argue that the reformers’ attack on clerical marriage was a multifaceted approach in which not only were theological and practical reasons against the practice were argued, but married clerics and their wives became targets of the reformers. The reformers condemned the practice on theological grounds arguing that not only should a priest be “pure” when administering the sacraments, but that priests should follow Christ’s example of an unmarried life. The reformers also tried to argue that celibacy and being unmarried had Apostolic authority and biblical precedence. On practical grounds, the reformers argued that the wives and children of married priests would distract them from their duties. There was also a concern that clerical families would be a drain on Church resources and that clerical positions may become hereditary. Church resources might be diverted to supporting a priest’s family and a hereditary clergy would be harder to control. Married priests and their wives were also subjects of attack by the reformers. In the writings of the reformers, married priests were often called “fornicators”, and clerical wives were often referred to as “concubines”.

Compared to the issues of lay investiture and simony, clerical marriage has received far less attention from scholars. I.S. Robinson³ and H.E.J. Cowdrey⁴, considered to be the foremost scholars on the Investiture Controversy and “Gregorian” reforms, typically mention clerical marriage only briefly in passing and limit themselves to practical reasons why reformers sought to eliminate the practice. This lack of attention from scholars is puzzling when one considers that among the eleventh-century reforms, the enforced ban on clerical marriage had the greatest impact on the clergy. Historian Anne Llewellyn Barstow argues that by enforcing its ban on clerical marriage, the Western church not only created a separation between the laity and clergy, but an entirely new caste in medieval society.⁵ To date Anne L. Barstow has been the only scholar to examine both the practical and theological arguments of the reformers. However, the main problem with Barstow’s approach is that she treats the theological and practical as separate entities, and does not explore how they worked together to support the reformers’ arguments. While Barstow mentions that married priests and their wives often became targets for attack, she seems to regard this as a “side effect” of the reform instead of being an element of the reformers’ attack on clerical marriage. I intend to take a different approach from Barstow by showing that the theological and practical arguments of the reformers were used together to attack clerical marriage. Also, the attack on

³ For example, in *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); *Authority and Resistance in the Investiture Contest: The Polemical Literature of the Late Eleventh Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); and “The Friendship Network of Gregory VII,” *History* 63, no. 207 (1978): 1-22. - In all three works the issue of clerical marriage is hardly discussed at all.

⁴ H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) - While this work provides useful information on the life and reign of Hildebrand of Sovana (Pope Gregory VII), like Robinson, Cowdrey also overlooks the issue of clerical marriage.

⁵ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1982), 19.

married clergy and their wives was another component of the reformers' argumentation against clerical marriage, instead of merely a "side effect".

The eleventh century was a major turning point for the Western Church. Towards the middle of the century began a period of reform (often referred as the "Gregorian Reforms") which sought to eliminate the practices of clerical marriage, simony and lay investiture. When exactly this period of reform begins and ends has been a source of debate among scholars. Pope Leo IX's (1002 - 1054) Easter Synod of April 1049 is often regarded as the beginning of the reform period because the practices of clerical marriage and simony were both condemned. However, it was not until the Lateran Synod of 1059 when the validity of clerical marriages was denied.⁶ At the Synod of 1074 under Pope Gregory VII (c. 1015 - 1085), lay investiture was addressed for the first time and thereafter become the dominant issue of the reformers till the Concordat of Worms in 1122. Some historians have even pointed to the Council of Pavia in 1022 as the beginning of the reform period as it was the first council of eleventh century in which clerical unchastity was addressed and declared "a root of all evils".⁷ Others like Cowdrey have persuasively argued that the antecedent for the eleventh-century reforms began in the tenth century with the Clunaic movement.⁸ Founded by Odo of Cluny (c. 878 - 942), the Clunaic reform movement sought to eliminate "earthly influences" from monastic life and promoted celibacy. For my research, I have decided to focus mainly on the years from 1049 to 1150. The reasons for this are twofold: first, the primary source material from this period against clerical marriage in the form of polemics, treatises, letters and

⁶ Leidulf Melve, "The Public Debate on Clerical Marriage in the Late Eleventh Century." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61, no. 4 (2010): 689.

⁷ Kathleen G. Cushing. *Reform and the papacy in the eleventh century: spirituality and social change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 120.

⁸ H. E. J. Cowdrey, *The Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 266.

decrees, begins to appear in the 1050s after the Synod of 1049. For example, the *Liber Gomorrhianus* (“Book of Gomorrah”) written around the year 1051 by the Italian Benedictine monk and cardinal, Peter Damian (c. 1007 - 1072/73), is one of his first works attacking the perceived “sexual vices” of the clergy. The French Benedictine monk and later Abbot of Silva and Cardinal, Humbert of Silva Candida (c. 1000/15 - 1061) wrote *Adversus Nicetam* (“Against Nicetas”) in 1054. In it, Humbert attacks the Studite monk, Nicetas Stethatos (c. 1005 - c. 1090) (also known as Nicetas “Pectoratus”), and criticizes the Eastern Church’s practice of allowing its clergy to marry. Second, although the Concordat of Worms in 1122 has been regarded as the end for the “Gregorian” reforms in regards to lay investiture, the issue of clerical marriage continued to be a problem for the Church well into the twelfth century. In the early-to-mid twelfth century polemics attacking and defending clerical marriage continued to be produced. Around the year 1100, the Anonymous of York (also known as the “Norman Anonymous”) wrote three tracts defending clerical marriage. While it would perhaps make sense to stop at the year 1139 with the Second Lateran Council, since from that point to the present day it has been the Western Church’s policy that its clerics remain unmarried and celibate, it appears that after 1139 clerical marriage continued to have detractors and defenders. The French nun, philosopher, scholar, and wife of the monk and philosopher Peter Abelard (1079 - 1142), Héloïse d'Argenteuil (c. 1100 - 1163/64), weighs in on the topic of clerical marriage in the 1140s. Héloïse provides a unique female perspective on clerical marriage, which I believe is worth taking into consideration when trying to understand the clerical marriage debate of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For Héloïse and Abelard, clerical marriage was a personal issue and both suffered from the anti-marriage

reforms. Their experience helps provide us with a window into the historical reality and impact of these reforms.

In order to make an effective case against clerical marriage, the eleventh-century reformers needed to attack the practice on multiple fronts. The first chapter will examine the theological arguments of the reformers. It will be shown that the theological arguments served as a “foundation” for the reformers’ attack on clerical marriage. Here, the reformers tried to cite historical and biblical precedence as well as authority of the Apostles and Church fathers. However, they could not argue against clerical marriage and unchastity solely on theological grounds as this would confine their campaign to intellectual circles. Chapter two examines the practical arguments made against clerical marriage. This was an important element of the reformers’ argumentation as they needed to convey the idea clerical marriage was detrimental to the Church not only spiritually but it also had negative “real world” consequences for the clergy and laity. For example, a point often argued by the reformers was that having a wife and children would distract a priest from his duties. The third chapter examines the reformers’ attack on married clergy and clerical wives. In doing so, not only was attention drawn to the practice itself, but such clerics became an example of someone committing this “abuse”. This element of the reformers’ attack on married clergy also helped to serve as a means for practical implementation of reforms. For example, Gregory VII’s decree that the laity should not attend masses by simoniac or married priests would have caused problems for priests who were known in their community to be married. Feeling pressure from Rome and their community may have caused some priests to either leave their wives or the clergy. The fourth chapter will briefly explore the “pro-marriage” side of the eleventh and

twelfth century debate on clerical marriage. Those who defended the clergy's "right" to marry likewise sought historical and biblical precedents, Apostolic authority and authority of the Church fathers. Like the reformers, the "anti-reformers" also cited real world problems. For example, Anonymous of York argued that if priests were not allowed to marry, they might be driven to commit far worse crimes.⁹ In the fifth chapter, I examine the relationship of the twelfth century French nun and scholar Héloïse d'Argenteuil and the French scholar and philosopher Peter Abelard. Not only are they both the example of a clerical couple whose lives were impacted by the Church's increasing efforts at reform, but Héloïse provides a rare female perspective from this time on the topic of marriage.

⁹ C.N.L. Brooke. "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1050-1200." *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 12, no. 1 (1956): 14.

Historiography

Scholarship regarding the Investiture Controversy and the eleventh-century “Gregorian” reforms begins in the early-sixteenth century. One of the first works published on the eleventh-century reforms was the polemic, *Secleratus Hildebrandus* (literally, “The Wicked Hildebrand”), written by Ulrich von Hutten and Hardwin von Grätz.¹⁰ Both were followers of Martin Luther and defended the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, who became embroiled in a conflict with Pope Gregory VII over the issue of lay investiture. The first real scholarly work on this period, *Apologia pro Gregorio VII pontifice maximo contra sectarios* (“An apology for Gregory VII against the wicked”), by the German Jesuit and writer Jacob Gretser (1562-1625), was published in 1606. Grester’s work was ground-breaking for its use of primary source materials dating from Gregory VII’s pontificate. According to I.S. Robinson, Grester’s work was responsible for “inaugurating for the long-held interpretation that the Investiture Contest was a struggle between Catholic orthodoxy and secular power.”¹¹ From the sixteenth century to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, scholarship of the eleventh century was largely dominated by German scholars. These scholars (especially earlier ones) focused more on lay investiture than simony or clerical marriage. This was likely due to the Holy Roman Empire’s relationship with Rome. The Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, was excommunicated twice for his refusal to enforce and accept Gregory VII’s decrees against the practice of lay investiture, which resulted in decades of civil war and unrest in German lands. Thus scholarship of the eleventh-century reforms was initially permeated

¹⁰ I.S. Robinson, *Authority and Resistance in the Investiture Contest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 1.

¹¹ Robinson, *Authority and Resistance in the Investiture Contest*, 1.

with ideas of the Reformation in which many writings were published questioning papal authority.

Henry C. Lea

One of the first works to deal specifically with clerical marriage and celibacy in regards to the eleventh-century reforms was Henry C. Lea's, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, first published in May of 1869. Lea explores the history of clerical celibacy from its alleged Apostolic origins to the mid-nineteenth century. According to the historian Anne L. Barstow, Lea's underlying objective was to challenge the then-current Catholic interpretation that celibacy was Apostolic doctrine.¹² To support his argument, Lea cites scripture (I Corinthians 9:5) as evidence that the Apostles themselves were married.¹³ Lea also points to the Apostolic Canons six and fifteen, which not only forbid the clergy from leaving their wives under the pretext of religion, but also prescribe punishment for any clerk or layman who abstains from marriage.¹⁴ He also notes that nowhere in the Apostolic Constitutions is sex restricted or forbidden between the married clergy and their wives.¹⁵ While Lea establishes his argument and begins to support it with evidence in the first two chapters of the book, he seems to abandon it by the third chapter. Overall, the *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, is a relatively basic work on celibacy and clerical marriage. While Lea made use of papal documents in the first edition (such as the *Registrum* and *Epistolae Vagantes* of Gregory VII), he fails to mention or make use other eleventh-century authorities such as Damian and Humbert. It is unclear why Lea did not include these eleventh-century writers in his initial research. As a historian writing on the

¹² Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy*, 14.

¹³ Henry Charles Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church* (New Hyde Park, N.Y: University Books, 1966), 10.

¹⁴ Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 28.

¹⁵ Lea, 30.

eleventh-century reforms, surely, he must have been aware of Damian and Humbert. Lea's omission of these medieval writers may have been due to the inaccessibility of their works to someone writing in the mid-nineteenth century. However, this puzzling absence of important eleventh-century sources was remedied in later editions. When the revised second edition was published twenty-three years later, it featured an entire chapter on Damian.¹⁶ Lea's work was greatly received and he is credited with opening the subject of clerical marriage and celibacy to Anglophone historians and polemicists.¹⁷

As a monograph, the later editions of the *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, continue to hold up very well by covering major events, figures, decrees and developments in the long debate over clerical marriage and celibacy. However, the *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy* has to be supplemented with newer scholarship. For example, Lea does not discuss the influence the Clunaic movement had on the eleventh-century reforms. One should also be aware of the possibility of an anti-Catholic bias, as Lea himself was a Quaker.¹⁸

Franz Xaver von Funk

The next major work on the history of clerical celibacy came in a series of articles published between 1879 and 1897 by the German Catholic theologian and historian, Franz Xaver von Funk. He builds on Lea's argument that clerical celibacy as not Apostolic doctrine by examining decrees made by the early Christian Church. In the articles "Der Zölibat ist keine apostolische Anordnung," and "Cölibat und Priesterehe imchristlichen Alterum," von Funk successfully disproved the old argument that priestly

¹⁶ Lea, v.

¹⁷ Edward Peters. "History, Historians and Clerical Celibacy" in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*. Michael Frassetto (ed.) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 8-9.

¹⁸ Lea, v.

celibacy dated from the Apostolic period, instead arguing for the fourth century CE.¹⁹ He notes that clerical celibacy could not have been Apostolic doctrine because the first decrees and legislation concerning celibacy and clerical marriage did not appear until the fourth century CE. Like Lea, von Funk also acknowledges that there is no scriptural precedence to support the Church's policy on celibacy. His work was very well received in his lifetime and had a major influence on French scholars such as Elphège Vacandard and Henri Leclercq. Vacandard published an article on celibacy in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* in 1905. Leclercq also published an article on celibacy in the *Historie des conciles* in 1908.²⁰ According to historian Edward Peters, Vacandard's work lay behind the treatment of celibacy in Augustin Fliche's *La Réforme grégorienne*.²¹ While von Funk succeeded in finishing the argument which Lea started, he did not contribute much to the scholarship of clerical marriage in the eleventh-century reforms. For example, in *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (published in English as "A Manual of Church History") he briefly discusses the Investiture Controversy and makes no mention of simony or clerical marriage.²²

Augustin Fliche

Augustin Fliche (1884 - 1951) was a French historian who specialized in the history of the medieval church. *La Réforme grégorienne*, published in three volumes between 1924 and 1937, examined the eleventh-century "Gregorian" reforms including the issue of clerical marriage.²³ At the time of its initial publication, *La Réforme*

¹⁹ Peters, "History, Historians and Clerical Celibacy," 11.

²⁰ Peters, 11

²¹ Ibid.

²² Franz Xaver von Funk, and P. Perciballi (trans.) *A Manual of Church History* Vol. 1 (London: Burns & Oates, 1914), 335-345.

²³ Peters, 11.

grégorienne was perhaps the most substantial piece of scholarship on clerical marriage and celibacy in regards to the eleventh-century reform since Lea's *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*. Fliche was also one of the first scholars to examine why numerous decrees issued against clerical marriage over the centuries were unsuccessful. He concluded that these decrees were bound to fail without a strong, independent papacy to foster and promote them.²⁴ Fliche identified Pope Leo XI (not Gregory VII) as the founder of the eleventh-century reform movement. He also argued that the abolition of simony and nicolaitism were Gregory's chief goals. Although Fliche provides a lengthy analysis of Gregory and finds fault with his opponents, he fails to separate clearly the political and ascetic goals.²⁵ According to Barstow, *La Réforme grégorienne* still provides a useful discussion of much of the source material for the eleventh-century defence of clerical marriage.²⁶

Christopher Brooke

After Fliche, no substantial new work appears on celibacy and clerical marriage in the eleventh century until Christopher N. L. Brooke's articles on the English Church in 1956.²⁷ In the article, "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England 1050-1200," Brooke examines the impact the "Gregorian" reforms had on the married clergy in England.²⁸ Brook notes that between the Norman conquest of England in 1066 and 1123, a number of canons were issued in England against the married clergy.²⁹ According to Barstow, Brooke's detailed research made it possible for the first time to see the effort of

²⁴ Barstow, 9.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Barstow, 14.

²⁸ Brooke. "Gregorian Reform in Action," 1-21.

²⁹ Brooke, 15.

the Gregorian decrees on the lives of the English clergy, to trace the steady retreat of married clergy in major orders, and by the year 1200 marriage among ministers of the altar was virtually eliminated.³⁰

Ernest Sackur

By the end of the nineteenth century, French, English and German scholars began to debate whether or not the Clunaic movement had an influence on the eleventh-century reforms. Beginning in the tenth century, the Clunaic reforms sought to remove “worldly” influences from monastic life, and promote celibacy. One of the first to argue a connection between the two was Ernst Sackur, who published *Die Cluniacenser in ihrer kirchlichen und allgemeingeschichtlichen Wirksamkeit bis zur Mitte des elften* in 1894.³¹ In it, Sackur argues that three main elements of the Clunaic movement can be seen in Gregory VII’s activity: the idea of a universal Church, the spiritual over the temporal, and the idea of a clergy free from all vices.³² Although Suckur died in 1901 at the age of 39, his work triggered a debate what would rage well into the twentieth century.

H.E.J Cowdrey and I.S. Robinson

The two major English historians in the twentieth century to study the eleventh-century reforms were H.E.J. Cowdrey and I.S. Robinson. In *The Clunaics and the Gregorian Reform*, published in 1970, Cowdrey argues that the Clunaic movement had an influence on the eleventh-century reforms and the reforming popes like Gregory VII. To support his argument, Cowdrey compares the two movements and concludes that both shared common ground in their struggle for freedom from lay entanglement, and

³⁰ Barstow, 14-15.

³¹ Ernest Sackur, Schafer Williams (trans.), “The Influence of the Cluniac Movement” in *The Gregorian Epoch: Reform, Revolution, Reaction?* Schafer Williams (ed.) (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1967), 13.

³² Ernest Sackur, “The Influence of the Cluniac Movement,” 15.

promoted moral and material purification.³³ He also notes that at some point in their lives, a few of the reforming popes like Gregory VII (born Hildebrand of Sovana) were monks and were likely influenced by what they saw as the monastery's efforts to reform monastic life. While Cowdrey notes that the ultimate goal of the "Gregorian" reforms was to free the Church from subjugation of temporal lordship, the Clunaic movement prompted a separation between the regular clergy and laity.³⁴ Cowdrey's interpretation has gained wide acceptance among scholars. Since the 1980s, historians have come to regard the eleventh-century reform movement as a continuation of the reform program which began in Cluny (West Francia) in the late-tenth century.³⁵

This idea of a Clunaic influence on the eleventh-century reformers was later built upon by Phyllis G. Jestice, in "Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of a New Sexual Morality."³⁶ Jestice focused on Cluny's influence on the eleventh-century reformers in regards to celibacy. For Odo of Cluny and his contemporaries, chastity kept the mind turned towards God, made meditation possible and kept the Christian's mind focused on eternal truth rather than transitory pleasures of the world.³⁷ Jestice's underlying argument is that tenth-century reformers concern with celibacy was due to a combination of a growing emphasis of monastic and ritual spirituality, and the beginnings of an effort to convince Christians that they could hope to emulate Christ.³⁸ This concern

³³ Cowdrey, *The Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform*, 136-137.

³⁴ Cowdrey, 136-137.

³⁵ Jonathan Stavnskær Doucette, and Jørgen Møller. "The Collapse of State Power, the Cluniac Reform Movement, and the Origins of Urban Self-Government in Medieval Europe." *International Organization* 75, no. 1 (2021): 207.

³⁶ Phyllis G. Jestice, "Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of a New Sexual Mortality" in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*. Michael Frassetto (ed.) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 81-115.

³⁷ Jestice, "Why Celibacy?" 87.

³⁸ Jestice, 81.

with ritual, moral and spiritual purity was later adopted by the eleventh-century reformers.

In 1978, Robinson published the article “The Friendship Network of Gregory VII”. In it, Robinson examines the support Gregory received from his allies earlier in his pontificate.³⁹ However, this support slowly eroded over time as he became increasingly zealous in his reforming efforts against nicolaitism and lay investiture. Robinson was the first to examine Gregory’s allies and their support of the reforms. Historians up to that point, like Cowdrey, had focused mostly on the resistance Gregory experienced in trying to enforce reforms.

While Cowdrey and Robinson have contributed much to scholarship of the eleventh-century reforms, both have largely overlooked the issue of clerical marriage and celibacy. Both only discuss clerical marriage and/or celibacy briefly in passing, and limit themselves to explaining the practical arguments of the reformers. However, it is worth noting that later in life, Cowdrey wrote a chapter entitled, “Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy” in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*.⁴⁰ In this relatively short chapter, Cowdrey examines the efforts of Pope Gregory VII to eradicate the practice of clerical marriage and the arguments of the reformers. While Cowdrey examines the issue of clerical marriage in regards to the eleventh-century reforms in far greater detail than his previous works, and makes good use of primary source materials (such as papal decrees and writings of

³⁹ I.S. Robinson. “The Friendship Network of Gregory VII,” *History* 63, no. 207 (1978): 7.

⁴⁰ H.E.J. Cowdrey. “Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy” in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*. Micheal Frassetto (ed.) 269-302 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

Damian and Humbert), unfortunately he focuses on the practical arguments of the reformers instead of the theological arguments.

Anne L. Barstow

Perhaps the most significant work published in the last forty years on clerical marriage in relation to the eleventh-century reforms is Anne L. Barstow's *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates*. Unlike Cowdrey and Robinson, Barstow examines both the practical and theological arguments made by the eleventh-century reformers against clerical marriage. She argues that the concern with "purity" and celibacy in the eleventh-century was due to a rise in the popularity of asceticism and led to a process in which the clergy was gradually monasticized. Barstow also argues that in prohibiting the clergy to marry, the Western Church not only created a separation of the clergy and laity, but an entirely new caste in medieval society. To support her argument, Barstow frequently cites the *Registrum* and *Epistolae Vagantes* of Gregory VII, the writings of Damian and Humbert and various papal decrees against clerical marriage created before and during the eleventh century. Like Fliche, Barstow also explores why clerical marriage continued for so long despite the number of decrees made over the centuries prohibiting the practice.⁴¹ She comes to a similar conclusion as Fliche, that the Church prior to the 1050s lacked the means and mechanisms to enforce such decrees.⁴² Barstow's work is also noteworthy for including a chapter on the defence of clerical marriage. Those who defended the clergy's right to marry is another aspect of the eleventh-century reforms which has been overlooked by scholars. Barstow examines the arguments of those in the pro-marriage camp including the "Anonymous" of York

⁴¹ Barstow, 1.

⁴² Barstow, 45.

(Normandy) and Ulric of Imola and Sigebert of Gembloux (Germany). She concludes that the pro-marriage writers rejected compulsory celibacy for three main reasons: first, they considered such decrees to be arbitrary and new inventions deigned to control rather than reform men.⁴³ Second, such decrees were enforced by men who did not lead moral lives themselves.⁴⁴ Third, it forced otherwise honest men to engage in undesirable forms of sex.⁴⁵ Barstow's book appears to have been very well received. In a review published in 1983 in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Brooke states that:

... she [Barstow] succeeds in clarifying the world of practice and the polemics in a clear, sensible and sympathetic survey, which draws many threads together, and will be a valuable aid to future students of both celibacy and papal reform.⁴⁶

In the review, Brooke also stated that he concurred with Barstow's observation that compared to other aspects of the eleventh-century reforms, clerical marriage has been largely neglected.⁴⁷

From the 1990s to the Present Situation

After Barstow, very little scholarship on the eleventh-century reforms was published during the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium. During this period only two major publications regarding clerical celibacy and the eleventh-century reforms were produced in 1998. *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Clerical Celibacy and the Religious Reforms*, edited by Michael Frassetto, contains chapters written by a variety of scholars on a range of topics related to the reform period.⁴⁸ The Chapter "History, Historians and Clerical Celibacy", by Edward Peters examines the

⁴³ Barstow, 154/155.

⁴⁴ Barstow, 155.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ C.N.L. Brooke. "Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates. By Anne Llewellyn Barstow." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34, no. 3 (1983): 482.

⁴⁷ Brooke, "Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy," 482.

⁴⁸ Michael Frassetto (ed.) *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

historiography of clerical celibacy and of the eleventh-century reforms.⁴⁹ “Gregory and the Prohibition of Nicolaitism”, by Uta-Renate Blumenthal, examines the efforts of reforming popes like Gregory VII to eradicate clerical marriage and simony.⁵⁰ Chapters by authors I previously discussed (Phyllis G. Jestice and H.E.J. Cowdrey) are also included. That same year *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, by Dyan Elliott was published. In it, Elliott examines the medieval Church’s association of sex with sinfulness, impurity and immorality.⁵¹ At certain points she discusses the emphasis reformers like Damian placed on the idea of celibacy and purity.⁵² A section of Elliot’s book was republished as the chapter “The Priests Wife: Female Erasure and the Gregorian Reform” in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* in 2005.⁵³ This chapter has since been frequently cited by scholars, which shows the work’s importance for contemporary scholars.

The 2010s saw a handful of publications on the eleventh-century reforms with a particular focus on celibacy, sex, gender, and marriages. Helen L. Parish’s, *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c. 1100 - 1700* was published in 2010. In it, Parish examines the debate over clerical celibacy from the early Christian Church to the Reformation period and later. In Chapter 3, “‘A ‘Concubine or an unlawful woman’: Celibacy, Marriage, and the Gregorian Reform”, she discusses Church decrees during the eleventh century against

⁴⁹ Edward Peters, “History, Historians and Clerical Celibacy” in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*. Michael Frassetto (ed.) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 3-21.

⁵⁰ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, “Gregory and the Prohibition of Nicolaitism” in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*. Michael Frassetto (ed.) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 239-267.

⁵¹ Dyan Elliott. *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*. (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

⁵² Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 101, 103, 105.

⁵³ Dyan Elliott, “The Priest’s Wife: Female Erasure and the Gregorian Reform” in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance H. Berman (ed.) . New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2005), 111-140.

clerical marriage and how reformers used the terms like “concubine” in referring to clerical wives as a means to deny the validity of clerical marriages.⁵⁴ Megan McLaughlin’s, *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in the Age of Reform, 1000-1122*, published in 2010, examines how the definition of marriage and what it meant to be married underwent a change during this period.⁵⁵ In 2012, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* by Ruth Mazo Karras looks at how the medieval Church slowly started to regulate and influence unions between men and women, including the relationship between priests and their female partners.⁵⁶ Published in 2015, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300*, by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, examines the efforts at reforming the clergy of England and Normandy after the Norman conquests, and focuses on the polemics of pro-marriage writers.⁵⁷ To date, Thibodeaux has been the only scholar besides Barstow to provide an in-depth examination of the defense of clerical marriage during the eleventh and early-twelfth centuries. Thibodeaux argues that that one of the main reasons why the Norman and Anglo-Saxon writers defended the right of clerics to marry was that this enforced celibacy robbed men of their masculinity. Particularly in Anglo-Saxon culture, being married and having children was regarded as a mark of manliness.⁵⁸ In 2019, *Married Life in the Middle Ages, 900-1300* by Elizabeth van Houts

⁵⁴ Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West, c.1100-1700*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 87-122.

⁵⁵ Megan McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform, 1000-1122*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages*. 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press., 2015).

⁵⁸ Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 12.

examines various aspects of marriage and being married in the Middle Ages.⁵⁹ In Chapter 6, “Clerical Marriages”, van Houts looks at the debate surrounding clerical marriage and the arguments made against such marriages by reformers like Damian.⁶⁰ In the first twenty-five years of the twenty-first century, nearly all the scholarship on clerical marriage and the eleventh-century reforms comes from prominent female scholars. Until very recently, nothing has been published by male scholars in regards to the eleventh-century reforms.

For the most part, the topic of clerical marriage and celibacy with regards to the eleventh-century “Gregorian” reforms continues to be overlooked by scholars. While scholarship on the eleventh-century reforms began in the sixteenth century, scholars did not begin to examine the issue of clerical marriage and celibacy until the mid-nineteenth century. While Lea was one of the first western scholars to examine the history of clerical marriage and celibacy in regards to the eleventh-century reforms, no substantial work was produced on the subject until the publication of Fliche’s *La Réforme grégorienne* over a half-century later. The topic continued to be largely overlooked by mid-twentieth century scholars. In the 1970s, scholars like Robinson and Cowdrey began to touch upon the practical arguments of the eleventh-century reformers. Even Gerd Tellenbach, who was considered a prominent scholar of the eleventh-century reforms, completely ignores the reforms and instead focuses on the Investiture Contest. “History, Historians, and Clerical Celibacy,” by Edward Peters provides a useful discussion of the complex

⁵⁹ Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, *Married Life in the Middle Ages, 900-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶⁰ Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, *Married Life in the Middle Ages, 900-1300*, 170-198.

historiography of clerical celibacy.⁶¹ Peters covers the long and complex historiography of clerical marriage and celibacy, and discusses the scholarly contributions of such scholars as Lea, von Funk, and Brooke. However, Peters does not discuss the historiography of clerical marriage and celibacy in regards to the eleventh-century reforms, and only mentions Fliche and Barstow's work in passing.⁶² The ongoing problem in eleventh-century scholarship is the tendency to focus solely on either the theological or practical arguments of the reformers. So far, Barstow is the only scholar who has examined both the practical and theological arguments of the reformers and pro-marriage writers. Also, there has been no scholarship regarding how the attack on the married clergy was an element of the reformers' argumentation against clerical marriage and unchastity. As of April 2025, the most recent work on the period is *Lower than Angels: A History of Sex and Christianity*, by the English historian, Diarmaid MacCulloch, published in September of 2024.⁶³ In it, MacCulloch examines how the Church has handled sexual relations over the centuries and focuses largely on the reforming efforts of Gregory VII.⁶⁴ MacCulloch argues that there is no single Christian theology on sex, but rather a plethora of Christian theologies of sex, many of which "have over two millennia been downright contradictions of each other."⁶⁵ As this is a

⁶¹ Edward Peters, "History, Historians and Clerical Celibacy" in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, 3-21.

⁶² Edward Peters, "History, Historians and Clerical Celibacy", 12.

⁶³ Diaramid MacCulloch. *Lower than Angels: A History of Sex and Christianity* (Bristol, UK: Allen Lane publishers, 2024).

⁶⁴ Noel Malcolm, "Lower Than the Angels by Diarmaid MacCulloch (Book Review)" *Times Literary Supplement*. News UK, September 27, 2024. <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/religion/religious-culture/lower-than-the-angels-diarmaid-macculloch-book-review-noel-malcolm> (Accessed November 29, 2024).

⁶⁵ Adrian Thatcher, "Book Review: Lower than the Angels: A History of Sex and Christianity." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2025): 68. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/10.1177/00211400241307782c>.

very recent publication, we will have to wait and see what impact MacCulloch's book will have on the scholarship and historiography of the eleventh-century reforms.

Background

The Origins of Clerical Celibacy

The association of sexual activity with impurity or defilement is almost universal and is likely as old as religion itself.⁶⁶ However, in regards to religions found around the Mediterranean, such as the Semitic peoples, Hellenistic religions and the old Roman cult, the requirement of sexual abstinence before participating in worship is particularly striking.⁶⁷

In the Old Testament there are four categories or objects or activities that were looked upon as “unclean”: certain foods, leprosy, contact with corpses and sexual activities of any kind.⁶⁸ In regards to the latter, uncleanness resulted from any discharge from sexual organs, menstruation, childbirth, and even normal sexual intercourse (Ex. 19.15; Lev. 7.19-20; 15.16; 22.4; I Sam. 21.4; Ezk. 44.9).⁶⁹ Such activities rendered a person unclean for the rest of the day, and then a bath was required. Priests who had intercourse were not only unclean for the whole day, but were not permitted to eat any of the food offered for sacrifice.⁷⁰ After the Babylonian captivity, the Jewish priesthood underwent a “sacralizing” period in which new asceticism which required abstinence from sex for three days before sacrificing at the altar was adopted.⁷¹

A similar requirement of abstinence before worship can also be seen in the Hellenistic religions and the old Roman religion. The devotees of Athena of Pergamon were ordered to abstain from intercourse with their own husband or wife for one day, and

⁶⁶ Charles Frazee, “Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church.” *Church History* 57, no. 1 (1988): 113.

⁶⁷ Frazee, “Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church,” 113.

⁶⁸ Frazee, 112.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Barstow, 22.

from any other for two days.⁷² A common soldier's prayer to Mithras invoked the god: "Mithras, also a soldier, keep us pure till dawn".⁷³ Roman farmers before sacrificing were required to be chaste (*castus*) before making their offering.⁷⁴ This gave them the indefinable power of *numen*. Before making his worship, the participant in such a rite would need all the *numen* that was to be had, and sexual relations are full of *numen*; therefore to engage in them would use up the available supply of that precious power.⁷⁵ According to Charles A. Frazee, the motivation behind these prescriptions apparently was based upon the feeling that the "power" sought from the gods would be lost unless sexual purity was present in the worshipper. The classical scholar, Herbert J. Rose suggested that chastity is so powerful because it ". . . involves turning the great magical force of human fertility, unspent and unweakened by normal usage, into a magical channel."⁷⁶ Since Christianity originated in the Eastern Mediterranean in the first century CE, it only stands to reason that it would acquire some of these attitudes towards sex and ritual purity from Semitic and Hellenistic influences.

Another major influence on the Christians attitude towards sex was a new form of asceticism which came out of Egypt in the fourth century CE.⁷⁷ Chastity and virginity became considered superior to marriage, and sexuality was discussed in increasingly negative terms. Prominent Christians in Rome had been inspired by this new model of asceticism when two famous Egyptian monks, Athanasius and Peter of Alexandria, had spend a period of exile in the Western capital in the mid-fourth century.⁷⁸ In the decades

⁷² Frazee, 113.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Frazee, 114.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Barstow, 30.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

following Nicaea a wave of popular enthusiasm for the type of Christian life known as monasticism swept the Eastern Empire. While previously an ascetic life had to be undertaken on the personal initiative of the Christian, it was now possible to join with others in pursuing the ideal which was held to rest in a life of extreme self-denial. Celibacy was of supreme importance to the monk -- this kind of life was unthinkable apart from it.⁷⁹ Beginning in Egypt, monasticism moved into Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor with astonishing rapidity and enlisted men and women in the tens of thousands. It was carried to the West when Athanasius was exiled to Gaul and took with him several Egyptian monks.⁸⁰ St. Basil of Caesarea (330-379 CE) is responsible for giving a definite direction to monasticism in the East, as did St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-547 CE) in the West.⁸¹ Both men were concerned over the celibate life of the monk. Basil's appreciation is summed up in his statement that it is celibacy which "makes man like the incorruptible God" and "preserves the body from corruption."⁸²

This concern with chastity and celibacy was revived in France in the tenth century with the founding of Cluny in Burgundy in 910 and the reformation of Gorze in Lorraine in 932.⁸³ The Clunaic reforms sought to remove "worldly" influences from monastic life, and promoted celibacy. For Odo of Cluny and his contemporaries, chastity kept the mind turned towards God, made meditation possible and kept the Christian's mind focused on eternal verity rather than transitory pleasures of the world.⁸⁴ The tenth century reformers concern with celibacy was due to a combination of a growing emphasis of monastic and

⁷⁹ Frazee, 115.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Frazee, 115/116.

⁸² Frazee, 116.

⁸³ Frazee, 119.

⁸⁴ Jestice, 87.

ritual spirituality, and the beginnings of an effort to convince Christians that they could hope to emulate Christ.⁸⁵ This concern with ritual, moral and spiritual purity in the tenth century was later adopted by the eleventh-century reformers.

For the Christian clergy, the perceived need for a constant state of “cleanliness” did not appear until around the late-second to early-third century once the concept of holiness became attached to the Eucharist.⁸⁶ Once communion became a standard Christian practice and the concept of Transubstantiation (the idea that the substance of bread of the Eucharist literally becomes the substance of the body of Christ) became widely accepted, new requirements were created for priests. Since a priest was expected to administer communion daily, therefore he had to always be “pure” (i.e. - abstain from sex) at all times. Then, at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third century his role began to change. The growth of the number of people within the church and the attendant complexity of problems partly as the result of persecution by the state forced the bishop more and more to take on an “official” status within the community.⁸⁷ There was pressure on the bishops to become “priests” in the way that the Jews and the pagans had cultic ministers.⁸⁸ There was concern for definite places of worship - the Jews had their synagogues and the pagans their temples - and a desire that the clergy, as many as were needed, should be full-time in the service of the church.⁸⁹ According to Frazee, even by third century CE, the priesthood was well on the way to becoming a special kind of Christian caste, something it had not been before this time.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Justice, 81.

⁸⁶ Frazee, 113.

⁸⁷ Frazee, 111.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Decrees Against Clerical Marriage

Prior to the eleventh century, the Christian Church had a long history of issuing decrees against clerical marriage and clerical unchastity. Decrees concerning the married clergy appear as early at the fourth century CE. The first was a decree from the Council of Nicaea (325). Although the decree itself did not prohibit the clergy from marrying or prescribe punishment for married priests, it did advise against having unmarried or unrelated women in their homes. However, at the same time it allowed the presence of a mother, sister, aunt, as well as “any person who is above suspicion.”⁹¹ Many ecumenical councils and synods over the next several hundred years issued decrees against clerical marriage, but for the most part these were largely ignored and/or were poorly enforced by the Church. As Barstow points out, despite six hundred years of decrees, canons, and increasingly harsh penalties, the Latin clergy continued to live with their wives and raise families.⁹²

The first council of the eleventh century to address the problem of clerical marriage and unchastity was the Council of Pavia in 1022. However, the main concern of the decrees from Pavia was not so much clerical marriage, but rather preventing the loss of Church lands and property.⁹³ At the Synod of Reims in 1049, Pope Leo IX demanded that those clergy who had purchased their office to declare their offense, and warned in powerful terms of the dangers of both apostasy and incest embodied in simony and incontinence.⁹⁴ That same year at the Synod held in Rome at Easter, Leo repeated the

⁹¹ Fiona Griffiths, “Wives, concubines, or slaves? Peter Damian and clerics’ women” *Early Medieval Europe* 30, no. 2 (2022): 274.

⁹² Barstow, 45.

⁹³ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, “The Prohibition of Clerical Marriage in the Eleventh Century” in *Chastity: A Study in Perception, Ideals, Opposition*. Nancy Van Deusen (ed.) (Leiden; Brill, 2008), 64.

⁹⁴ Parish. *Clerical celibacy in the West, c.1100-1700*, 84.

prohibition against clerics in major orders engaging in sexual relations with their wives, but also took the more radical step of instructing the laity to abstain from the sacraments of priests and clerks who were guilty of fornication.⁹⁵ According to the Italian monk Peter Damian, it was also decreed at the Easter Synod of 1049 that the wives of clerics should be made slaves of the Church (later I discuss why this claim is rather suspect in Chapter 3). Under Pope Nicholas II, the Roman Synod of 1059 ruled forcefully against incontinence and concubinage; of equal importance, by equating priests' wives with concubines, the validity of clerical marriage is for the first time implicitly denied.⁹⁶ The Synod of 1059 also famously decreed that the faithful were not to attend the masses of the clergy known to have intercourse with women.⁹⁷ The Synods of 1074 and 1075 under Pope Gregory VII repeated the decrees of the 1059 Synod. However, what set Gregory apart from previous reforming Popes was his willingness to take practical measures in order to secure adherence to the prohibition.⁹⁸

Problems with Enforcement

With so many decrees issued against clerical marriage and unchastity over the centuries, why did these practices continue unabated for so long? One reason is the situation of the Christian Church from the late-fourth century and into the Middle Ages. Since the majority of clergy were already married (especially prior to being ordained), the Church could not afford to disqualify large numbers of its personnel.⁹⁹ The Church at the time was devoted to the concept of indissoluble marriage, and therefore hesitated to break

⁹⁵ Parish, 97.

⁹⁶ Melve, "The Public Debate on Clerical Marriage in the Late Eleventh Century," 689.

⁹⁷ Brooke, "Gregorian Reform in Action," 5.

⁹⁸ Melve, 690.

⁹⁹ Barstow, 21.

up licit unions.¹⁰⁰ Also, if such decrees were enforced, it may discourage people from joining the clergy. Caught between an increasing asceticism and a commitment to affirm marriage, church leaders more or less tolerated married clergy until the eleventh century.¹⁰¹ Second, until the 1050s, the Church lacked the ability to enforce such decrees. As Agustin Fliche points out, all these attempts were bound to fail without a strong, independent papacy to foster and promote them.¹⁰² Gregory VII's main innovation was not only the use of legates to make sure decrees were being followed and enforced, but excommunication (for laity and clergy) who either refused or failed to follow papal decrees. It is also worth noting that the ninth and tenth centuries, Europe experienced numerous invasions and civil wars.¹⁰³ As a result, the issues of clerical marriage and celibacy took a back seat to the chaos and upheaval of this period. By the year 1000, a bishop or priest with a wife or concubine was not unusual.¹⁰⁴ What percentage of the Western clergy were married by the dawn of the second millennium is difficult to answer with any certainty due to the lack of evidence. But as Frazee notes, most authorities agree from the time of Pope Gregory I (c. 530 - 604 CE) to the tenth century, a majority of clergymen in the West were married.¹⁰⁵

The Eleventh-Century "Threat" of Clerical Marriage

Exactly how and why clerical marriage and unchastity became seen as a threat by the eleventh century has never been entirely explained. Different theories and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Peter Damian, and Pierre Payer (trans.) *Book of Gomorrah: an eleventh century treatise against clerical homosexual practices* 1st ed. (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 11.

¹⁰³ Joseph H. Lynch, Philip C. Adamo, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (London; Longman, 2014), 145.

¹⁰⁴ Lynch and Adamo, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History*, 145.

¹⁰⁵ Charles A Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church." *Church History* 57, no. 1 (1988): 119.

interpretations have been put forward to explain the causes of the eleventh-century reforms. To date, the most compelling explanation is that the eleventh-century reformers were influenced by the tenth-century Clunaic movement. As H.E.J. Cowdrey points out, both the Clunaic reformers and eleventh-century reformers had very similar goals of removing “worldly influences” from monastic life and promoted celibacy.¹⁰⁶ Many of the reforming popes of the eleventh century began their ecclesiastical careers as monks and were likely influenced by these monastic reforms. The reform movement which began in the monasteries gradually spilled over into the secular clergy. Scholars like Phyllis G. Jestice have noted that the concern with ritual, moral and spiritual purity of the Clunaic reformers was later adopted by the eleventh-century reformers.¹⁰⁷ Since the 1980s, many historians and scholars have accepted the view that the eleventh-century reforms were a continuation of the Clunaic reforms which began in the tenth century.¹⁰⁸

However, in my opinion, the “Clunaic influence theory” does not fully explain the catalyst for reform in the eleventh century, or what factors caused a sense of urgency to deal with the issues of clerical marriage and unchastity. The eleventh century appears to have been a time when ideas surrounding the Latin Church’s governance, control and supremacy, religious rituals, behaviour of the clergy and its interaction with the laity, as well as celibacy and marriage all converge. Some like Barstow have argued that the eleventh-century reforms were the result of an increased concern with “purity” and celibacy due to the rise in the popularity of asceticism.¹⁰⁹ The eleventh century did seem

¹⁰⁶ Cowdrey, *The Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform*, 136-137.

¹⁰⁷ Jestice, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Stavnskær Doucette, and Jørgen Møller. “The Collapse of State Power, the Cluniac Reform Movement, and the Origins of Urban Self-Government in Medieval Europe.” *International Organization* 75, no. 1 (2021): 207.

¹⁰⁹ Barstow, 12.

to experience a revival in the concept of holiness attached to the Eucharist. As a priest was “literally” touching the body of Christ each time he performed the ritual of communion, therefore he had to be “pure” (i.e. - chaste) in order to be worthy of handling the sacrament. The underlying argument in Gerd Tallenbach’s, *Church, State, and Christian society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, was that the Western Church was trying to restructure and reorder society.¹¹⁰ The Medieval Church during this time increasingly desired to create a distinct separation between the clergy and laity. This meant not only improving the behavior of the clergy, but also correcting the general relationship with the Church to the secular world.¹¹¹ Ruth Mazo Karras notes that the medieval Church slowly started to regulate and influence unions between men and women, including the relationship between priests and their female partners.¹¹² During this time the concept and definition of marriage was starting to undergo a change and questions about such ideas as consent and clandestine vs. spiritual marriages began to appear (although such concepts would not be fully worked out for a least another century or so). It has also been suggested that the eleventh-century reformers felt that the Church was in a state of moral and spiritual decline. According to I.S. Robinson, reforming popes like Leo IX and Gregory VII desired to return the Church to an earlier “golden age” of prosperity and freedom.¹¹³

Others like Uta-Renate Blumenthal and Jack Goody have taken a materialist approach and have suggested the real motivation behind the reforms against clerical

¹¹⁰ Gerd Tallenbach, *Church, State, and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

¹¹¹ Karras, *Unmarriages*, 45.

¹¹² Karras, 44-45.

¹¹³ Ian Robinson, *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*. (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2004), 1-2.

marriage (and simony) was due to concerns over the loss of Church property.¹¹⁴ From the time of Constantine the Church had rapidly and steadily accumulated property.¹¹⁵ In the following centuries, vast amounts of property and land was gifted to the church by some of its wealthier members, bequeathed by others, or endowed by emperors and kings.¹¹⁶ However, despite these generous endowments, the western Church found itself in an “impoverished” state by the eleventh century.¹¹⁷ The Church had lost a considerable amount of its lands and property due to the unauthorized selling off of Church lands and property (simony). Married clergy were also blamed for this loss as Church property and land would either be handed down to sons of priests, or given as dowries for daughters (as in the case of Juhel, Bishop of Dol, whom I will discuss later). We can see this concern over the alienation of church property in the early eleventh century reflected in the decrees of the Council of Pavia in 1022. Despite the rhetoric against married clergy in the first two canons, the remainder of the decrees were not so much concerned with the sexual probity of the clergy, but rather preventing the loss of Church property.¹¹⁸ Besides lamenting over the rich estates, patrimonies and other goods which had been acquired by “infamous fathers for infamous sons”, the canons of 1022 also decreed that sons and daughters of unfree clerics were to remain serfs of the Church forever.¹¹⁹ They were to belong to the Church as chattel together with all their property.¹²⁰ Despite such seemingly harsh declarations, these decrees were never enforced. However, future decrees made in

¹¹⁴ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, “The Prohibition of Clerical Marriage in the Eleventh Century” in *Chastity: A Study in Perception, Ideals, Opposition*. Nancy Van Deusen (ed.)26; and Jack Goody, *The Development of the family and marriage in Europe* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1983), 133.

¹¹⁵ Goody, *The Development of the family and marriage in Europe*, 98.

¹¹⁶ Goody, 81.

¹¹⁷ Blumenthal, 64.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

the various synods and councils against clerical marriage later in the eleventh century also reflect a similar concern for Church property. For example, in 1072 the Council of Rouen forbade any minister who married to receive or depose any of the Church's revenue.¹²¹ Preventing priests from marrying (and having children) was a way to prevent the alienation of Church property.

There also may have been a political undertone to the Western Church's efforts to crack down on clerical marriage. During the eleventh century the Western Church increasingly tried to assert its dominance, which put it in a theological conflict with the Eastern Church. While the main issues between the East and Western Churches mostly revolved around the Eastern Church's use of unleavened bread (*Azymes*) for the Eucharist, and the question of *filioque* (the Latin doctrine that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son, not from the Father alone), clerical marriage was also a point of contention.¹²² The question of whether or not clergy should be allowed to marry had long been a sticking point between the East and West since at least the Council of Tours in 567 CE.¹²³ However, it was not until the eleventh century when the Western Church began insisting on celibacy and claimed the authority to dissolve marriages that the Eastern Church began to strongly defend the right of its clergy to marry.¹²⁴ For the East these laws regarding celibacy exceeded the authority of the church.¹²⁵ The monk Nicetas criticized the West's insistence on celibacy and claim to dissolve clerical marriages:

¹²¹ Goody, 80.

¹²² Brett Whalen, "Rethinking the Schism of 1054: Authority, Heresy, and the Latin Rite" *Tradition* 62 no.1 (2007): 17.

¹²³ Barstow, 29.

¹²⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian tradition: a history of the development of doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 175.

¹²⁵ Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 175.

“Who is it, ... who has handed on to you the tradition that you should both prohibit and dissolve the marriage of priests? What kind of teacher of the church was it who handed on such an absurd tradition to you?”¹²⁶

The West insisted on its new doctrine (which was presented as an old doctrine) that clerical marriage and illegitimate birth disqualified candidates from ordination.¹²⁷ The Eastern Church rejected these ideas and insisted on the rights of priests to keep wives and never prohibited children of illicit birth access to the priesthood.¹²⁸ Cardinal Humbert famously attacked the Eastern Church for allowing its clerics to marry. In his *Adversus nicetam*, Humbert portrayed the Greek Church as a “brothel” and accused Nicetas and his church of nicolaitism.¹²⁹ Humbert is mainly remembered by historians for his role in the East/West Schism of 1054. According to historian Jaroslav Pelikan, although celibacy was a matter of discipline and of canon law, rather than doctrine, it became a doctrinal issue.¹³⁰ Part of the Western Church’s claim to independence rested on the elaboration of an ecclesiastical legal system, and part of that legal system was the claim to jurisdiction over clerical marriage.¹³¹ The issue of clerical marriage was one of the many sticking points between the Eastern and Western Churches which led to the East-West Schism of 1054. The bull of excommunication that Humbert left on the altar of Sancta Sophia included a reference to the “error” of the Byzantines in permitting and defending the “carnal marriages” of those who minister at the holy altar.¹³² So it is possible that Western Church’s rivalry with the Eastern Church, combined with the Eastern Church’s

¹²⁶ Pelikan, 175.

¹²⁷ Sara McDougall, “Bastard Priests: Illegitimacy and Ordination in Medieval Europe,” *Speculum* 94, no. 1 (2019): 154.

¹²⁸ McDougall, “Bastard Priests,” 154.

¹²⁹ Parish, 83.

¹³⁰ Pelikan, 175.

¹³¹ Karras, 45.

¹³² Cowdrey, “Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy,” 270.

refusal to enforce celibacy and break up the marriages of its own priests, may have contributed in part to the Western Church's fervour in reforming its own clergy.

Chapter 1: Theological Arguments Against Clerical Marriage

One element of the reformers' argumentation against clerical marriage and unchastity was to attack such practices on theological grounds. The reformers had to convince their fellow clergymen (and lay powers) that celibacy and the Church's seemingly recent decrees and efforts to stamp out clerical marriage were not new innovations, but had always been Church doctrine and policy dating back to the Apostles and early Church fathers. To do this, the reformers cited what they argued were scriptural, Apostolic precedence and canonical authority in favour of celibacy and against clerical marriage. The reformers also sought the authority of the Church fathers such as Jerome as proof that celibacy had always been the policy of the Church. In order to convey the idea that such marriages were both "impure" and "sinful", the reformers advocated the need for priests to be "pure" when performing the sacraments. In addition, some reformers even argued that having contact with a woman made a priest impure and unworthy of performing the sacraments. Some reformers also argued that such priests and their partners were committing a "spiritual incest". Others even went as far as to suggest that priests who were married or who remained with their partners had committed heresy.

Biblical Precedent & Apostolic Authority

The reformers argued that clerical celibacy had Apostolic origins and scriptural precedents. A Biblical passage frequently cited by the reformers as "proof" that celibacy had scriptural basis and Apostolic origins was I Corinthians, attributed to the Apostle Paul. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was cited on numerous occasions to support the assertion that virginity was favoured over marriage in the early church.¹³³ While I

¹³³ Parish, 221.

Corinthians 4:5 was interpreted by those in the pro-marriage camp as proof the Apostles themselves were married men, the reformers argued against this. In Damian's *Contra Intemperantes Clericos* ("Against the Intemperance of the Clergy"), he dismissed the suggestion of Paul's dictum, "Let each man have his own wife," [1 Cor. 7:2] permitted the marriage of priests.¹³⁴ According to Damian, if this text were to be universally applied, it would be to the detriment of those who vowed a life of consecrated chastity.¹³⁵ Damian concluded that it would be better for those priests who could not live in continence to abandon their altars rather than cause offence by their actions.¹³⁶ The obligation to celibacy was presented as having its origins in the Old Testament priesthood, grounded in the Levitical laws, and exemplified in the long tradition of vowed chastity and sacerdotal celibacy in the Catholic church, and also in the voluntary chastity of the faithful who abstained from marriage and sexual pleasure in order to serve God more fully.¹³⁷ Besides Paul, passages from other Apostles such as Matthew and James were also quoted by the reformers in what they believed were either promoting celibacy or discouraging marriage. To abstain from marriage, as Matthew the evangelist indicated, 'for the sake of the kingdom', was, for priest and people, to enjoy a spiritual freedom and liberty that was not possible for those encumbered with the cares of the world.¹³⁸ [Matthew 13:12]. While the reformers liked to cite New and sometimes Old Testament passages which they believed supported their arguments against clerical marriage and unchastity, they were not above misquoting or misattributing passages. For example, to support his argument that priests should leave their wives after ordination

¹³⁴ Parish, 110.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Parish, 221.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

and such wives should have no part in the sacraments or Church services, Damian provides an incorrect description of a letter from the Apostle James.¹³⁹ Whether Damian simply misquoted James, used a different version of the Bible (as there was no standard edition in this period), or if this was a fabrication by Damian is unclear. However, it is a good example of why one should be careful in reading scriptural passages quoted by the reformers.

Authority of the Church Fathers

To help support their argument against clerical marriage, the reformers also sought the authority of the Church fathers. While the Church fathers were divided on the topic of marriage, the eleventh-century reformers often quoted Church fathers who were against marriage and sex. In the writings of these reformers, Jerome (d. 430 CE) looms large.¹⁴⁰ His *Contra Jovinianum* (“Against Jovinianus”) written in 392/3 CE, provided an inexhaustible treasure of anti-marital sentiments and imagery, which was eagerly seized upon by the celibate medieval clergy.¹⁴¹ van Houts explains that while the eleventh-and-twelfth-century reformers adapted Jerome’s rhetoric, vocabulary and imagery (often quoted verbatim), we must assume that these authors deployed them to make points about their own time in the expectation that the learned amongst their audience appreciated the scholarly authority underpinning the rhetoric.¹⁴² In the *Adversus Jovinianum*, Jerome savagely attacked Jovinian’s beliefs.¹⁴³ Jovinian agreed with the Stoics in considering all moral faults equally grievous, but also denied that the ascetic life had any special claim to

¹³⁹ Damian, Letter 112.8 in *The Letters of Peter Damian: Letters. 91-120*. Owen J. Blum (trans.) (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 262.

¹⁴⁰ van Houts, *Married Life in the Middle Ages*, 173.

¹⁴¹ van Houts, 173.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 85.

be the pre-eminent Christian path to salvation.¹⁴⁴ Indeed Jerome defended the celibate life so vigorously that he came close to condemning marriage.¹⁴⁵ He maintained that sex and salvation were contradictions and even in marriage, sex was evil and unclean.¹⁴⁶ Jerome even went as far as to recommend that married Christians should avoid sexual contact whenever possible.¹⁴⁷ For the eleventh-century reformers who were trying to promote the idea that clerical marriage and unchastity were “impure” and “sinful”, the *Adversus Jovinianum* helped to support their position. For example, at one point Jerome claims that one of the detriments to being married is that wives are “expensive” on account of their clothing and other paraphernalia.¹⁴⁸ The reformers borrowed this idea by attacking the way married clerics and their wives dressed, and expressed concern for the misappropriation of Church resources in supporting a cleric’s family (which I discuss in the following chapter) The reformers repurposed Jerome’s views against marriage and sex to argue that marriage (for clerics) was wrong and sinful.

Argument for Priestly “Purity”

An idea frequently argued and stressed by the eleventh-century reformers was the need for priests to be “pure” when administering the sacraments. The concern with ritual cleanliness and purity gained ground in the eleventh century. As Jestice notes, this concern with purity was not new, but was newly prominent.¹⁴⁹ With the revival of the concept transubstantiation, the reformers argued that since Christ was a virgin, therefore a priest needed to be “pure” when administering the sacrament. For the higher clergy

¹⁴⁴ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, 85.

¹⁴⁵ Brundage, 85.

¹⁴⁶ Brundage, 82.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ van Houts, 178.

¹⁴⁹ Karras, 121.

sexual intercourse with women in marriage was forbidden on the grounds that the priest ought not to administer sacraments with hands that had engaged in sexual acts.¹⁵⁰ Theoretically, this argument went against the Christian orthodoxy because the status of the administrator (the priest) was that of an intermediary without any power to diminish God's grace.¹⁵¹ Despite this the eleventh-century reformers stressed the need to be "pure" (i.e. - abstain from sex) before performing the sacraments, such as communion. As Ruth Mazo Karras notes, this concern for purity was not new by the eleventh century, but had become newly prominent.¹⁵² As previously explained, the eleventh century experienced a revival in the concept of transubstantiation (the idea that the substance of the bread of the Eucharist becomes the substance of the body of Christ during communion). In his *Letters*, Damian often stresses the idea for the need of priests to be "pure" before handling the sacraments.¹⁵³ In his *De Celibatu Clericorum* ("Concerning the Celibacy of the Clergy") Damian argues that:

"because Christ's natural body was formed in the temple of a virgin's womb, he looked to his ministers nowadays to be content and clean in the presence of his sacramental body; with regards to bishops in particular, hands that confer the Holy Spirit should not touch the genitals of harlots."¹⁵⁴

In the same letter, he also resorted to his customary rhetorical practice of directly addressing the fornicating bishops, asking what business they had to handle the body of Christ while wallowing in the allurements of the flesh.¹⁵⁵ Reminding them that the 'Son of God was so dedicated to purity of the flesh that he was born not of conjugal chastity but rather from the womb of a virgin and that as an infant he had been tended by pure

¹⁵⁰ van Houts, 171.

¹⁵¹ van Houts, 171/172.

¹⁵² Karras, 121.

¹⁵³ In particular, *Letters* 61, 65, 112, 114, 165.

¹⁵⁴ Cowdrey, "Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy," 271.

¹⁵⁵ Cushing, *Reform and the papacy in the eleventh century*, 121.

hands, Damian stipulated that Christ wanted to be served in the mass and at all other times by ‘unstained hands’.¹⁵⁶ Both clerical marriage, and the toleration of concubinage, were, in Damian’s eyes, sinful. The consequences of the sin would be paid by the married priest, but the stain of sin fell upon the whole community.¹⁵⁷ If, for example, a bishop (whose hands had been “tainted” by contact with a concubine) laid his hands on his flock, he defiled not only his own spirit but that of all whom he touched.¹⁵⁸ Damian suggested that married priests should be ashamed to approach the altar with “unclean hands”. Some reformers argued that such polluted hands would devalue the effectiveness of the sacraments and also diminish the salvation of the priest and laymen alike.¹⁵⁹ Those who advocated for clerical celibacy launched a campaign amongst the laity to persuade men and women to object to married priests singing masses or performing the rite of baptism on the grounds that the salvation of their souls was at stake if they colluded in the lifestyle of married priests.¹⁶⁰

However, it is worth noting that the reformers were divided on the question regarding the validity of the sacraments performed by married or unchaste priests. Whereas some like Cardinal Humbert argued that the sacraments performed by such priests were worthless, others like Damian maintained that such sacraments were still valid. In his work, *Liber gratissimus* (literally, “The Most Gratuitous Book”), Damian explicitly denies that the Eucharist is any less efficacious when performed by wicked priests, thus avoiding the heresy of Donatism.¹⁶¹ According to Barstow, Damian saw that

¹⁵⁶ Cushing, 121.

¹⁵⁷ Parish, 109.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ van Houts, 172.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 103.

universal celibacy might indeed be the Apostolic goal, but nevertheless to deny the validity of the sacraments of any priest was to court disaster for the peace of the well-being of the Church.¹⁶² However, Damian did express concern that the “pollution” of the priest’s sin of fornication might be passed onto the congregation. It was only the more radical reformers like Humbert, Pope Nicholas II, and Hildebrand (Gregory VII) who dared to risk havoc in order to purify the service of the altar.¹⁶³ As Fliche notes, Gregory VII never actually stated that the sacraments preformed by unchaste priests were invalid, but only forbade the laity to partake of them.¹⁶⁴ I believe this was part of Gregory’s plan to put pressure on the married or unchaste clergy and encourage them to change their ways (more on this in Chapter 3). Gregory was not the first to issue such a warning to the laity. The decree that the laity should boycott the masses of unchaste priests was first made at the Lateran Council of 1059, forbidding anyone: “hear the mass of a priest who, he knows for certain, keeps a concubine or has a woman living with him.”¹⁶⁵

“Spiritual Incest”

An idea expressed by some reformers was that priests and their female companions (whether married or cohabitating) were committing “spiritual incest”. One of the first of the reformers to suggest this idea was Pope Leo IX (1002 - 1054). In Leo IX’s earliest *Vita*¹⁶⁶ (which began in 1049/50 but was not completed until 1058) reports that the pope “restarted the discussions of the four principal synods’ of the early church,

¹⁶² Barstow, 149.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Augustin Fliche, *La réforme grégorienne*. vol. 3. (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense bureaux, 1939), 46.

¹⁶⁵ Cara Kaser, “The Clerical Wife: Medieval Perceptions of Women During the Eleventh and Twelfth-Century Church Reforms” *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal* vol 1. no. 1 (2004): 181.

¹⁶⁶ The exact dating of the account of Leo IX’s life and papacy (*Vita*) is not entirely uncertain. Most likely work on Leo’s *Vita* started around 1049/50, but was not completed until 1058.

attended to the ‘heresy of simony’, and ‘put asunder’, incestuous marriages.”¹⁶⁷ At the Synod of Reims in 1049, the pope reportedly warned in powerful terms the dangers of both apostasy and incest embodied in simony and incontinence.¹⁶⁸ However, the reformer who most vehemently promoted the idea of married priests and their partners committing incest was Damian. In Damian’s *Letters*, he frequently refers to priests and their partners committing incest. In *Letter* 141, Damian tried to refute the interpretation that the Apostle Paul’s statement that every man should marry applies unconditionally [I Corinthians 7:2]. Damian insists that the Apostle was not referring to “all men”, but only those whose keeping with the norms of legitimate authority are allowed to keep wives. Otherwise, Damian argued, this would result in incest:

Iuxta quam regulam et apostolus cum dicit, unusquisque suam uxorem habeat, non omnes amplectitur homines, sed illos tantum, quibus iuxta legitime sanctionis normam habere licet uxores. Alioquin quo pacto sibi matrimonii foedera copulabunt, qui cubilia paterna commaculant, qui germanas, ha scelus, uterinas incestant?¹⁶⁹

According to this rule, when the Apostle says, “let each man have his own wife,” he does not include all men, but only those, in keeping with the norms of legitimate authority, who are allowed to have wives. Otherwise, how could those enter marriage who defile the bed of their father, or, what a monstrous thing to say, sleep incestuously with their sisters?¹⁷⁰

According to Kathleen G. Cushing, Damian was concerned about the contamination of spiritual incest perpetrated by sexual relations with the women for whom a priest was trusted to act as pastor and confessor, and who were effectively his “children”.¹⁷¹ Lay women, Damian explained, were the spiritual daughters of priests; for a priest to sleep

¹⁶⁷ Griffiths, “Wives, concubines, or slaves?”, 271.

¹⁶⁸ Parish, 84.

¹⁶⁹ Damian 141 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 3 NR 91-150*. Kurt Riendel (ed.) (München: Monumenta Germaniae Historica: 1989), 496.

https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_briefe_d_dt_kaiserzeit_4_3/index.htm#page/496/mode/1up

¹⁷⁰ Damian, *Letter* 141.16 in *The Letters of Peter Damian, 121-150*. Owen J. Blum (trans.) Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 120/121.

¹⁷¹ Cushing, 122.

with one is therefore incest.¹⁷² Besides priests, clerical wives were also open to accusations of incest with their “spiritual father” (also their husband) the priest.¹⁷³ (Which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3). This raises the question of why some reformers accused married priests and their partners of committing incest. We have to keep in mind that the reformers themselves were clergymen trying to convince their fellow clergymen (as well as some lay rulers) that clerical marriage was sinful. As clergymen, they would have been well aware that in scripture, incest is a sin. This ties back to what the reformers were trying to promote the idea that clerical marriage was sinful.

Clerical Marriage as a “Heresy”

Some reformers such as Damian, Humbert, Mangold of Lutenbach and Bonizo of Sutri tried to argue that clerical marriage was a heresy. In its most basic sense, heresy refers to any beliefs, opinions, or teachings which are contrary to orthodox religious doctrine. The first of the eleventh-century reformers to argue that clerical marriage was a heresy was Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida. In his work, *Adversus nicetam* (“Against Nicetas”), Humbert articulated the link between clerical marriage and heresy.¹⁷⁴ Humbert was also the first of reformers from this period to use the term “nicolaitism” when referring to clerical marriage. For the eleventh-century reformers, the term “nicolaitism” could refer to clerical marriage, but it could also refer to clerics having children, (and in a broader sense) clerical unchastity. The exact origins of the term are somewhat obscure. The first recorded instance of its use at the Council of Tours in 567 CE, was used to

¹⁷² Barstow, 62.

¹⁷³ Parish, 110.

¹⁷⁴ Parish, 83.

describe priests who had sexual relations with their wives.¹⁷⁵ One theory is that the term was taken from a sect called the “Nicolatians” referenced in Revelation 2:6 and 2:14-15.¹⁷⁶ Another theory is that the term was derived from Nicholas the deacon, who was one of the original seven deacons of the Apostolic Church described in Acts 6:1-6.¹⁷⁷ Despite his blameless character as described in scripture, Nicholas acquired the reputation of being the first fornicator among the clergy.¹⁷⁸ Thanks to Humbert, the term experienced a revival in the eleventh century. In his 1053 polemic *Adversus nicetam* (“Against Nicetas”), concerning the Studite monk Nicetas Stethatos (also known as Nicetas “Pectoratus”) he wrote:¹⁷⁹

Hinc perpendentes at te tam perverse defendi adulteria potius quam nuptias sacerdotum, arlitratur ab inferis emersisse principem hujus haeresis nefandrum diaconum Nicolaum. De quo Epiphanius vester sic scripsit: Quarta Nicolaitarum a Nicolao haeresis est adinventata, uno ex septem diaconibus ab apostolis ordinato.¹⁸⁰

And so, considering that you instead defend the wicked marriage of priests rather than adultery, I may judge to come forth from hell this heinous heresy of this nefarious deacon Nicolas. Concerning [this matter] which your Epiphanius thus wrote: Forth is the heresy devised by Nicolas of the Nicolaites, first of the seven deacons ordained by the Apostles.¹⁸¹

In the same letter Humbert goes on to criticize the Eastern Church for allowing marriage to the higher clergy, and argues for a long-standing tradition of perpetual continence for those called to higher orders in the Latin Church.¹⁸² Damian's writings helped to popularize the use of this term to describe those who opposed the imposition of

¹⁷⁵ Barstow, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Cowdrey, “Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy” 283.

¹⁷⁸ Cowdrey, 283.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Humbert, *Adversus nicetam* in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Jacques Paul Migne. XXV [PL 143.996] -<https://books.google.ca/books?id=EbY9aPvhLrgC&pg=PA995#v=onepage&q&f=false>

¹⁸¹ All translations in this thesis are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁸² Helen L. Parish. *Clerical Celibacy in the West, c.1100-1700* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 108.

mandatory celibacy upon all Catholic clerics.¹⁸³ The first time he used the term “Nicolaitans” was in his *Letter 65* to the then-archdeacon Hildebrand (who later became Pope Gregory VII), dated to December of 1059.¹⁸⁴

Nicolaitae autem dicuntur clerici, qui contra castitatis aecclesiasticae regulam feminis admiscentur. Qui plane tunc fornicatores fiunt, cum fedi commertii copulas ineunt, tunc Nicolaitae iure vocantur, cum haec loetiferam pestem velut ex auctoritate defendunt. Vitium quippe in heresim vertitur, cum perversi dogmatis assertionem firmatur.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, the clerics are called Nicolaites, who being mixed with women contrary to the law of ecclesiastical chastity. Obviously, they become fornicators, when they enter [into this] foul commerce, then they are rightly called Nicolaites, when they defend their deadly plague as if by authority. For that reason a vice turns into a heresy, when it is affirmed by the assertion of corrupt doctrine.

In the same letter, Damian, following Humbert, declared that clerical marriage was a heresy.¹⁸⁶ For Damian clerical marriage was a vice, but it became a heresy when the practice was “confirmed by the defence of misguided teaching”.¹⁸⁷ According to Helen L. Parish, Damian’s most significant contribution to the clerical marriage debate was less the identification of the defence of clerical marriage as a heresy, and more the presentation of clerical celibacy as a necessary requirement for a priesthood whose purity must be on reproach.¹⁸⁸ For Bonizo of Sutri, all types of sexual relations for priests were sinful and therefore heretical.¹⁸⁹ Curiously, nowhere in the *Registrum* or *Epistolae Vagantes* does Gregory VII refer to clerical marriage as a heresy. Gregory only used the

¹⁸³ Brundage, 216.

¹⁸⁴ Owen J. Blum, *The Letters of Peter Damian Peter Damian, Letters 61-90* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 24-25.

¹⁸⁵ Damian 65.3 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*. Kurt Reindel (ed.) (München: Monumenta Germaniae Historica: 1988), 230/231 - https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_briefe_d_dt_kaiserzeit_4_2/index.htm#page/229/mode/1up

¹⁸⁶ Damian 65.16 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*, 242 https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_briefe_d_dt_kaiserzeit_4_2/index.htm#page/242/mode/1up

¹⁸⁷ Parish, 109.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Barstow, 80.

term *nicolaita* (nicolaite) once in 1076 when calling out Bishop Juhel of Dol as a simoniac and nicolaite due to his notoriously public marriage.¹⁹⁰ For Gregory, clerics who continued to remain with their wives were disobeying Church decrees, and therefore were committing the act of rebellion. Gregory, quoting 1 Samuel 15:23 and Pope Gregory I, refers to rebellion as: “the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as the offence of idolatry”.¹⁹¹ The reason why some reformers referred to clerical marriage and unchastity as a “heresy” was that they were trying to promote the idea such practices went against Church doctrine and teachings.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the reformers presented a variety of theological arguments against clerical marriage and unchastity. The reformers needed to do this in order to convey the idea that their efforts at reform and decree prohibiting clerical marriage were not new inventions, but had always been part of Church doctrine and policy. The reformers also had to emphasize the “spiritual harm” such marriages would cause to the clergy and laity. It is worth noting that the reformers were divided on the question of the validity of sacraments performed by such priests and whether or not these marriages constituted heresy. However, these theological arguments were only one part of the reformers’ argumentation against clerical marriage and unchastity. In the next chapter, the practical arguments the reformers presented against clerical marriage are examined.

¹⁹⁰ Cowdrey, 283/284.

¹⁹¹ Gregory VII, *Epistolae Vagantes* 33 in *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*, H.E.J. Cowdrey (trans.) (Oxford, Clarendon Press., 1972), 87.

Chapter 2: Practical Arguments Against Clerical Marriage

In the previous chapter we saw that the reformers presented a number of theological arguments against clerical marriage. Not only did they argue that such marriages went against scriptural, Apostolic and canonical authority, but they also emphasised the spiritual harm these “impure” unions would cause to the Church and the laity. However, the reformers also expressed concern regarding the “real world” harm such marriages would cause. This chapter explores the practical arguments made by the reformers against clerical marriage. This was another important part of the reformers’ argumentation as they needed to convey the idea that clerical marriage posed real world problems not just for the Church and clergy, but also for the laity. The reformers often argued that if clerics were allowed to marry (and have children) Church resources would be diverted to supporting the priest’s family. Others argued that having a family would distract a priest from their duties. Some also seemed to have been concerned about the alienation of church property if a priest’s benefice was passed down from father to son, or if church lands and property were given away to daughters as dowries. Highlighting these real world problems was important to the reformers’ campaign because if they had limited themselves to theological reasons, it would have confined their campaign to theological circles. The ultimate goal of these polemics against clerical marriage was to convince the clergy and laity (usually lay rulers) that married clergy posed a real and serious danger to the clergy and laity.

“Drain” on Church Resources

The reformers expressed concern that the wives and children of married priests would be a drain on Church resources. The idea was that Church property would be

diverted towards supporting the priest's family (which the reformers also considered a form of simony), instead of being used to the benefit of the priests' congregation. Generally speaking, the practice of simony refers to the buying and selling of church offices and/or property. However, for the eleventh-century reformers, simony encompassed a wide range of activities from misappropriation of church property, to using bribes, flattery or currying favour to obtain an ecclesiastical office. The term simony comes from the New Testament story of Simon Magus¹⁹², who was cursed by the Apostle Peter for his unholy ambition [Acts 8:9-24].¹⁹³ In the writings of the eleventh-century reformers such as Gregory, Damian and Humbert, simony and nicolaitism are often attacked simultaneously. For the reformers, nicolaitism had the potential to lead to simony. A major concern frequently expressed by the reformers (which will be discussed in this chapter) was that church property and resources would end up being used to support the wives and children of married clerics (which they considered a form of simony). An allegation made by the medieval English writer and historian, William of Malmesbury (1083 - 1143) was that not only do parish clerics give their church revenues to their concubines and children, but they also create spectacles by taking their women, decked out lavishly in fine clothing and jewels, to weddings and to church.¹⁹⁴ The opponents of clerical marriage cited ostentatious clothes as being among the most despised attributes of the married priest.¹⁹⁵ The reasoning was that if he dressed and behaved more like a lay man, he would not stand out for his sober and modest attire.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² According to the story, a sorcerer named Simon Magus tried to unsuccessfully purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from the Apostles Peter and John.

¹⁹³ Robinson, *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*, 3

¹⁹⁴ Thibodeaux, 30.

¹⁹⁵ van Houts, 178.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

The context is most often moral denunciation by commentators who argue that expensive golden embroidered and bejewelled cloaks and dresses are the outward representation of a debased inner character, and that such immoral behaviour by a priest and his wife leads others astray.¹⁹⁷ Money spent on an expensive wardrobe should ideally have been spent on pastoral care, charity, teaching of, and preaching to parishioners with the aim to save their souls in the afterlife.¹⁹⁸ Priests, so the argument goes, spend it on decorating themselves, their wives, and children, rather than their altars. The financial cost of the married priest's household was used as evidence that tithes should not go to them but instead to monks or regular canons, or indeed unmarried parish priests living chaste and modest lives.¹⁹⁹ The message to the reader or listener is clear: do you want your hard-earned income to be wasted on frivolity or on serious contemplation of God?²⁰⁰ Whether or not married priest and their partners actually dressed so ostentatiously as alleged by the reformers is unclear, but it seems to have been a favourite means of attacking the married clergy.

Family Life a "Distraction" for Priests

Another argument frequently made by the reformers was that all the cares, responsibilities and distractions of having a family would prevent a priest from performing their duties. As Frazee notes, the reformers argued that the Apostle Paul's view of the unmarried state frees the ordained minister from the cares of personal life so that he may devote himself entirety to the concerns of the whole Christian community.²⁰¹ According to Paul, "The unmarried man cares for the Lord's business; his aim is to please

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ van Houts, 179.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Frazee, 108.

the Lord. But the married man cares for worldly things; his aim is to please his wife, and he has a divided mind” [I Corinthians 7:32-3].²⁰² Damian’s position on the matter is summed up in his conclusion to the *De Celibatu Clericorum* (“Concerning the Celibacy of the Clergy”) where, reflecting that a priest cannot serve to please both God and his wife,²⁰³ he explains that the body, as well as the soul, worships God, is the temple of God, and must not be defamed therefore by contact with a “courtesan”.²⁰⁴ In *Letter 61* to Pope Nicholas II, Damian deplores the situation in which bishops live in concubinage.²⁰⁵ Towards the beginning of the letter, Damian provides a description of the noise, commotion and distractions of a married priests’ household:

Sed haec scelus, omni pudore postposito pestis haec in tantam prorupit audaciam, ut per ora populi volitent loca scortantium, nomina concubinarum, socerorum quoque vocabula simul et scoruum, fratrum denique et quorumlibet popinquorum, et ne quid his assertionibus deesse videatur, testimonio sunt discursio nuntiorum, effusio munerum, cachinnatum ioca, secreta colloquia. Postremo ubi ominis debietas tollitur, uteri tumentes et pueri vagientes.²⁰⁶

But what a criminal situation! Shamelessly, this epidemic had been so audaciously revealed that everyone knows the houses of prostitutes²⁰⁷, the names of the mistresses²⁰⁸, the fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law, brothers, and their close relatives; and lest anything be lacking in these assertions, they give evidence of messengers running to and fro, of the sending of presents, of the jokes they laughed at, and of their private conversation. And lastly, to remove all doubt, you have swelling bellies and squalling babies.²⁰⁹

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Barstow, 63.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Owen J. Blum, *The Letters of Peter Damian: Letters 61-90* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 3.

²⁰⁶ Damian 61 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*, 208.

²⁰⁷ Here Damian is referring to the households of married clerics as “houses of prostitutes”. This sort of rhetoric is typical of Damian.

²⁰⁸ By “mistresses” he means the wives or partners of clerics. Damian usually refers to these women as either “mistresses” or “concubines”.

²⁰⁹ Damian, *Letter 61.3* in *Letters 61-90*, 4.

In *Letter* 112, Damian issues a similar warning that if clerics choose to marry, their households will be filled with the noise of crying babies.²¹⁰ In *Letter* 70, Damian even provides us with a rare description a clerical household he lived next to while a student in Parma in the 1020s.²¹¹ The letter was written shortly after 1060s to Damian's old acquaintance Landulf, a cleric a Milan, reminding him of his earlier vow to give up his secular career and retire to a monastery.²¹² In the letter Damian provides a litany of cases stressing the dire consequences of what happened to men who ignore their promises.²¹³ One includes a married priest named Teuzolinus and his unnamed wife, whom Damian refers to as *pelex sua* ("his mistress" or "concubine"). Damian claims that Teuzolinus was a good man and his "mistress" was beautiful and attractive. He describes the couple as greeting each other everyday with "wanton laughter, winking, and telling scurrilous jokes".²¹⁴ While he describes this clerical household as both happy and noisy, as van Houts notes, Damian would have not told us this story unless there was a moral message with a dramatic ending.²¹⁵ According to Damian, after having lived inseparably for twenty-five years, the couple were found dead in their home after a fire struck their neighbourhood.²¹⁶ This death by fire, Damian concluded, was a just punishment because the flames of death represented those of the passion that had engulfed the priest and his wife during their life together.²¹⁷

Besides being a distraction and drain on Church resources, there was also concern regarding children who were likely result from such marriages.

²¹⁰ Damian, *Letter* 112.44 in *Letters. 91-120*, 282.

²¹¹ van Houts, 174.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Damian, 70.18-19 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*, 320.

²¹⁵ van Houts, 174.

²¹⁶ van Houts, 174.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

A Hereditary Clergy

A major concern for the reformers was that if the clergy was allowed to marry, there was a risk that offices might become hereditary. In the Middle Ages it was expected that most sons would follow in their father's footsteps and take up the same profession or trade as their father. Priesthoods had become a family-based economy like any other medieval practice.²¹⁸ Skills were passed from father to son with the expectation that he would be ordained and ply the family craft, but rather than producing material goods the product was salvation and orthodoxy.²¹⁹ As Brooke explains, the attack on clerical marriage was closely associated with the new sacramental theology, with its growing emphasis on the objective nature of Real Presence, and the growing sense that the priesthood and all who stood by the altar at mass were a race apart, "separated for the work".²²⁰ This made the reformers all the more aware that marriage tended to assimilate the clergy into their lay surroundings. Marriage produced children and the desire for hereditary succession. As a result, the benefice became more and more like a lay fee, passing from father to son.²²¹ We know of many examples of benefices being passed down from father to son, sometimes over many generations. Hereditary benefices seem to have been particularly prevalent in Normandy and England. For example, throughout the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the church of Whalley in Lancashire was passed down from generation to generation within the same family.²²²

In theory, the Church's policy against individuals inheriting its property dates back to the sixth century CE, when Pope Pelagius instructed that any married man

²¹⁸ Tyler Freeman, "Gregory VII and Clerical Celibacy," B.A. Thesis., (New College of Florida, 2017), 5.

²¹⁹ Freeman, "Gregory VII and Clerical Celibacy," 5.

²²⁰ Brooke, "Gregorian Reform in Action," 3.

²²¹ Brooke, 3.

²²² Parish, 91.

appointed as bishop should promise that his children would not inherit the property of the Church.²²³ However, much like the decrees against clerical marriage, the decrees against inheriting Church property seem to have been either largely ignored or poorly enforced, if at all. The first major decrees against the inheritance of Church property in the eleventh century came at the Council of Pavia in 1022. In the middle of the eleventh century, numerous Councils and Synods featured similar decrees against the children of priests inheriting Church property. In addition, the Church had attempted to declare priests' sons illegitimate and therefore disqualified for ordination.²²⁴ The Council of Bourges in 1031 insisted that priests not merely abstain from sex but separate from their wives, and stated explicitly that sons born during their fathers' ministry could not be ordained, on the grounds that they were illegitimate.²²⁵ In *Letter* 162, addressed to Peter (the archpriest of the canons of the Lateran, and chancellor of Pope Alexander II), Damian exhorts the archpriest to use his good offices in combating the current "evil" of clerical marriage and cohabitation with women.²²⁶ At one point Damian addresses the problem of "bastard clerics" (*manzeres clerici*) resulting from these "sinful" unions, arguing that like the sons of Abraham born of concubinage, they will be denied inheritance:

Et quidem dum superesset Abraham, omnes gloriabantur se esse filios Abrahae, sed cum in fine totum uni patrimonium contuli, qui revera filii nomen optinet, qui concubinali notantur infamia, manifeste discrevit. Nunc itaque manzeres clerici inter legitimos Abrahae filios communi videntur admixtione discurrere, sed postmodum ab hereditatis consortio repelluntur, qui modo mulieribus quasi perceptis a patre muneribus delectantur.²²⁷

²²³ Parish, 90.

²²⁴ Barstow, 38.

²²⁵ Barstow, 48.

²²⁶ Owen J. Blum, *The Letters of Peter Damian: Letters. 121-150*. (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 142.

²²⁷ Damian 162 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 4 NR 151-180*. Kurt Reindel (ed.) (München: Monumenta Germaniae Historica: 1993), 154/155.

https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_briefe_d_dt_kaiserzeit_4_4/index.htm#page/154/mode/1up

And Indeed as long as Abraham lived, all his children were boasting to be [sons] of Abraham, but when in the end [he] gave [his] whole patrimony to one, who truly had the name of the son, [and those] who being marked with the disgrace of concubinage, he clearly set apart. Therefore, bastard clerics now seem live commonly among the legitimate sons of Abraham, but later they [will] be denied fellowship in the inheritance, who now take pleasure with women, as if understood [to be] gifts from [their] father.

Like all reformers, Damian was well aware that such unions with priests often resulted in children. Although historian Laura Wertheimer interprets these “bastards” as referring to the fathers rather than the sons, she notes that Damian’s constant interweaving of the language of illegitimacy, carnality, and rejection of the clerical order emphasizes the idea that cleric’s children belonged to a lineage cut off from the priesthood.²²⁸ At the Synods of 1074 and 1075, Gregory VII forbade the ordination of sons of priests, the offspring of adultery, or other “bastards”.²²⁹ Around the same time the local church synod of Poitiers excluded sons of priests and others born from fornication from the holy orders, unless they lived under a monastic rule.²³⁰ These decrees and attacks against clerical sons later resulted in a handful of polemics produced by the Norman clergy during the late-eleventh to early-twelfth centuries, which both advocated for the rights of priests to marry and the sons of priests to be ordained (discussed in chapter 4).

Alienation of Church Property

There were additional problems a hereditary clergy could potentially pose for the Church. First, if a priest’s benefice was passed down from father to son (especially generation after generation), it would lead to the alienation of Church property. This alienation of Church property into private hands was considered to be simony by the

²²⁸ Laura Wertheimer, “Children of Disorder: Clerical Parentage, Illegitimacy, and Reform in the Middle Ages” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 3 (2006): 398.

²²⁹ Wertheimer, “Children of Disorder,” 399.

²³⁰ Wertheimer, 399.

reformers. Various decrees were issued in the eleventh century decreeing that the clerics of children could not inherit Church property (Pavia in 1022) and prohibiting the sons of clerics from ordination (Bourges in 1031). The reformers argued since these sons did not come from licit marriages, they were illegitimate, and therefore not eligible to be ordained.²³¹ While the sons of priests presented the risk of the clergy becoming hereditary if they followed in their father's footsteps, any daughters involved also posed a problem as Church lands and property might be given away as dowries. An example from this period is documented in Gregory VII's *Epistolae Vagantes* concerning a Bishop Juhel of Dol. It appears that Juhel (sometimes spelled "Juthael" or "Judhael") purchased his bishopric sometime around the year 1040.²³² He was later condemned at the Council of Reims in 1049 and excommunicated by Pope Leo IX in 1050.²³³ In a letter dated September of 1076, Pope Gregory VII informs King William I of England that not only has Juhel married and had children, but he is also accused of using church property as dowries for his daughters:

Qui etiam nec hoc scelere contentus iniquitatem super iniquitatem apposuit et, quasi simoniacum esse parum et pro nihilo deputaret, nicolaite quoque fieri festinauit. Nam in ipso tam perniciose adepto episcopate nuptiis publice celebratis scortum potius quam sponsam ducere non erubuit, ex qua et filios procreauit; ut qui iam spiritum suum animarum corriptori per simoniaca commercia prostituerat ... Nam adultus ex illicito matrimonio filias, praediis ecclesiae et redditibus nomine dotis collatis atque alienatis, scelere immanissimo maritauit.²³⁴

He [Juhel] not content even with this crime but piled iniquity upon iniquity: as though he considered it to be little or nothing to be a simoniac he hastened also to become a nicolaite. For the same bishopric which he

²³¹ Wertheimer, 398-399.

²³² Pierre Hyacinthe Morice, *L'église De Bretagne: Ou, Histoire Des Sièges Épiscopaux, Séminaires Et Collégiales* (France: Chez Méquignon Junior, 1839), 265-267.

²³³ Morice, *L'église De Bretagne*, 265-267.

²³⁴ Gregory VII, *Epistolae Extra Registrum Vagantes in Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Jacques Paul Migne [PL XXVIII.148.675]
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=NMIUAAAQAAJ&pg=PA675#v=onepage&q&f=false>

had so destructively obtained he was not ashamed to take a prostitute as a wife, by whom he also begot children, so that he who had already corrupted his soul to the debaucher of souls by his simoniacal trafficking ... For a monstrous outrage he married off his grown-up daughters from [his] unlawful marriage, giving away and alienating church lands [and] revenues by [their] dowries.

In the same letter Gregory asks William for help in removing Juhel from his bishopric. Juhel was soon replaced by Ivo (Evenus), abbot of Saint-Melanie, Rennes, who ruled the See until his death in 1081.²³⁵ Another problem not explicitly stated in decrees or the writings of the reformers is that a hereditary clergy would be harder for the Church to control. Some scholars like Jack Goodie have claimed that the Church's practical aim in both requiring priestly celibacy and excluding the children of priest from ordination: the reformers sought to guarantee that priests would not be able to pass their offices down to their children.²³⁶ Church property was always at risk of being sucked into the vortex of private ownership, and to avoid this it was essential that this property not be treated as hereditary. As Goody wrote, "it does not seem accidental that the Church appears to have condemned the very practices that would have deprived it of property."²³⁷ The economic problems associated with the loss of church property also occupied Gregory VII's attention.²³⁸ At one time the revenues attached to the altars of St. Peter's in Rome were being shared by sixty different people due to the inheritance of Church property.²³⁹ In Arezzo the cathedral had one "deputy" caring for the church while the income attached to it was distributed through a long list of hereditary "custodians."²⁴⁰ According to Frazee,

²³⁵ Gregory VII, H.E.J. Cowdrey (trans.) *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 44/45.

²³⁶ McDougall, 140.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Frazee, 125.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

reformers like Gregory believed that only an unmarried clergy could free the Church's income from diversion into private families.²⁴¹

Conclusion

As we have seen, the reformers provided a variety of practical arguments against clerical marriage. They argued that such marriages would result in the diversion of church resources and distract priests from their duties. Reflected in the concerns of the writings of the reformers was the threat of the clergy becoming hereditary if a priest's benefice was passed down from father to son, and the alienation of church property and lands which would result from it being kept in the family as inheritance or being used in dowries for daughters. It was important for the reformers to emphasise the supposed practical problems clerical marriage would cause in order to convey the idea that such marriages posed a real threat and danger to the Church, its clergy and the laity. Now that we have examined the theological and practical arguments of the reformers, the next chapter examines another crucial element of the reformers' argumentation against clerical marriage: the attack on married priests and clerical wives.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

Chapter 3: The Attack on Married Clergy and Clerical Wives

Another important element of the reformers' campaign against clerical marriage and unchastity was their attack on the married clergy. In the writings of the reformers, married priests and their wives, as well as unchaste priests and their female partners became targeted. This chapter will show that the letters and polemics written against the married or unchaste clergy was a crucial part of the reformers' efforts to eliminate the practice of clerical marriage. Priests who were married or who were in a relationship with a woman were often referred to as "fornicators" and were accused of "fornication". For these priests, their character, worthiness to be a priest and the validity of the sacraments they performed were also called into question. Some reformers even argued that there was a danger unchaste priests were "contaminating" the souls of his community. Clerical wives²⁴² were often accused of having "seduced" their husbands, committing "spiritual incest" and "polluting" the sacraments. In drawing attention to these priests and women, the reformers not only highlighted the practice of clerical marriage, but in convincing the clergy and laity that clerical marriage posed a threat to their integrity may have helped to facilitate practical implementation of these reforms.

Married Priests

Priests who were married or unchaste are frequently discussed in the writings of the reformers such as Gregory VII, Damian, Humbert, Bonizo of Sutri, and Bruno of Segni. For these priests, their actions, character and worthiness of being a priest and the validity of the sacraments they performed were called into question. In their writings, the

²⁴² For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to women who had a relationship with a priest (whether married or unmarried) hereafter as "wives". Regardless if they were married or not, these women were generally referred to as "concubines" in either case by the reformers.

married priests are often referred to as “fornicators” (*fornicatores*), and accused of “fornication”. In his *Registrum*, Gregory claims that priests who are either married or unchaste have committed “fornication”.²⁴³ The idea the reformers were trying to express was that by being married or unchaste, the priest was committing a sin. Reformers like Gregory, Damian and Bruno of Segni, sometimes lament that “nowadays” priests are not ashamed to be married and seem to have no regard for church law. In his *Sermo de simoniacis* (“Sermon concerning simoniacs”), Bruno of Segni states:

Priests were not ashamed to take wives; they married openly; they contracted impious alliances and gave them legal sanction, although according to the laws they ought not to dwell in the same house as a woman.²⁴⁴

For many reformers like Bruno, such priests were committing two offences simultaneously. By being married or unchaste, these priests were not only committing the sin of fornication, but they were also breaking canon law.

The reformers also attacked married or unchaste priests by calling their character and “worthiness” as a priest into question. The reformers tried to argue that these priests had willingly let themselves fall into temptation. Damian describes the married clergy as an illegitimate, soft, effeminate lot, degenerating from a genuine nobility of the order of priests.²⁴⁵ In *Letter 112*, to Bishop Cunibert of Turin, Damian describes unchaste clerics as giving into “lust” (*luxuria, -ae*) and earthy “pleasures” (*voluptas, -atis*):

illi ergo Deum post corpus suum ponunt, qui contempnentes divinae legis imperium suarum obtemperant illecebris voluptatum, et dum laxant frena luxuriae, indicitam sibi pravaricantur regulam disciplinae. Ignorantes quia pro uniuscuique fugaci voluptate concutibus mille annorum negotiantur incendium, ut qui nunc

²⁴³ H.E.J. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085: An English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 105, 106, 148, 156.

²⁴⁴ Bruno of Segni, “Sermon Concerning Simoniacs” in *Papal Reform in the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo XI and Pope Gregory VII*, Ian Robinson (ed.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 377.

²⁴⁵ Elliott, 105.

estuant flamma luxuriae, tunc comburantur igne vindicate. Sed qui petulantis illecebrae volutantur in caeno, qua pestiferae securitatis audica salutaris eucharistiae sese igerunt sacramento, cum Dominus per Moysen sacerdotibus dicat: Omnis homo qui accesserit de stirpe vestra ad ea, quae consecrata sunt et quae optulerunt filii Isreal Dominio, in quo est inmunditia, peribit coram Dominio.²⁴⁶

They, therefore, prefer their body to God, who by despising the rule of divine law, obey the pleasures of their own desires; and in unleashing the reins of lust, transgress the norms of restraint imposed upon them. They ignore the fact that for every fleeting enjoyment of intercourse they prepare a thousand years in hell, and those who now ignite the flame of lust, will then be consumed in avenging fire. But for those who wallow in filth of wanton pleasure, how can they dare in their pernicious security to participate in the sacrament of the saving Eucharist, since though Moses and the Lord said to his priests, “Any man of your descent who while unclean approaches the holy gifts which the Israelites hallow to the Lord shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.”²⁴⁷

For the reformers, who were influenced by the Clunaic reforms, the ideal Christian was to have their mind turned towards God, and not be distracted by transitory pleasures of the world.²⁴⁸ In another letter, Damian claims that they have been “enslaved” by the power of “dominating women”.²⁴⁹ In the conclusion to *De celibatu clericorum* (“Concerning the Celibacy of the Clergy”) Damian states that a priest cannot serve or please both God and a wife.²⁵⁰ He goes on to explain that the body, as well as the soul, worships God, is the temple of God, and must not be defamed therefore by contact with a “courtesan”.²⁵¹

The married or unchaste priest still posed a serious threat to their congregation and community. For many reformers, such priests had made themselves “impure” by having contact with a woman. To Damian, both clerical marriage and the toleration of

²⁴⁶ Damian 112.17 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 3 NR 91-150*, 268/269.

²⁴⁷ Damian, *Letter* 112.17 in *Letters 91-120*, 266/267.

²⁴⁸ Jestic, 87.

²⁴⁹ Damian, *Letter* 162.5 in *The Letters of Peter Damian: Letters. 151-180*. Owen J. Blum (trans.) (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 143/144.

²⁵⁰ Barstow, 63.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

concubinage was sinful.²⁵² The consequences of the sin would be paid by the married priest, but the stain of the sin fell upon the whole community.²⁵³ In his *Letter* 61, to Pope Nicholas II (c.990/5 - 1061), Damian describes priestly unchastity as a “pollution” which “contaminates” everyone:

Et cum omnes aecclesiasticos ordines in te uno habeas metuenda mole congestos, omnes proculdubio foedas, dum te prostibuli permixitone commaculas. Polluis itaque in te ostiarum, lectorum, exorcistam, omnesque deinceps scaros ordines, pro quibus omnibus in districto Dei iudicio redditurus es rationem.²⁵⁴

And since all ecclesiastical orders are accumulated in one awesome structure in you alone, you surely defile all of them as you pollute yourself by associating with prostitutes. And thus you contaminate by your actions the doorkeeper, the lector, the exorcist, and in turn all the scared orders, for all of which you must give an account before the severe judgment seat of God.²⁵⁵

For example, if a bishop were to lay hands on his flock which had been “tainted” by contact with a concubine, he defiled not only his own spirit but that of all whom he touched.²⁵⁶ As previously explained in chapter one, the eleventh century saw a revival in the concept of the holiness of the Eucharist and Transubstantiation (the idea that the substance of bread of the Eucharist literally becomes the substance of the body of Christ). Reformers like Humbert, Damian and Gregory argued that since the Eucharist was the body of Christ, therefore a priest needed to be “pure” before touching it. In the *De Coelibatu Sacerdotum*, Damian echoes a popular sentiment shared among the reformers that because Christ was born of a virgin, therefore the hands of a priest must not be “sullied” by contact with a woman.²⁵⁷ For reformers like Damian, by having a relationship with a woman, a priest had made himself “impure” by having contact with

²⁵² Helen L. Parish, *Clerical celibacy in the West, c.1100-1700* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 109.

²⁵³ Parish, *Clerical celibacy in the West*, 109.

²⁵⁴ Damian 61.12. in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*, 215.

²⁵⁵ Damian, *Letter* 61.12 in *Letters 61-90*, 11.

²⁵⁶ Parish, 109.

²⁵⁷ Peter Damian, *De Celibatu Sacerdotum* in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Jacques Paul Migne. [PL. 145.385] <https://books.google.ca/books?id=0MEUAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA385#v=onepage&q&f=false>

her, and therefore made himself “unworthy” of handling the Eucharist. In the *Liber Gomorrhianus* (“Book of Gomorrah”), Damian states that God does not wish to receive sacrifices from the hands of the “impure”.²⁵⁸ However, compared to clerical wives, married priests get off rather lightly in the writings of the reformers.

Clerical Wives

While married priests were attacked by the reformers, their wives also became frequent targets by the reformers. The eleventh-century reformers often describe clerical wives in very harsh terms and accuse them of “corrupting”, “polluting” or even “seducing” priests.²⁵⁹ A term frequently used by the reformers to refer to the wives of clerics is “concubines” (*concupina, -ae*). The term concubinage was used by the medieval canonists to describe a man and woman in a sexual relationship, who are living together but are not married (today we would refer to this as “cohabitation”). The practice of concubinage itself was never condemned by the medieval church, but rather tolerated as a lesser or secondary form of marriage.²⁶⁰ By the eleventh century the concept of the indissolubility of marriage (the idea that the bond of marriage can never be broken) had already long since been established.²⁶¹ The problem for the eleventh-century reformers was how to advocate for the break-up of otherwise licit marriages. The solution was to argue that clerical marriages were not true marriages, but rather concubinage. Since priests were technically not supposed to be married in the first place (due to canon law, past decrees, etc.) for the reformers, these clerical marriages were not valid to begin with.

²⁵⁸ Peter Damian, *Liber Gomorrhianus* in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Jacques Paul Migne [PL. 145.159.20]

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=7RgRAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA159#v=onepage&q&f=false>

²⁵⁹ Damian, 112.34.

²⁶⁰ Barstow, 4/5.

²⁶¹ Barstow, 21.

This idea was expressed in a letter written by Damian to the duchess Adelaide of Susa and Turin (c. 1012/20 - 1091), who was heir to lands in Northern Italy and Burgundy.²⁶²

In the letter, Damian explains the reasons why clerical marriages can never be considered real marriages:

Illorum vero clericorum feminae, qui matrimonia nequeunt legali iure contrahere, non coniuges sed concubines potius sive postibula congrue possumus appellare. Ideoque quia a Deo non merentur agnosci, de templo Di merito censentur excludi.²⁶³

But the women who live with these clerics, legally unable to contract marriage, cannot properly be called wives but rather concubines or prostitutes. And since they are not deserving of recognition by God, they are rightfully deemed to be excluded from the temple of God.²⁶⁴

Since concubinage did not have the same notion of indissolubility attached to it, this made it easier for the reformers to argue for the dissolution of clerical marriages.

The reformer with the most extreme views on priests' wives was Damian. Like most reformers, he uses the terms "concubines", "harlots" and "prostitutes" in his writings when referring to the wives or partners of clerics. However, what sets Damian apart from his contemporaries is his extreme and fiery language used in writing against the married or unmarried companions of priests. In 1063/64, Damian wrote to Bishop Cunibert of Turin (? - c. 1082), expressing his disapproval that the bishop allowed his clerics to live as married men.²⁶⁵ One section of *Letter* 112, in what seems like Damian addressing the wives of clerics, he goes off on a tangent describing women who associate with priests as "poisonous", "venomous" and "evil":

²⁶² Owen J. Blum (trans.) *Peter Damian, Letters 91-120* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 294.

²⁶³ Damian 114.17 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 3 NR 91-150*, 299.

²⁶⁴ Damian, *Letter* 114.7 in *Letters 91-120*, 297.

²⁶⁵ Owen J. Blum, *The Letters of Peter Damian: Letters. 91-120*. (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1998) 258.

Interea et vos alloquor, o lepores clericorum, pulpamenta diaboli, proiectio paradisi, virus mentium, gladius animarum, aconita bibentium, toxica convivarum, materia peccandi, occasio pereundi. Vos, inquam, alloquor ginecea hostis antiqui, upapae, ululae, noctuae, lupae, sanguisugae... Vos arpigae, quae sacrificium Domini circumvolantes arripitis, eosque qui Deo oblati fuerant, crudeliter devoratis. Nam et leenas vos non incongrue dixerim, quae beluarum more iubas attolitis, et incautos homines ad suae perditionis interitum cruentis amplexibus arpaxatis. Vos sirnes atque carbides, quae dum suavem deceptionis editis cantum, inevasibile struitis salo vorante naufragium. Vos viperae furiosae, quae prae impatientis ardore libidinis Christum, qui caput est clericorum, vestris amatoribus detruncatis.²⁶⁶

And in the meantime I speak to you, oh charmers of clerics, tasty morsels of the devil, cast out of paradise, venom of the mind, the sword [which kills] souls, the poisoned drink, the toxic feast, the source of sinning, and the occasion of damnation. I speak to you, female enemy of old, hoopoes, screech owls, nighthawks, she-wolves, leeches... You [are] harpies, flying around the sacrifice of the lord, snatching away those who are offered up to God, and cruelly devour [them]. And I might call you lionesses, who like wild beasts cast off your manes in this manner, and snatch unsuspecting men with your cruel embrace and bring them to destruction. You [are] sirens and charybdis, who by singing your sweet [song] of deception, cause inevitable shipwreck in the devouring sea. You furious vipers, who because of the fervour of your impatient lust dismember your lovers, by cutting [them off] from Christ, who is the head of the clergy.

Damian presents contemporary priests' companions as unabashedly diabolical, even as their method of "domination" is explicitly sexual.²⁶⁷ However, despite Damian's extreme hostility and caustic language against clerical wives, his views and rhetoric should not be taken as being as typical for the eleventh-century reformers. It is worth noting that other reformers of the period such as Gregory, Humbert and Bonizo of Sutri never use such extreme language when discussing wives of clerics. As historian Fiona Griffiths notes, Damian's fiery language was a rhetorical device.²⁶⁸ There has been a tendency in eleventh-century scholarship to view Damian's thoughts and opinions on clerical marriage as being "typical" for the reformers. Damian's writings loom particularly large

²⁶⁶ Damian 112.34 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani Teil 3 NR 91-150, 278/279*

²⁶⁷ Elliott, 101.

²⁶⁸ Griffiths, 289, 271.

in the eleventh century debate on clerical marriage due to the fact that he was one of the most prolific writers of this period. From the late 1040s to his death (c. 1072/73), Damian wrote extensively on the three main “issues” plaguing the Church (i.e. – lay investiture, simony, and clerical marriage). The additional appeal for modern scholars is Damian’s style. Not only is he extremely colourful in his use of language and rhetoric, but at times it seems like Damian is speaking directly to the reader²⁶⁹, thereby giving his writings a “personal quality.” However, we have to be careful not to fall into thinking that Damian speaks for all the reformers, or that his views are typical for the time. As Griffiths notes, Damian has been typically featured in scholarship on the period not just as one voice among many, but as the reform’s presumed spokesman – at least on the topic of clerical marriage.²⁷⁰ Nowhere in the *Registrum* or *Epistolae Vagantes* does Gregory VII refer to the wives of clerics as “screech-owls”, “harpies” or “followers of Diana”. The term “concubine” only appears twice in the *Registrum*²⁷¹, and only one instance of the word *scortum* (meaning: “prostitute”) in the *Epistolae Vagantes*²⁷² when Gregory refers to the wife of the Bishop Juhel of Dol. Unlike Damian, Gregory focuses much more on the married/unchaste priests with threats of *anathema* (excommunication) and eternal damnation.²⁷³

In the same letter to Cunibert, Damian even claimed that at the Easter Synod of 1049, it was decreed that the wives of clerics should be made slaves of the Church:

²⁶⁹ As we just seen in *Letter* 112.34, Damian begins this section of the letter by directly addressing women who associate with priests (*Interea et vos alloquor, o lepores clericorum*)

²⁷⁰ Griffiths, 269.

²⁷¹ Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 155, 156,

²⁷² Gregory VII, *Epistolae Extra Registrum Vagantes* in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Jacques Paul Migne [PL XXVIII.148.675]

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=NMIUAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA675#v=onepage&q&f=false>

²⁷³ Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 105, 106, 148, 156.*

In plenaria plane synodo sanctae memoriae Leo papa constitui, ut quaecunque damnabiles feminae intra Romana moenia reperirentur presbyteris prostituae, ex tunc et deinceps Lateranensi palatio adiucarentur ancillae. Quod videlicet salutare statutum aequitatis iustitiaeque plenissimum, nos etiam per omnes aecclesias propagandum esse decernimus, quatinus percepto prius apostoliace sedis edicto unusquisque episcopus aecclesiae suae vendicet famulas, quas in sua parroechia deprehenderit sacrilega presbyteris ammixitone substratus. Aequitatis scilicet iure ut quae sacris altaribus rapuisse servorum Dei convincuntur obesquium, ispaee hoc saltem episcopo per dimintui capitis sui suppleant famulatum.²⁷⁴

In the plenary synod [of 1049] it was Pope Leo [IX] of blessed memory, who decreed that whenever these damnable women, living with priests as their mistresses, were found living within the walls of the city of Rome, they were to be condemned from then on to be slaves of the Lateran palace. I have also decided to publicize this salutary law, so replete with justice and equity, throughout all dioceses, so that the first hearing the decrees of the Apostolic See, every bishop may acquire as slaves of his dioceses all the women in his territory he finds living in sacrilegious union with priests. It is clearly a matter of justice, that those who have stolen the ministry of the servants of God at the holy altar, should at least reimburse the bishop with their service after forfeiting their civil rights.²⁷⁵

However, Damian's claim is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the original rulings from Pope Leo IX's Easter Synod have not survived, making it difficult to know precisely what was discussed.²⁷⁶ Although Damian himself was present at the Synod of 1049, none of his contemporaries (including Humbert and Hildebrand (later Pope Gregory VII)) who were also present, ever mention or discuss this alleged decree in their writings. The only other eleventh century source to corroborate Damian's claim is the German chronicler, Bernold of St. Blasien (also known as "Bernold of Constance") (c. 1050 - 1100). However, Bernold's account of the 1049 Synod in his *Chronicon*, is also suspect. First, Bernold was not a witness to the Synod's rulings as he was likely born around the year 1050. Second, Bernold (likely writing sometime in the 1070s), relies

²⁷⁴ Damian 112.37 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 3 NR 91-150*, 280/281

²⁷⁵ Damian, *Letter 112.37 in Letters. 91-120*, 278.

²⁷⁶ Griffiths. "Wives, concubines, or slaves?", 271.

heavily on Damian's letter to Cunibert when discussing the 1049 Synod.²⁷⁷ As Griffiths notes, Damian's claims concerning the Synod are not supported by contemporary accounts or by any evidence of implementation.²⁷⁸ If Leo IX had ordered for the enslavement of clerics' women, nothing came of the ruling.²⁷⁹ Even if one disregards the writings of Damian, a similar rhetoric of clerical wives of "seducing" or "distracting" their husbands from their duties can be seen in the writings of other reformers such as Gregory, Humbert and Bonizo of Sutri. Many reformers also tried to argue that both married priest and their wives were committing "spiritual incest" (see Chapter 1).

Influence of These Writers

While the eleventh-century reformers fiercely attacked married priests and clerical wives (and partners) in their writings, the question remains as to how influential and effective their writings were in bringing about change. As previously explained, the goal of the reforms was to convince not only their fellow clergymen, but also the laity that clerical marriage was a problem and a threat which needed to be eliminated. According to the historian, Helen L. Parish, the views of reformers like Damian not only resonated with the reforming popes, but also with more radically minded laymen.²⁸⁰ In Milan there was an attempt to enforce papal decrees against clerical marriage by Ariald the Carimate (c. 1010 - 1066), the leader of a faction known as the Patarenes.²⁸¹ The Patarenes were an eleventh-century reform movement in Milan, who sought moral reform of the clergy.²⁸² They seemed to have shared the reformers' belief that preserving cultic

²⁷⁷ Griffiths, 272/3.

²⁷⁸ Griffiths, 270.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Parish, 110/111.

²⁸¹ Parish, 111.

²⁸² H.E.J. Cowdrey, "The Papacy, The Patarenes and the Church of Milan." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 18 (1968): 29.

purity of the altar required sacerdotal celibacy.²⁸³ In May 1057 that Patarenes entered the cathedral with a popular mob to expel an unworthy priest.²⁸⁴ Ariald demanded that married priest sign, on pain of death, a *phytadium de castitate servanda* (literally: “A promise concerning chastity which is to be kept”²⁸⁵)²⁸⁶ The reformers had to marshal public opinion so that actions that had previously failed to provoke a general moral indignation within society (such as clerical marriage or concubinage) would come to be regarded as serious moral offences with untold consequences.²⁸⁷ By emphasising the potential for contagion, and by reiterating the need to cleanse the sacred from contamination by the secular, the reformers used the language of “purity” and “pollution”, in particular the rhetoric of sexual separation, both to delineate and more sharply enforce what they deemed to be the appropriate spheres of activity both for themselves and lay society.²⁸⁸

While there are numerous examples of bishops who either resisted, ignored or failed to enforce papal decrees against clerical marriage (such as Bishop Odo of Constance²⁸⁹ and Cunibert of Turin²⁹⁰), we do know of clergy and laity who enforced these decrees. For example, the *Registrum* contains a letter from Gregory to Count Albert of Calw (Swabia) and his wife Wiltrud, commending them for their devotion and for enforcing papal decrees against clerical marriage and concubinage.²⁹¹ Gregory’s main innovation in the enforcement of these decrees was the use of legates to make sure papal

²⁸³ Wertheimer, 400.

²⁸⁴ Parish, 111.

²⁸⁵ Another possible way to translate this: “A promise regarding the maintenance of chastity”.

²⁸⁶ Parish, 111.

²⁸⁷ Cushing, 112.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ H.E.J. Cowdrey, *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 18.

²⁹⁰ In letter 112, Damian calls out Cunibert for apparently failing to enforce papal decrees.

²⁹¹ Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 106.

decrees were being obeyed, and the use of excommunication for those who refused or failed to obey.²⁹² Gregory also called for the laity to boycott the masses of simoniac and married priests, and in addition, called for their removal from the altar “if necessary, by force.”²⁹³ These measures were put largely put into practice by the reforming party (Paterenes) in Milan.²⁹⁴

The main impact of the reformers’ writings was that it made the practice of clerical marriage known and drew attention to those committing the “offence”. For a priest who was known in his community who was married or in a relationship with woman, this might cause problems. As the character and “worthiness” of married priests came under scrutiny, combined with the threats of *anathema* and calls for the laity to boycott masses, may have pressured priests to leave their wives. For clerical wives, the language used in the writings of the reformers had two main effects. For clerical wives, the language used in the writings of the reformers had two main effects. First, the clerical wife loses her status by being referred to as a “concubine” (or worse), and having her relationship with her husband referred to as “concubinage”. For the more radical reformers like Damian, the language used dehumanized clerical wives. The clerical wife is thereby transformed from someone of high standing in her community into a danger and a threat to the integrity of the clergy and laity.

The Impact on Priests and Wives

As the enforcement of decrees prohibiting clerical marriage gradually increased, what was the effect on married priest, wives and their families? There is not doubt that

²⁹² Henry C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*. (New Hyde Park, N.Y: University Books, 1966) 186-187.

²⁹³ Robinson, *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century; Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*, 14.

²⁹⁴ Robinson, 14.

many lives and families would have been negatively impacted by such legislation. Unfortunately, it is very difficult for us to get an accurate picture since we have virtually no primary source material which discusses the impact on clerical marriages or families. C.N.L Brooke states that the works of Leo IX, Humbert, Hildebrand and Damian must have resulted in many victims.²⁹⁵ He speculates that the legislation of the eleventh-century Popes on clerical marriage must have “produced as many broken homes and personal tragedies as the morals of Hollywood”.²⁹⁶ The gradual spread and enforcement of this anti-marriage legalisation raises a lot of questions. For example, how many marriages were broken up due to the reforms? What became of the wives of clerics after they separated? What happened to the children resulting from these relationships? Did most priests choose to leave their wives or the clergy? Unfortunately, for most of these questions we do not know and can only speculate to a degree. According to Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, the laws prohibiting clerical marriage forced clerics into a dilemma, a choice between their marriage and their livelihood.²⁹⁷ It also forced the cleric to delegitimize his children publicly.²⁹⁸ A priest who refused clerical celibacy could theoretically lose his livelihood and impoverish his family.²⁹⁹ Although these newly enforced laws against clerical marriage meant that a priest could no longer have a wife or children, it did mean however that he became a member of a new and exclusive caste. Barstow speculates that the lure of power, prestige and benefits that each priest could share may have convinced some clerics to give up on the idea of marriage.³⁰⁰ Some may have acknowledged that the

²⁹⁵ Brooke, 1.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Thibodeaux, 42.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Barstow, 180.

heights of power which the church was approaching were not available to men whose loyalties and resources were shared with women and children.³⁰¹ However, just because a priest was no longer meant to have a wife or children does not necessarily mean they were abandoned. It is quite plausible that a priest could have kept seeing or supporting his wife or children in secret, although he would have been forced by the Church to declare his children “illegitimate” and his marriage “annulled”. More importantly, just because priests were no longer allowed to marry did not mean they stopped marrying. We know that in some countries and regions of Western Europe, clerical marriage continued to be a problem long after the First and Second Lateran Councils (1123 and 1139 respectively). For example, in England clerical marriage was not stamped out until the end of the twelfth century.³⁰² In the example of Héloïse and Abelard (which I discuss in Chapter 5), the enforced decrees against clerical marriage put many couples in a difficult situation. Although Héloïse and Abelard did marry, they kept their marriage and relationship a secret for fear of what might happen if they were discovered (including the possibility of Abelard losing his benefice, and position as a teacher).

As for whatever became of the former wives of clerics, we simply do not know. Historian, Dyan Eliot has noted the rather curious phenomenon in which wives contemporary with the Gregorian reform seem to have vanished.³⁰³ It is entirely possible that some of these women could have remarried. If there were no children involved, some may have chosen to become nuns. A worse case scenario is that they may have been driven into poverty or prostitution. Historians, Georges Duby and Jo Anne McNamara

³⁰¹ Barstow, 180/1.

³⁰² Elliott, 82/83.

³⁰³ Elliott, 83.

speculate that such women became part of the growing number of rootless poor.³⁰⁴ Historian Ruth Mazo Karras explains that because the women who had liaisons with priests were demoted to concubinage, they were stripped of any property and inheritance rights they might have had.³⁰⁵ There is speculation that in the account of the French preacher, Robert d'Arbrissel (c. 1045 - 1116), the mysterious "prostitutes" amid an entourage of itinerant preachers may have actually been rejected clerical wives.³⁰⁶

Conclusion

As we have seen the married clergy itself became the subject of attack by the reformers. Married or unchaste priests were called out for their supposed "fornication" and their character and worthiness of being a priest was called into question. Women who associated with priests were attacked for "seducing" priests and passing the "pollution" of sin onto the congregation. This was another key element of the reformers' arguments against clerical marriage and unchastity, as it not only highlighted the practice the reformers sought to eradicate, but calling out the married or unchaste clergy would have likely put pressure on them to change their ways. While we have seen the three main elements of the reformers' arguments against clerical marriage (practical, theological and the attack on the married clergy), the next chapter will examine the arguments of those from this period who were in favour of clerical marriage.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Karras, 122.

³⁰⁶ Elliott, 83.

Chapter 4: The Defence of Clerical Marriage

While there were many in the eleventh century who were against clerical marriage, there were also some who supported and defended it. This chapter explores how the pro-clerical marriage camp defended the practice of clerical marriage. There were two central ideas of the reformers the pro-marriage writers had to address and disprove. First, they had to refute that reformist belief or argument that clerical marriage was unlawful and impure.³⁰⁷ Second, they had to counter what the reformers held as scriptural, Apostolic and canonical basis for prohibiting clerical marriage and enforcing celibacy. Like the reformers, the pro-marriage writers also presented their own theological and practical arguments to support their position. The advocates of clerical marriage justified such unions on the basis of historical precedent, showing with a deep knowledge of scripture that the Bible permitted priestly marriage.³⁰⁸ Not only did they cite scripture and the canons to support their arguments in favour of clerical marriage, but they also used both against the reformers. The primary argument in the defence of clerical marriage was that the element of compulsion in the discipline of the Church was not supported by scripture.³⁰⁹ They also argued that marriage (even for clerics) was normal and natural, and warned that prohibiting such marriages would drive some to commit even worse offences. Even the authority of the Church and pope to issue and enforce such decrees was also questioned.

The Western Clergy's Reaction to Papal Decrees

³⁰⁷ Thibodeaux, 90.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Parish, 118.

In mid-to-late eleventh century, the Western Church's prohibition of clerical marriage and increased efforts at enforcement was met with some resistance from the clergy. According the scholar Augustin Fliche, in Germany, France and the Anglo-Norman State, clerics rejected the law on clerical celibacy with astounding unanimity.³¹⁰ The chronicler Lampert of Hersfeld states that the German clergy became outraged upon hearing the pope's decrees of perpetual anathema for any priests living with women.³¹¹ For them, the Pope was palpably heretical and a proclaimer of insensate teaching.³¹² They argued that by forcing them to live as angels, and refusing to allow "nature to flow its usual course", the pope had, "loosened the reins of fornication and impurity".³¹³ Lampert notes the dilemma of Archbishop Siegfried of Mainz, who was caught between the mandate of the pope to rigorously enforce the rule of chastity and the fury of a recalcitrant clergy.³¹⁴ In 1074, Siegfried held a Synod at Erfurt at which he found no support among the bishops.³¹⁵ The following year he held a Synod at Mainz.³¹⁶ According to Lampert, after the Archbishop declared that he was compelled to implement pope's demands, the reaction from those in attendance was so violent that the Archbishop barely escaped with his life.³¹⁷ The reaction of the French clergy to these reforms is revealed in the *Vita* of Walter, abbot of Saint-Martin, Pontoise. When the bishops and abbots assembled at the councils in Paris (perhaps in 1074), they declared these rulings to be "intolerable and therefore irrational," and attacked Walter for daring to suggest that

³¹⁰ Augustin Fliche, *La réforme grégorienne*. vol. 2. (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense bureaux, 1926), 167.

³¹¹ Lampert of Hersfeld, and I.S. Robinson (trans.) *The Annals of Lampert of Hersfeld* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 238.

³¹² Cowdrey, "Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy," 287.

³¹³ Lampert, *The Annals of Lampert of Hersfeld*, 238; Cowdrey, 287.

³¹⁴ Cowdrey, 287.

³¹⁵ Cowdrey, 287/288.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Lampert, 239/240 - Cowdrey in Frassetto, 288.

the decrees of the supreme pontiff should always be obeyed, even if one thought them wrong.³¹⁸ The bishops arrested Walter as a blasphemer and had him brought in chains to the king.³¹⁹

Writings Defending Clerical Marriage

As Barstow notes, despite centuries of numerous decrees against the practice, there is virtually no literature prior to the eleventh century which defends clerical marriage.³²⁰ Since these decrees were generally poorly enforced (or in many cases, not at all), nobody was affected by these decrees. Most of the polemical literature against the Church's anti-marriage legislation dates from the mid-to-late eleventh century and come mostly from Germany and Normandy. Only two pro-clerical marriage sources come from Italy and one from the Byzantine empire. The first source we have comes from the East. The *Libellus contra Latinos* ("Book against the Latins") was written in 1054 by the Byzantine theologian Nicetas Stethatos. In it, Nicetas attacks the Western Church's recent practice of prohibiting and dissolving the marriages of priests.³²¹ The first pro-clerical marriage source from the West was written around the year 1060 by the Italian bishop, Ulric of Imola.³²² In an epistle, known as the *Rescript*, Ulric responds to Pope Nicholas II's celibacy decree of 1059.³²³ Ulric argued that the clergy had always been allowed to marry and the pope had no right to forbid them wives.³²⁴ However, polemics against the anti-marriage reforms do not appear again until the reign of Pope Gregory VII in the 1070s. Gregory VII was the first of the "reforming popes" to make a concerted

³¹⁸ Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Héloïse and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-century France* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 79.

³¹⁹ Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Héloïse and Abelard*, 79.

³²⁰ Barstow, 105.

³²¹ Cowdrey, 270.

³²² Barstow, 107.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

effort to stamp out clerical marriage. He energetically promoted a campaign to enforce clerical chastity, especially in the years 1074 and 1074.³²⁵ This enthusiasm for reform contributed to the resistance reforming churchmen experienced in trying to make their fellow clerics abandon their wives and companions.³²⁶ A document from Germany dating from around 1074-79, entitled *Epistola de continentia clericorum* (“A letter on the continence of the clergy”), references Pope Nicholas II’s measures of 1059-1060 concerning clerical continence. The author claims that the pope had acted “not legitimately but wrongfully, not canonically, but injudiciously”.³²⁷ The author then proceeds to argue that the duty of the pope was, “to commend but not to command continence.”³²⁸ The author further asserts that compulsion was alien to scripture and to the canonical tradition.³²⁹ As Cowdrey notes, the author of the *Epistola de continentia clericorum* employed similar arguments as Lampert – that enforced continence was fraught with moral perils and raised the danger of scandal in the church at large.³³⁰

Perhaps the only pro-clerical marriage source we have on this period from Italy is Landulf of Milan’s, *Historia Mediolanensis* (“A Milanese History”). Landulf (Also known as Landulf “the senior”) was a married priest, historian, and an opponent of the both the Gregorian Reforms and the local *Patarenes*.³³¹ Although the *Historia Mediolanensis* contains many inaccuracies, it does however feature Landulf’s arguments

³²⁵ Cowdrey, 287.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Cowdrey, 288.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Cowdrey, 288/289.

³³¹ Constance H. Berman, *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2005), 131, 145.

supporting clerical marriage.³³² But our main sources from the pro-marriage camp from the late-eleventh to the early-twelfth century comes from four Norman tracts. The first, *Tractatus pro clericorum conubio* (literally, “A Tract for concubines of the clergy”), was written by an unknown author around 1077-78.³³³ Later, three other works, the *Treatise on Grace* and tracts “J22/26” and “J25” were written by an Anglo-Norman author referred to as Anonymous of York (also known as the “Norman Anonymous”) around 1102-1110.³³⁴ According to Thibodeaux, these writings were influenced by a resurgence of celibacy legislation and enforcement in the region.³³⁵ Anonymous’ three tracts defending clerical marriage were written in response to the anti-clerical marriage legislation of Anselm of Canterbury in 1102-08.³³⁶ In 1102, Anselm advised that archdeacons and canons who had physically separated from their wives would be tolerated so long as they refrained from intercourse or speaking to them without witnesses.³³⁷ He also declared that priests who had not given up their women would not celebrate mass.³³⁸ There has been much debate and speculation among scholars regarding Anonymous’ background and possible motives for his fierce defence of clerical marriage and the right of priests’ sons to be ordained. One theory is that Anonymous was perhaps a married priest, or a son of a priest himself.³³⁹ The rather engaging nature of his writings, expressed in the first person, suggests his interests in clerical marriage was more than

³³² Davis, Ralph Henry Carless, Henry Mayr-Harting, and Robert Ian Moore. *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis*. (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 61-62.

³³³ Thibodeaux, 89/90.

³³⁴ Thibodeaux, 89.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Mews, 79.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Parish, 118.

academic.³⁴⁰ Also, his apparent familiarity with efforts at reform in England suggests some experience on the other side of the Channel.³⁴¹ However, it is difficult to gauge the impact of Anonymous' writings, which may have been relatively unnoticed in their day. Brooke argues that Anonymous was rather insignificant, given that he had quasi-heretical views on several Church issues that were unlikely to have gone unnoticed had he occupied an important office in the Church.³⁴² Brooke also notes that despite the existence of married clergy in England well beyond the eleventh-century reforms, there is little evidence of a burgeoning polemical debate on the topic, and there is nothing to imply that the Anonymous was writing as part of a controversy within the English Church.³⁴³ It also appears that the *Tractatus pro clericorum conubio* was not widely read outside of Normandy. According to Thibodeaux, the *Tractatus* was likely read by clergy who served the cathedrals of Cambri and Noyon in the neighbouring archdioceses of Reims.³⁴⁴ Regardless of the impact Anonymous and the unknown *Tractatus* author may have had in their day (or lack thereof), their writings help provide a window to the argumentation of the pro-marriage camp.

Biblical Precedence & Apostolic Authority

Just as the reformers sought scriptural precedence to support their position against clerical marriage, those on the pro-marriage side also cited scripture to defend clerical marriage. The pro-marriage writers quoted passages from the Bible to support their argument that clerical celibacy and the Church's anti-marriage laws had no basis in scripture. They also cited Bible passages to argue that clerical marriage was supported by

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Parish, 118/119.

³⁴² Parish, 119.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Thibodeaux, 96.

scripture. In his *Historia Mediolanensis*, Landulf of Milan, defends clerical marriage by citing canon law and scripture. Landulf makes references to the Old Testament priesthood [Leviticus 21.7] and 1 Timothy 3:2: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife.”³⁴⁵ Another popular Bible passage often quoted by both the pro and anti-marriage camps was I Corinthians 4:5-7, 7:9. Those in the pro-marriage party interpreted these passages as meaning the Apostles themselves were married or approved of marriage.³⁴⁶ Anonymous makes the case that Paul, in his most famous letter to the Corinthians, gave the same advice to the laity and clergy and that he made no distinction between the two groups.³⁴⁷

Both the Anonymous and the *Tractatus* author tried to refute the notion that the Church’s celibacy decrees were Biblical. In his tract “J25”, Anonymous began by questioning whose ordinance it was to institute celibacy.³⁴⁸ He decided that it was a “tradition of man” not “an institution of God.” Such decrees could not be found in either the Old or New Testament or in the writings of the Apostles.³⁴⁹ The *Tractatus* author used the same line of reasoning, by offering the same Biblical support for his argument. If the Apostle (Paul) did not intend for priests to marry, he would have not stated that a “bishop should be the husband of one wife” [1 Tim. 3:2].³⁵⁰ The reformers cited the same passage, arguing that “one wife” referred to a priests’ church or flock. Some reformers claimed that married priests were committing “adultery” (or even bigamy) by being married to both a woman and the Church.³⁵¹ Anonymous countered this argument by

³⁴⁵ McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform*, 33/34.

³⁴⁶ Lea, 10.

³⁴⁷ Thibodeaux, 95.

³⁴⁸ Thibodeaux, 91.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Damian, *Letter 152.10 in Letters 151-180*, 12.

stating that the Apostle (Paul) “would have hardly made this ruling, if it were adultery, as some assert, for a bishop to have at one time both a wife and a church-two wives, so to speak ... For the Holy Church is not the priests’ wife, not his bride, but Christ’s.”³⁵² In trying to counter the reformers’ argument about the general “polluting nature” of women, Anonymous states that all sins are cleansed at baptism.³⁵³ The implication of Anonymous’ argument is that women are not impure, and therefore men (including priests) to do not become “polluted” when having contact with women.

“Normal” and “Natural” Argument

A point commonly argued on the pro-marriage side was that marriage was normal and natural (even for clerics). The Anonymous argued that clerics and laymen were both may of the same substance and share the same human frailties. In the *Treatise on Grace*, he emphasised the similarities between lay and clerical bodies. “Why are we,” he asks, “who are made from the same matter and assume the sin of flesh from Adam’s sin,” not allowed wives?.³⁵⁴ Both groups of men suffer from sexual desires, and both inherit sin from Adam. Reformers, the author maintains, try to enforce standards (celibacy) that they themselves do not abide by.³⁵⁵ As Thibodeaux notes, this comparison completely disputes the reformist agenda to elevate the clergy to higher status over laymen.³⁵⁶

Some in the pro-marriage camp argued that continence was not humanly possible for most people (at least not without having been granted the “gift” of continence from God). Both the *Tractatus* author and Anonymous agree that continence is a gift from

³⁵² Brooke, 14.

³⁵³ Karras, 122.

³⁵⁴ Thibodeaux, 95.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

God, without which it would be impossible to live up to the standards of celibacy.³⁵⁷ In tract “J25”, Anonymous, employing the same argument as in his *Treatise on Grace*, states that “Those who are continent have received continence from God,” and, without this gift from God, they could not be chaste.³⁵⁸ The writer also explains that those who are not blessed by continence are driven by the “law of their members,” which holds them “captive”; this “law,” essentially the combination of sin and carnal desire, provokes them either to marry or fornicate. Such language on the “law in their members” (from Romans 7:23) is also found in the *Treatise on Grace*.³⁵⁹ According to Lampert, upon hearing Pope Gregory’s decrees, the German clergy cried out, asking: “where he might obtain the services of angels to rule over the people throughout the Church of God?”³⁶⁰

Prohibiting Marriage Would Drive the Clergy to do Worse Things

Another point commonly argued by those in the pro-marriage camp was that if priests were not allowed to marry, it would drive them to commit far worse crimes. Nicetas alleged that the Latin church dishonoured marriage by its insistence on clerical celibacy, and imposed upon the willing or unable clergy an impossible discipline that simply opened the door to immorality.³⁶¹ As Karras notes, the defence of clerical marriage focuses especially on the practical argument that, as the clergy could not remain chaste, it was better for them to marry than to have concubines.³⁶² The phrase, “*melius est enim nubere, quam uri*” (“It is better to be married than to burn”) [1 Corinthians 7:9] was used as the conventional foundation for the defence of marriage: to refuse the clergy the

³⁵⁷ Thibodeaux, 93.

³⁵⁸ Thibodeaux, 94.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Lampert, 238/239.

³⁶¹ Parish, 83.

³⁶² Karras, 122.

right to marry was to invite those who had no vocation to celibacy to far worse crimes.³⁶³ Like other writers, Anonymous argued that by denying what is natural, marriage, will result in sodomy.³⁶⁴ Curiously, sodomy is the first offence mentioned in a list of other sexual transgression, and is often focused on by these writers.³⁶⁵ Other offences like adultery, the “unspeakable pollution” of prostitution, and even incest might also occur.³⁶⁶ For some in the pro-marriage camp, marriage was a means of curbing sexual desires. These authors assumed that male sexuality, if uncontrolled will create a greater problem. By this logic, the author connects “natural” sexuality to marital sexuality and the control of the male body.³⁶⁷

Marriage Defended as Custom & Right

Clerical marriage was also defended as custom and a right, since it had been common practice for the clergy to marry for centuries (despite numerous decrees issued against it). For example, the Tractatus author emphasizes the idea that legitimate marriage has always been permitted to priests, that such unions were neither adultery nor fornication (*adulterina vel fornicaria*), and the “architects” of the new laws (*novi dogmatis*) suggest.³⁶⁸ The papacy’s attempts to eliminate clerical marriage entirely, especially the drastic methods adopted by the proponents of celibacy during the second half of the eleventh century, were seen by some like Sigebert of Gembloux, as pernicious inventions, undermining the proper order of society.³⁶⁹ As further proof that the laws against clerical marriage went against tradition and were ungodly, the

³⁶³ Brooke, 14.

³⁶⁴ Thibodeaux, 99.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Thibodeaux, 90/91.

³⁶⁹ McLaughlin, 33/34.

Anonymous points out that marriage is a sacrament and indissoluble.³⁷⁰ Although the indissolubility of marriage was first proposed by Augustine of Hippo, reformers increasingly emphasise the permanence of such unions, along with monogamy.³⁷¹

Authority of the Church and Pope Questioned

The Church's authority to make such decrees against clerical marriage was also questioned by those in the pro-marriage camp. They argued that the Church had no authority to issue such decrees or the power to break up clerical marriages. In his *Libellus Contra Latinos*, Nicetas demanded to know from the Church of Rome: "Who is it that taught you to prohibit and dissolve the marriage of priests? Which of the Doctors of the Church taught you such depravity?"³⁷² A common sentiment among the pro-marriage camp was that such laws against clerical celibacy were entirely new inventions.³⁷³ They maintained that clerical marriage had always had a place in scripture and ecclesiastical tradition.³⁷⁴ In Serlo of Bayeux's *Defensio*, written in the early-twelfth century, he rallies against the "new laws" and "harsh statutes" of the reformers,³⁷⁵ The *Tractatus* author even goes as far as to suggest that the creators of these laws were sexually suspect themselves. He accuses of them hypocrisy and states that while legitimately married clerics are persecuted, fornicators escape discipline.³⁷⁶ Thibodeaux notes that accusations of sodomy were often used against religious and political enemies during this time. For

³⁷⁰ Thibodeaux, 91/92.

³⁷¹ Thibodeaux, 92.

³⁷² Parish, 83.

³⁷³ Thibodeaux, 90, 92.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Thibodeaux, 92.

³⁷⁶ Thibodeaux, 100.

the Anglo-Saxons and Normans, both sodomy and celibacy were associated with being unmanly.³⁷⁷

Conclusion

As we have seen the defence of clerical marriage had a regional quality. In the East, the Eastern (Orthodox) Church defended the rights of its priests to be married despite increasing pressure from Rome during the mid-eleventh century. In the West, the defence of clerical marriage came mostly from more northern countries or regions of Europe. In Germany, Normandy/England, clerics defended their right to marry. Like the Reformers, the pro-marriage writers relied on scriptural, historical and Apostolic precedence to support their arguments in favour of marriage. They often relied on the exact same texts as the reformers, but with different interpretations. While their writings may have had little impact in their time, examining the pro-marriage camp helps give a fuller picture of the marriage debate of the eleventh and early-twelfth centuries. Although scholarship generally tends to focus on the reformers, it is important to keep in mind that the clerical marriage debate was not one sided. So far, all of the writers we have examined have been men. In the next chapter the thoughts and opinions of the twelfth-century French scholar and nun, Héloïse d'Argenteuil, will be examined as she provides a rare and unique female perspective on marriage from this period.

³⁷⁷ Thibodeaux, 98.

Chapter 5: Héloïse and Abelard

In the previous chapters we have seen the arguments for and against clerical marriage. However, the problem is that virtually all the primary source material we have from the eleventh and twelfth centuries were written by men, and as a result, provide a male perspective on the clerical marriage debate. This is evident in the writings of the pro-marriage camp which tends to stress the right of men (both clergy and laity) to marry, and the consequences of barring male clerics from marriage. Nowhere do they mention how women fit into the picture, other than their argument that being married helps restrain a man's carnal impulses. When the reformers discuss women who have either married or associate with priests, they tend to focus on the harm and "pollution" these women will supposedly cause the clergy. Nowhere do the reformers discuss how clerical marriage might likewise be detrimental to women, other than the occasional vague warnings about putting themselves at risk for "divine punishment".³⁷⁸ This chapter examines the thoughts and opinions of the French nun and writer, Héloïse d'Argenteuil (d. 1164), and the French philosopher and scholar, Peter Abelard (1079 - 1142). While Héloïse and Abelard are best remembered for their protracted love affair, for them the issue of clerical marriage was personal. Both suffered as a result of the Church's efforts to increasingly enforce clerical celibacy in the early-to-mid twelfth century.

Héloïse provides a unique female perspective on the clerical marriage debate. Although she was only briefly married to Abelard, she is the only example we have of a clerical wife for whom we know her thoughts and opinions on marriage. While she

³⁷⁸ An excellent example of this is Damian's, *Letter* 112.30-34, 40, 43. Not only does it contain a fiery attack on clerical wives (34-40) but Damian also recounts tales of divine punishment involving women in the Bible (40 and 43).

acknowledges the need for and importance of human companionship, Héloïse also cites a variety of reasons why married life may not be suitable for clerics. However, we should keep in mind that many of the thoughts, opinions and arguments Héloïse presents on clerical marriage largely comes from Abelard's autobiography, *Historia Calamitatum* (also known as, "A Story of My Misfortunes" or "A History of My Calamities"). Because of this, we should be aware that while a woman's perspective is being reflected in the work, it is being filtered through Abelard's writings. In the *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard recounts his early career, which culminates in a vivid description of his affair with Héloïse, providing rich circumstantial detail about the life of a successful cleric in early twelfth-century Paris.³⁷⁹ However, he glosses over his affair with Héloïse, presenting it as a simply a moral lapse on his part.³⁸⁰ In Héloïse's first letter to Abelard as a nun, she accused him of glossing over her arguments against marriage based on the purity of love as an ideal.³⁸¹ She closes the first letter by reminding him of the many letters that he had showered on her in the past and of the songs that had made her famous.³⁸² Unfortunately, besides what little information is provided by Abelard, we do not know the full extent of Héloïse's arguments. Even in her later letters to Abelard, Héloïse does not mention or discuss any of the arguments she made against marriage when Abelard began proposing to her. Historian Elizabeth van Houts note that in using Abelard's autobiography and Héloïse's later letters, it is possible to trace Héloïse's thinking about their life together as lovers and briefly as a married couple.³⁸³ However,

³⁷⁹ Constant J. Mews, *Abelard and Héloïse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83.

³⁸⁰ Mews, *Abelard and Héloïse*, 83.

³⁸¹ Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 35.

³⁸² Mews, 35.

³⁸³ van Houts, 176.

we should bear in mind that the couples later reminisces may not be exactly representative of their feelings at the time.³⁸⁴

The Lives and Relationship of Héloïse & Abelard

Little is known for certain about Héloïse's background other than that she was educated at the royal Abby of Ste.-Marie, Argenteuil.³⁸⁵ According to the French philosopher, Roscelin of Compiègne (1050 - 1125) her uncle Fulbert was of noble birth.³⁸⁶ Perhaps in 1113, Héloïse decided to move from Argenteuil so as to board with her uncle, within the cathedral cloister of Notre-Dame.³⁸⁷ Fulbert was also a canon of the cathedral of Notre-Dame.³⁸⁸ In 1115, Héloïse meet Abelard while attending the University of Paris. Abelard was a teacher at the University of Paris, although his exact clerical rank at the time is uncertain.³⁸⁹ Some have argued that he may have been in the lower orders, such a lector or acolyte.³⁹⁰ While others maintain that given his age, intellectual standing, and responsibilities (as head of the cathedral school) he must have proceeded to a higher rank (subdeacon, deacon, or priest).³⁹¹ Regardless of his rank, Abelard would have certainly been a member of the clergy as all teachers at the time were clergymen.³⁹² Abelard and Héloïse fell in love and exchanged letters. Héloïse later became pregnant and gave birth to a son, whom she named "Astrolabe" for reasons which are unclear. One suggestion is that she devised the name *Arstrabius puer dei*

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Mews, *Abelard and Héloïse*, 59.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ van Houts, 177.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

(Astrolabe, child of God) as an anagram of *Petrus Abelardus II*.³⁹³ According to Abelard, after the birth of their son, he proposed to Helousie and they married in a private ceremony in the presence of friends and family.³⁹⁴ Possibly fearing what damage might be done to his reputation and career prospects if news of the affair, marriage and child came out, Abelard sent Héloïse away to be a nun at the convent in Argenteuil. According to Abelard, Fulbert believed that Abelard had repudiated the marriage by making Héloïse a nun.³⁹⁵ Fulbert bribed a servant of Abelard's to let his kinsman or followers into Abelard's lodging at night, where they caught him asleep and castrated him.³⁹⁶ Abelard then goes on to describe the embarrassment and humiliation he experienced after the incident, and the ridicule he received of this fellow teachers at the school^{397, 398}. Due to being castrated, Abelard was not longer eligible to become a priest or obtain a higher office in the Church. He left Notre-Dame and became a monk at the Abbey of St. Dennis in Paris.³⁹⁹ Héloïse and Abelard continued to correspond with each other until Abelard's death in 1142.

Héloïse's Views on Clerical Marriage

In chapter seven of the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard recounts his attempts to propose to Héloïse and her arguments against wedlock (and clerical marriage). Towards the beginning of the chapter, Héloïse reportedly expressed concern over what marriage would do to Abelard on a personal level. According to Abelard, Héloïse claimed that

³⁹³ Mews, 79.

³⁹⁴ Karras, 49/50.

³⁹⁵ Karras, 50.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ This was not a university in the modern sense, but rather the Cathedral School of Notre-Dame. Although Abelard was a teacher there, it appears he may have been more of a private tutor for Héloïse.

³⁹⁸ Abelard, Peter, and Jacques Monfrin. *Historia calamitatum*. 2e éd. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1962), 80.

³⁹⁹ Abelard, Peter, and Héloïse. *The Letters of Abelard and Héloïse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 20.

marriage would not only bring disgrace upon him, but it would also interfere with his ability to be a philosopher.⁴⁰⁰ She also states that marriage to him would be a loss for both the Church and the world of philosophy (to which Héloïse wants to have no hand in causing):

Quantas ad ea mundus penas exigere deberet, si tantam ei lucernam auferret; quante maledictiones, quanta dampna ecclesie, quante philosophorum lacrimae hoc matrimonium essent sequutur.⁴⁰¹

How great the penalty the world would demand of her, if she should steal away such a light; how many condemnations, how great the Church's loss, what tears of the philosophers would follow [from] this marriage.

Héloïse next states how lamentable it would be for Abelard to devote himself to one woman only, because he was one, "whom nature had made for the whole world" (*ut quem omnibus natura creaverat*).⁴⁰² Besides focusing on the disgrace which marriage would bring to Abelard, Héloïse also reminds him of the hardships of married life by referencing the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians. She also cites Jerome's argument of the dangers of sexual indulgence to a scholar or a philosopher.⁴⁰³

According to Abelard, Héloïse, turning to a consideration of such hindrances to the study of philosophy, bade him to observe what were the conditions for honourable wedlock:

Ut autem hoc philosophici studii nunc omittam impedimentum, ipsum consule honeste conversationis statum. Que enim conventio scolarium ad pedissequas scriptoriorum ad cunabula, librorum sive tabularum ad colos, stilorum sive calamorum ad fusos? Quis denique sacris vel philosophicis meditationibus intentus, pueriles vagitus, nutricum que hos mittigant nenias, tumultuosam familiae tam in viris quam in feminis turbam sustinere poterit? Que etiam inhonestas illas parvulorum sordes assiduas tolerare valebit?⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Abelard and Monfrin. *Historia calamitatum*, 75-76.

⁴⁰¹ Abelard and Monfrin, 75.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Karras, 49.

⁴⁰⁴ Abelard and Monfrin, 76.

But apart from the hindrances to such philosophic study, consider, she said, the true conditions for a dignified way of life. What harmony can there be between pupils and serving women, desks and cradles, books or tablets and distaffs, pens and quills and spindles? Who can concentrate on thoughts of Scripture or philosophy and be able to endure babies crying, nurses soothing them with lullabies, and all the noisy crowd of men and women about the house? Who will put up with the constant muddle and squalor which small children bring [into the home]?⁴⁰⁵

According to van Houts, Héloïse's rare observation that a noisy clerical household might hinder intellectual activities for both spouses must have reflected lived reality, and perhaps her own early upbringing before she went to Argentueil.⁴⁰⁶ Héloïse makes a similar observation to Damian in his *Letter* 112, that the houses of married clerics are noisy and filled with the cries of infants.⁴⁰⁷ Also, Héloïse's description of the "distractions" of married life would pose for a philosopher is similar to Damian's description of the distractions a married cleric would encounter with, "the demands of pregnancies and small children."⁴⁰⁸ It is possible that Héloïse and Damian have based their descriptions of the noisy married household from either personal experience or observations. In *Letter* 70, Damian provides an eyewitness account of a married clerical couple who lived next to him when in the 1020s he was a young student in Parma.⁴⁰⁹ According to Damian, the household of a priest married priest named Teuzolinus was, "filled each day with laughter and jokes".⁴¹⁰ However, whereas Damian argued that by avoiding marriage the priest avoids polluted hands, Héloïse emphasised the waste of intellectual gifts for men (philosophers) and, potentially, women alike.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁵ van Houts, 176.

⁴⁰⁶ van Houts, 177.

⁴⁰⁷ Damian 112.43 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 3 NR 91-150*, 286.

⁴⁰⁸ Damian 61 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*, 208.

⁴⁰⁹ van Houts, 174.

⁴¹⁰ Damian 70 in *Die Briefe des Petrus Demani Teil 2 NR 41-90*, 320-321.

⁴¹¹ van Houts, 177.

The Validity of Héloïse's and Abelard's Marriage

While Abelard eventually convinced Héloïse to marry him, whether or not their marriage would have been considered valid or forbidden at this time is difficult to answer due to the uncertainty over Abelard's exact clerical rank. According to historian Ruth Mazo Karras, at a later date, Héloïse and Abelard's marriage would have been considered clandestine once the canon law of marriage was more thoroughly worked out.⁴¹² This was not because Héloïse's family did not consent, for they were present (according to Abelard), but because it was not performed publicly in the parish of the parties' residence with a calling of the banns.⁴¹³ By this time the marriages of priests were already forbidden, but had not yet been declared invalid by the Church.⁴¹⁴ The prohibition on clerical marriage for subdeacons, deacons and priests was not firmly imposed in France until the Council of Reims in 1119.⁴¹⁵ Even if Abelard was a member of the lower orders of the clergy (and therefore the marriage would have been valid not forbidden at this time), the concern Héloïse reportedly expressed regarding the harm marriage would do to his career and reputation suggests that there may have already been a growing anti-clerical marriage sentiment in France (or at least in Paris) at this time. As Karras points out, it is not clear in Abelard's time if a cleric would have lost his position in the university by marrying.⁴¹⁶ He might have lost a benefice if he had one (but it appears that he did not). He may have, however, thought that marriage would undermine his moral authority if it were known.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² Karras, 49/50.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Karras, 50.

⁴¹⁵ Mews, 80.

⁴¹⁶ Karras, 50.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

Héloïse as the “Typical” Clerical Wife?

Although Héloïse is a unique example of a clerical wife, her thoughts, opinions (as largely reported by Abelard) and even background may not have been typical for most clerical wives. While she does provide a unique female perspective on clerical marriage, we should keep in mind that this perspective comes from a extremely well-educated, upper-class woman, who appears to have been from a wealthy family. The “dowry” required to maintain girls at old established abbeys such as Argenteuil was generally so large that it excluded those of more modest means of being educated there.⁴¹⁸ It is likely that most women who married priests did not have the level of education, social status or wealthy family as Héloïse. This raises the question of what would have been the background for most clerical wives prior to marrying a priest. Perhaps, more important is the question: what were the thoughts and opinions of the average clerical wife regarding clerical marriage or being married to a priest? Unfortunately, we do not know since these women did not leave behind anything in the way of written documents. We have to keep in mind that literacy rates for women in Medieval Europe were considerably lower than today. Although it is possible that some clerical wives were able to read or write to some degree, but even if they were able to write with proficiency, it is likely that the duties associated with managing a household would have interfered with documenting their experiences. So perhaps Héloïse has a point when she argues that the duties of running a household will interfere with ones intellectual pursuits. We also have to keep in mind that women in the Middle Ages were not generally encouraged to write anyway. The expectation for women in most medieval societies was to marry, have children and manage a household. Again, we can only speculate to a degree, but it is not unreasonable

⁴¹⁸ Mews, 59.

to think that most clerical wives would have likely been pro-clerical marriage. There are a few reported instances of women resisting attempts to enforce papal decrees against clerical marriage. In some places in Germany (Mainz and Passau), and Italy (Piacenza, Lodi, Florence, Turin, and Pavia), and in France at Rouen, where in the early 1070s Archbishop John had to flee from the cathedral being stoned by the married clergy.⁴¹⁹ Some of the violence was attributed to women such as the priest's wife who, incensed by her forced separation, poisoned the wife of Count Manegold, who had enforced Gregory VII's legislation.⁴²⁰ As late as the 1170s the wife and daughters of Hamo, canon of Lisieux, physically threw out two of Bishop Arnulf of Lisieux's agents who had come to evict the women. Hamo had by then been married for more than thirty years.⁴²¹

Being married to a priest would have had some advantages. Marriage on its own would have fulfilled the basic human need for companionship and affection. Being married to a priest would have afforded these women a higher standing within their community. There also would have likely been some material benefits being married to a priest. As previously mentioned, the reformers seem to like to depict married priests and their wives as being finely dressed and wearing jewels. Whether this was really the case or not, we do not know.

Besides Héloïse, the only other female voice from this period comes from the German Benedictine Abbess, writer, scholar and mystic, Hildegard of Bingen (b. 1098 - 1179). However, unlike Héloïse, who focuses on the inconveniences and troubles married life causes to a scholar, Hildegard focus more on the mystical aspects of marriage.

⁴¹⁹ van Houts, 187.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ van Houts, 187/188.

Neither the reformers nor pro-marriage writers resorted to using mysticism in defending their positions on clerical marriage.

Conclusion

Although Héloïse provides us with a rare and unique female perspective of marriage during this time (albeit, as reported by Abelard), her views might not reflect those of the typical clerical wife. Curiously, Héloïse's arguments against marriage are rather similar to those of Jerome and Damian. Héloïse could have been aware of the debate surrounding clerical marriage and arguments circulating at the time against clerical marriage. Being extremely well educated for the time, she would have certainly been aware of Jerome (even Abelard notes Héloïse's use of Jerome in her defence against his proposals of marriage). However, it is unclear if she would have had access to, or would have been aware of Damian's writings. The striking similarities between Héloïse's and Damian's arguments is likely due to both using Jerome, and possibly drawing from their own experiences or observations of a married cleric's household.

Conclusion

By analyzing and understanding the arguments the eleventh-century reformers made against clerical marriage and unchastity, this thesis has shown that the reformers took a multi-faceted approach. Not only were theological and practical reasons against these practices argued, but married clerics and their wives were targeted by the reformers. The reformers used these three elements together in their campaign against clerical marriage with the ultimate goal of convincing their fellow clergymen and the laity that clerical marriage and unchastity was a threat to both the clergy and laity.

The main driving force behind the eleventh-century reforms against clerical marriage was the Church's concern that its lands and property had become increasingly alienated over the centuries. The married clergy was seen as the root cause due to the fact that benefices were usually passed down from father to son (sometimes over many generations). Church lands and property also found its way into private hands due to being given away as dowries for daughters (such as in the example of Bishop Juhel of Dol). This concern for the loss of Church property can be seen in the decrees from the various synods and councils and in the writings of the reformers. The Council of Pavia in 1022 decreed that the children of priests could not inherit Church property. The Council of Bourges in 1031, forbade the sons of priests from being ordained. Such decrees were repeated at subsequent councils and synods during the reigns of Leo IX, Nicholas II and Gregory VII. These councils and synods repeatedly declared that married men were prohibited from being ordained and increasingly put pressure on priests to leave their wives under the threat of excommunication. In the writings of some of the reformers expressed concern that Church resources would be diverted to support a priests'

family. Some reformers like Damian and Gregory VII claimed that the sons of priests were illegitimate, and therefore ineligible for ordination. Prohibiting priests from marrying and having children, and barring their sons from ordination was meant to prevent the alienation of Church lands and property.

However, in order to make their campaign effective, the reformers needed to attack the “problem” of clerical marriage and unchastity on theological and practical grounds, and attack the married clergy itself. The theological arguments that presented against clerical marriage were used to promote the idea that the Church’s (seemingly new) decrees and efforts at promoting celibacy and forbidding clerical marriage were not new, but had always been Church policy and doctrine. Also, the “spiritual harm” that a married or unchaste clergy would cause to the Church itself, the clergy and laity was also emphasised. The reformers used practical arguments against clerical marriage to express the idea that it posed a “real-world” threat to the clergy and laity, such as priests being distracted from their duties and church resources being diverted to support a cleric’s family. Lastly, the attack on the married clergy was another element of the reformer’s campaign. The reformers claimed that not only were married priests committing the sin of fornication, but they had become “polluted” by having contact with a woman. For some reformers, these priests risked passing this “pollution” onto their congregation. The wives or partners of priests were accused of “distracting” or “seducing” their husbands. Some reformers like Damian used sexist and derogatory language towards clerical wives as a means of dehumanizing them. As a result, the clerical wife is then no longer a person, but rather a threat and danger to the Church, clergy and laity.

While preventing the alienation of Church property was the major motivation behind the reforms, there were other factors which influenced this period of reform. During the eleventh century there was a revival in the concept of Transubstantiation, and the perceived need that priests ought to be “pure” (i.e. - abstain from sex) before handling the Eucharist. During this time the laity itself also seems to have become concerned with the behaviour and conduct of priests, as seen in the Patarene movement. Another contributing factor was the influence of the Clunaic movement which began a century earlier. This movement to reform monastic life spilled over into the secular clergy in the eleventh century. Ongoing tensions between the Eastern and Western Church came to a head in the mid-eleventh century resulting in the East-West Schism of 1054. While clerical marriage was not the main cause of the Schism, it had been a point of contention between the Eastern and Western Churches. The Eastern Church’s refusal to enforce or accept such decrees regarding chastity and prohibiting clerical marriage may have led to the Western Church intensifying its efforts to reform its own clergy.

The issue of clerical marriage has been generally overlooked by scholars of the eleventh-century reforms. In addition, when the practical or theological arguments of the reformers are discussed, quite often they are mentioned in only passing. Prior to this thesis, no scholarship has been published which analyses all the three elements of the reformers’ argumentation against clerical marriage (practical and theological arguments, as well as the attack on the married clergy). While Barstow has so far been the only scholar who has analyzed both the theological and practical arguments of the reformers, she stops short from explaining the purpose and goals of the reformers. Also, she seems to regard the reformers attack on the married priests and their wives as a side effect of the

reform period and not an element of the reformers' argumentation against clerical marriage.

While there is an abundance of primary source material which survives from the eleventh century in the form of decrees, letters and polemics by the pro and anti-marriage camps, there are a few limitations of these sources which are worth noting. First, far more literature was produced by those who were against clerical marriage rather than those who defended it. As a result, there seem to be a tendency in modern scholarship to overlook the arguments of the pro-marriage camp. Second, Damian, looms large both in his time and in modern scholarship of the eleventh-century reforms. As he was most colourful and prolific writer of the reformers, there is a tendency to regard Damian's views, feelings and language towards the married clergy as being typical of the reformers. It is important to keep in mind that Damian stands alone in the language he uses and in his view that clerical wives should be enslaved. Only some of the reformers shared his view that clerical marriage was a heresy. Lastly, majority of the sources from this period were written by men, and therefore provide a male perspective on the clerical marriage debate. For the most part, we do not know the thoughts and opinions of women from this era regarding marriage (especially clerical wives), with the exception of Héloïse and Hildegard of Bingen. Perhaps more research is needed with regards to the pro-marriage camps' defence of clerical marriage. Another avenue for future research is in examining Damian's views and opinions on clerical marriage compared to other reformers of the period, to see what aspects Damian stands alone or shares with his contemporaries. Lastly, there could be further research into the views of medieval women

on marriage from other periods of the Middle Ages, including Heloise and Hildegard of Bingen (if such sources exist).

The debate over clerical marriage did not end with in the twelfth century with the First and Second Lateran Councils. As previously explained, here are many documented cases where it continued in England up to the year 1200. In some places in France it continued into the thirteenth century and some regions of Spain into the fourteenth century. The debate over clerical marriage was re-ignited in the early-sixteenth century with the Reformation as the authority of the Catholic Church, including its power to enforce celibacy on clerics was also questioned. In the first few years of the twenty-first century, the discussion surrounding clerical marriage arose in the wake of the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal. So perhaps pro-marriage writers like the Anonymous of York had a point when he argued that barring clerics from marrying would not only attract those who had no business being a priest, but it would also drive some to do far worse things. While the debate over clerical marriage goes as far back as late antiquity, it is not likely to be settled any time soon.

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