

## IMPASSE PASSÉ: CONJUGATING A TENSE PAST

First, I would like to thank Bryan Massingale for inviting me to address you this evening. It is a privilege to address this Society and to do so twice is a particular honor. I am hoping, of course, that this address draws if not less, then at least a different sort of attention, than did my 1997 foray into the history of the Eucharist. I proceed with all due trepidation.

I have been asked to address a very interesting issue. What insights can impasses in the past give us into the apparent impasses of the present? At first glance, this seems easy enough. Surely the church in the past has been stuck in situations in which “there is no way out of, no way around, no rational escape from, what imprisons one, no possibilities in the situation (to quote Constance FitzGerald’s apt description).”<sup>1</sup> Indeed certain historical situations did appear to be impasses to contemporaries, and I will discuss one such period in church history this evening. From our perspective, however, there are no impasses in history because, well, we got past them. Here we are, the problem solved, or at least endured or avoided. We have moved on, or so we tell ourselves. Our history is, in part at least, a narrative that provides reasons (or at least rationalizations) that explain what seemed at the time to be inexplicable. That is the point of history. It provides a rationale, an explanation, a narrative, in essence, a story for the myriad memories that a person, or group of people, has accumulated. As Terrence Tilley and Orlando Espín (among others) have recently reminded us, we “invent” our traditions and an important part of those traditions is our history.<sup>2</sup>

History is the story we tell ourselves so we know who we are, if I might put it so simply. If this is so, then there are two important points to be made about history. First, it is not the past. It is what we remember of the past fashioned into a narrative in the present to help us understand how we got to be who we

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<sup>1</sup>Constance FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” in *Living with Apocalypse, Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion*, ed. Tilden Edwards (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984), 93-116.

<sup>2</sup>Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) and Orlando Espín, “Toward the Construction of an Intercultural Theology of Tradition,” *The Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 9 (2002): 22-59. For a recent presentation of my own position on the role of history, see Gary Macy, *Diversity as Tradition: Why the Future of Christianity is Looking More Like Its Past*, Santa Clara Lecture 14 (Santa Clara, CA: Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education, 2007).

are so that we might imagine who we can become in the future. I cannot stress this point enough and will return to it later in the talk. Second, we need to constantly reappropriate a history for ourselves. Our narrative does not include all the possible events we could remember. If it did, the narrative would take longer than the original events. We need to select, to summarize and to rationalize some chosen set of events that seem to explain and to inspire us. Of course, this also depends on who “we” are. Different people will read the same events quite differently. We should not be surprised that even we as a church have more than one history.

Given the structure and purpose of history outlined in this very brief summary, there can be no impasses in history. It cannot work that way. We find the reasons we need to find to make our narrative continuous and progressive. This does not mean we are lying (although of course we can do that), but rather that one important role of history is making sense of the past, and in so doing, the impasses are explained away.

This does not mean, however, that the past cannot help us deal with present impasses. On the contrary, it can be immensely helpful, at the very least, in giving us hope. We survived much in the past, sometimes even worse situations than the present one. The Spirit has not failed us yet and we have every reason to hope that she continues to care for us in the present. The Spirit dwells in an important way in our histories and through them offers us continual hope. Let us take a moment, then, and listen to one of our stories. Like all our stories, it is one in which we both listened and failed to listen to the Spirit in our attempts to get past what then appeared to be an impossible situation.

The millennium had just past, and the church seemed, to some at least, to be in great peril. Few bishops seemed to listen to, or even care for, the vast majority of the laity, and preaching was abysmal. Priests were ill trained to meet the needs of their parishioners, if, in fact, they were trained at all. What the ordinary Christians knew about their own religion was appalling. The leaders of the church seemed hopelessly obsessed with the retention of power to the neglect of basic pastoral and sacramental needs. Theologians despaired of any reform or progress since there seemed to be no place from which leadership for reform could possibly come. (No, I am not going to quote Dickens. You can relax).

I am speaking, of course, of the early eleventh century in the Christian West. Here we meet a church structure far different from our own and one with which few Catholics are now familiar. In part, this is because, according to official church histories, only the present structure ever existed. Any deviations from that structure in the past were mere anomalies. Let us take a moment to try to recover that carefully cloaked history of the church of the first thousand years in order to understand why thoughtful Christians of the early eleventh century felt themselves at an impasse. The usual adjective used to describe church structure at the turn of the last millennium is “proprietary,” that is to say that the church was considered to be the property of the powerful lords and ladies who established and

controlled monasteries, convents, and parishes.<sup>3</sup> They built and owned many of the parishes and monasteries, and they appointed the abbots, abbesses, and priests to these establishments. Noble families also controlled the episcopate, appointing relatives or allies to what were in effect fiefs. Bishops swore allegiance to more powerful lords, providing them with troops and supplies just like any other vassals. When the emperor Otto II, for example, called for some two thousand armored knights from his vassals in 981, over fifteen hundred came from the bishops and abbots; far more than came from his secular vassals.<sup>4</sup>

Not that this situation was understood, even then, as the ancient practice of the church. The ancient custom of the church, later enshrined in the decrees of the Second Lateran Council in 1139, was that bishops were to be chosen by their clergy with the approval of the laity.<sup>5</sup> By the way, this was church law for Roman Catholics until 1917. In fact, the papacy first claimed the right to overturn this ancient practice and appoint bishops itself in treaties with Guatemala and Colombia in 1884.<sup>6</sup> I digress; however, this is another story that perhaps also needs to be told. Even in the dark days of the eleventh century, people were aware of the tradition even if they ignored it. And ignore it they did. Pope John X (914-928) would declare, “according to ancient custom, the conferring of a bishopric on a cleric pertained solely to the King and without his command the episcopal consecration might not take place.”<sup>7</sup> Abbots and abbesses, too, were aware that the ancient custom, as contained for instance in the Rule of Benedict,<sup>8</sup> was that the

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<sup>3</sup>For a classic exposition of the proprietorial church system, see Friedrich Kemp et al., *The Church in the Age of Feudalism*, vol. 3 of *History of the Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup>A list of the knights sent to Otto II is published by Ludewicus Weiland in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historicae, Constitutioes et acta publica imperatorum et regum* 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1843), 632-3. See Kemp, *The Church*, 278.

<sup>5</sup>“Obeuntibus sane episcopis, quoniam ultra tres menses vacare ecclesias prohibent partum sanctiones sub anathemate interdicimus, ne canonici de sede episcopali ab electione episcoporum excludant religiosos viros, sed eorum consilio honesta et idonea persona in episcopum eligatur. Quod si exclusis ejusdem religionis electio fuerit celebrata: quo absque eorum assensus et convenientia factum fuerit, irritum habeatur et vacuum.” C. 28 of the Second Lateran Council, Giovanni Domenico Mansi, et al., eds. *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*. 53 vols., (Paris: H. Welter, 1901-1927) 21: 533.

<sup>6</sup>Garrett Sweeney, “‘The Wound in the Right Foot’: unhealed?” in *Bishops and Writers: Aspects of the Evolution of Modern English Catholicism*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Wheatthampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1977), 225.

<sup>7</sup>“De hoc vero quod Gislebertus contra vestra scepra inutiliter gessit, eo quod prisca consuetudo, et regni nobilitas censuit, ut nullus episcopum ordinare debuisset absque regis jussione.” Letter of John X to King Charles III, 921. Jacques Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus ... Series latina*, 217 vols. and indexes, (1878-90; reprint, Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996-2006) (hereafter *PL*) 132: 808B. See Kemp, *The Church*, 279.

<sup>8</sup>“In abbatis ordinatione illa semper consideretur ratio ut hic constituatur quem sive omnis concors congregatio secundum timorem Dei, sive etiam pars quamvis parva

rulers of monastic houses were elected by the monks and nuns of those houses. The lord and ladies of the time, however, bestowed the lands upon which the monasteries and convents depended. This right of investiture (that is the bestowing of the lands that constituted an income for the abbey or convent) made it difficult to choose anyone of whom they disapproved.

To say that the church was under the control of the secular rulers does not really paint an accurate portrait of this early system, however. It might be better described as a church ruled by families. Bishops and priests were legitimately married until the Third Lateran Council forbade clerical marriages in 1179, although hereditary dioceses existed in England, for instance, at least until the mid twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> It should not be surprising, then, that dioceses were run in the same way as other feudal estates. Large and powerful families controlled rural estates containing a number of villages under their control. These families constantly maneuvered to expand their possessions through marriage. Episcopal families followed the same practices, intermarrying with other powerful families including other episcopal families. Although using examples from an earlier period, this picture is eloquently captured by the historian Brian Brennan:

The virtual inheritance of some Gallic sees by members of the same senatorial families is a phenomenon that long has been commented upon by historians. Indeed, some of the episcopal epitaphs written by Venantius illustrate the concept of the episcopacy as a type of family inheritance. The Ruruicii, grandfather and grandson, both bishop of Limoges, are accorded a joint epitaph that lays great stress on family ties. Likewise, the epitaph written for Bishop Eumerius of Nantes highlights the succession of his son to the see. The most fulsome expression of this concept of the episcopacy as a family inheritance comes in the epitaph written for Bishop Cronopius of Périgueux, who is descended from bishops on his father's side and on his mother's side as well -- a matter for obvious pride.<sup>10</sup>

The most dramatic example of this understanding of the diocese as the property of an extended family comes from the diocese of Rome itself. In the tenth and eleventh century, the powerful Theophylact family produced numerous popes. The

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congregationis saniore consilio elegerit." *Regula Sancti Benedicti*, c. 64, *De ordinando abate*, Archabbey of Pannonhalma, <[http://www.bences.hu/lelki/regula/l\\_regula/l\\_rb9.html](http://www.bences.hu/lelki/regula/l_regula/l_rb9.html)> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>9</sup>Christopher Brooke, "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1050-1200," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956): 1-21, and *ibid.*, "Married Men Among the English Higher Clergy, 1066-1200," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956): 187-88. For an excellent and recent evaluation of the implementation of celibacy, see André Vauchez, "Clerical Celibacy and the Laity," in *Medieval Christianity*, vol. 4 of *A People's History of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Bornstein (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 179-203.

<sup>10</sup>Brian Brennan, "'*Episcopae*': Bishops' Wives Viewed in Sixth-Century Gaul," *Church History* 54 (1985): 319.

patriarch of the family for whom it is named and his powerful wife, Theodora, arranged to control the papacy through a succession of alliances. Unfortunately for them, almost the sole witness we have to their story is their bitter enemy, Liutprand, the bishop of Cremona. Since Liutprand's testimony is biased, and few other sources exist, information about the Theophylact family is murky. The connection with the see of Rome, however, appears clear enough. With Theophylact's support, his cousin became Pope Sergius III in 897 beginning a tumultuous career as pope that ended in 904.<sup>11</sup> Marozia, the daughter of Theophylact and Theodora, produced a second family pope in John XI, pope from 931 to 935.<sup>12</sup> According to the scandal-loving Liutprand, John was the illegitimate son of Marozia and Sergius III.<sup>13</sup> In turn, Marozia's grandson, Octavian, became Pope John XII in 946 at barely eighteen years of age.<sup>14</sup> The Theophylact family would go on to produce three more popes, Pope Benedict VIII (1012-24),<sup>15</sup> followed by Benedict's younger brother, John XIX (1024-32)<sup>16</sup> who was raised from layman to pope in a single day, and then their nephew, Benedict IX. Benedict IX was appointed pope through his father's bribery and ruled on and off from 1032 until 1049.<sup>17</sup> At one stage in his

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<sup>11</sup>"Sergius III," *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e134>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>12</sup>"John XI," *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e140>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>13</sup>Not all sources agree on this. For an insightful analysis of Marozia from a feminist perspective, see Jo Ann McNamara, "Canossa and the Ungendering of the Public Man," in Constance Berman, ed., *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 102-22. This article originally appeared in *Render Unto Caesar: The Religious Sphere in World Politics*, eds. Sabrina Petra Ramet and Donald W. Treadgold (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1995), 131-50.

<sup>14</sup>"John XII," *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e145>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>15</sup>"Benedict VIII," *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e160>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>16</sup>"John XIX," *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e162>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>17</sup>"Benedict IX," *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press,

salacious career, he sold the papacy to his godfather so Benedict could marry his cousin whose father, it seems, objected to his daughter marrying a pope. Poor Benedict was jilted, though, and so tried to get the papacy back.

As you can see, the papacy of the tenth and early eleventh century is not a pretty picture. A closer look does little to clean it up. I have not, for instance, mentioned how John X led troops into battle against the Muslim armies and, possibly, ended his life smothered to death in prison by the Theophylacts, or how the corpse of Pope Formosus (891-896)<sup>18</sup> was posthumously tried, defrocked, and subsequently pitched in the Tiber by grave robbers. In an ironic twist, the pope who tried Formosus, Stephen VI<sup>19</sup> was himself strangled to death while Formosus was dug up (again) and revested in papal garb.<sup>20</sup>

Pretty appalling stuff, but I am afraid this is fairly standard dynastic politics back in the rough and ready early Middle Ages. Not all families, of course, were as ruthless and feckless as the Theophylacts. There were also records of conscientious and holy men and women who comprised the dynasties that ruled the church.<sup>21</sup> The model of the church as a family does have advantages, but that is another story for another time.<sup>22</sup> Today, I want to show the system as the reformers of the eleventh century saw it. For them, those in power controlled the church for the good of their own dynastic ambitions. The prophetic and pastoral voices of the church had been all but silenced; the gospel imperative was suppressed, and care of souls was neglected. Yet, how could one change a system in which all the usual sources for change were under the control of those in most need of reform?

As often happens, change came from an unusual place. Clusters of monasteries managed to remain free of dynastic control, particularly those allied with the great Benedictine monastery of Cluny. Cluny pushed first for the reform of the Benedictine life and then for the reform of the universal church. Other reformed

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<<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e163>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>18</sup>“Formosus,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e125>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>19</sup>“Stephen VI (VII),” *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, eds. J. N. D. Kelly and Michael Walsh (Oxford University Press, 2006) Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.sculib.scu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t99.e127>> (accessed 3 May 2009).

<sup>20</sup>For a recent discussion of the popes from this period, see F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002), 97-104.

<sup>21</sup>For examples of such families from the Merovingian period, see Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 53-58.

<sup>22</sup>For a more sympathetic view of this model of the church, see Macy, *Hidden History*, 74-80.

monasteries, for instance in Gorze and in Brogne, in Glastonbury, in Abington and in Vallombrosa joined Cluny in the push for reform. They found unlikely allies in the German Emperors who began to appoint reform popes. The most successful of these appointments was a relative of Emperor Henry III and the vigorous reformist bishop of Toul who became Pope Leo IX in 1049. He took the papacy on the road, holding councils throughout Europe. By dint of his own charisma, and the support of an enthusiastic laity as well an articulate and fervent bureaucracy, Leo began the imposition of a reform that completely changed the Church in Western Europe.<sup>23</sup>

The general outlines of that reform are well known.<sup>24</sup> Ecclesiastical offices could no longer be “sold” which in effect meant that they could not be bestowed by the powerful nobility. Clergy could no longer contract valid marriages, that is, a law of celibacy was enforced on clergy who had long been allowed to marry. This measure effectively removed clergy from the dynastic marital struggles of the medieval nobility by making the offspring of clergy bastards. There was no attraction in an alliance from which no inheritance could result. The struggle to enforce these reforms took over a hundred years against strong opposition from both the nobility who wished to retain their control and clergy who wished to remain married. The reformers however found a key ally in the laity who devoutly believed that unmarried priests were holier than married priests. They wanted and demanded a holy clergy that offered them holier, and hence more valuable, ceremonies.

A third reform, often overlooked in the telling of the story, is also important. In order to stress the power of the clergy over against that of the lords, the reformers redefined what it meant to be ordained. Ordination before the thirteenth century was certainly not limited to the priesthood and those orders that led to it. It referred to any ministry performed for a particular community. The priesthood was only one such ministry.<sup>25</sup> Yves Congar summed up the research on this issue succinctly: “ordination [for the first twelve hundred years] encompassed at the same time election as its starting-point and consecration as its term. But instead of signifying, as happened from the beginning of the twelfth century, the ceremony in which an individual received a power henceforth possessed in such a way that it could never be lost, the words *ordinare*, *ordinari*, *ordinatio* signified the fact of being designated and consecrated to take up a certain place, or better a certain function, *ordo*, in the community and at its service.”<sup>26</sup> One was chosen and consecrated for service to a particular community and only that community.

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<sup>23</sup>For an intriguing portrait of Leo’s reform movement, see Christopher Brooke, *Europe in the Middle Ages 962-1154*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1987), 341-346.

<sup>24</sup>For a recent discussion of the implementation of the reform agenda, see Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup>For a recent overview of the early understanding of ordination and its change in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Macy, *Hidden History*, 21-48; 89-110.

<sup>26</sup>Yves Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972): 180.

Ordination did not give one a power he or she could exercise anywhere. In fact, one of the reasons for the posthumous condemnation of Pope Formosus was that he had been bishop of Porto before proceeding to the Roman See.

Further, up until the eleventh century, there was no necessary progression from deacon to priest to bishop. Deacons, even in the most important sees, could move directly to the episcopate and priests could be ordained without ever having been deacons. According to the excellent study of sequential ordination by John St. H. Gibaut, ten popes between the years 715 through 974 were ordained bishop directly from the diaconate and were never ordained priests at all. The first deacon chosen as pope who bothered to be ordained a priest before ascending to the See of Rome was Gregory VII in 1073.<sup>27</sup>

The reformers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, then, overcame their historical impasse by creating an entirely new church structure centered on the priesthood. Ordination gave one power, most fundamentally, the power to make the risen Christ present in the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. The identification of orders with the liturgy of the Eucharist reached its full articulation in Alexander of Hales's lectures in Paris written between 1220 and 1227.<sup>28</sup> For Alexander, orders was different from any of the other sacraments, even baptism and confirmation, the sacraments that also imprinted indelible characters on the soul. Orders not only imprinted such a character, but conferred spiritual power and the execution of that power to a particular member of the church.<sup>29</sup> So intimately connected are orders and the Eucharist, that Alexander defined orders as "a sacrament of spiritual power for some office established in the church for the sacrament of communion."<sup>30</sup> All of the other *ordines* are somehow related to the priesthood, the highest of the *ordines*, since this is the *ordo* that can make Christ present in the liturgy.<sup>31</sup> The clergy became a completely separate and superior caste within Christianity, to a degree that they had never been in earlier centuries.

The reformers, however, did not see themselves as creating anything new. They thought they were restoring the church to the way it had been and the way it always ought to have been. They carefully and dutifully accumulated vast collections of ancient texts to prove what they knew must have been so. They, in effect, rewrote history to fit their agenda. The church they were creating was understood

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<sup>27</sup>John St. H. Gibaut, *The "Cursus Honorum": A Study of the Origins and Evolution of Sequential Ordination*, *Patristics Studies* 3 (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 296, 301.

<sup>28</sup>On Alexander's life and work, see *Magistri Alexandri de Hales, Glossa in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, 4 vols., Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi 12-15 (Florence: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1951-57), 1: 7-75.

<sup>29</sup>Bk. 4, dist. 24 in Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, 4: 400.

<sup>30</sup>"Ordo est sacramentum spiritualis potestatis ad aliquod officium ordinatum in Ecclesia ad sacramentum communionis" (ibid., 4: 401). On the importance of this definition, see Kenan Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 204, whose translation is used here.

<sup>31</sup>BK. 4, *distinctio* 24, in Alexander of Hales, *Glossa*, 4: 401.



to be the church as it always was. This makes perfect sense as they were seeking to establish the perfect Platonic ideal of a church as it existed eternally and unchanging in the mind of God. In a spectacularly successful literary campaign, they wove a history that presented the church as unchanging from the time of Peter. The present became frozen in an eternal Platonic moment. The structure of the Church had always been centered on the priesthood and, since the reformers were popes, always centered on Rome. This is the way God wanted it, and so the way it always should have been and always must be. Any seeming variations in the past must be perversions and explained away as such. This particular view of history and of the Church is, of course, alive and well today.

What a story! From a seemingly hopeless situation in which church structure was the plaything of powerful and sometime ruthless feudal families, the church emerged with a new structure centered on a priesthood significantly freed from dynastic entanglements. A revitalized laity, encouraged by the reformers to enforce the decrees of celibacy on their own priests, felt themselves empowered to undertake new forms of Christianity on their own. A wave of new lay movements swept the church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries encompassing both experiments accepted as orthodox, like those of Clare and Francis, and experiments accepted as questionable, like those of Valdes of Lyons, or the Beguines. Surely, this has to be one of the most impressive and successful reversals of fortune in the long history of Christianity. Moreover, they made it look as if it were the inevitable will of God.

However, the point of our gathering together is not just to tell stories, although that would be enough for a simple historian like myself. The further question now needs to be asked. What can we learn from this amazing history of ours, this part of who we are? Many lessons might be drawn, but I have chosen just a few.

## LIBERATION

First and most importantly, and perhaps obviously, this history should liberate us. When faced with a structure that no longer responded to the prophetic and sacramental needs of the majority of the people of the church, our ancestors changed that structure. They also created the illusion of the eternity of the structure they created, but that too was a creation, a story, that can be rewritten if it no longer helps us to live fully the Christian life of active faith and love. History should always free us from the tyranny of the present, perhaps all the more so when that present claims to be eternal. We are free, as were the reformers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were free, to change. Of course, radical change is rare, and even those reformers did not see themselves as doing anything new. They started, however, with something very powerful. They told themselves a new story about who they were. It freed them to draw what they needed from the past and use it to create a future that better served the community. We can do that. Perhaps it is we theologians who must do that.

## MISOGYNY

Their movement, however, had several unforeseen consequences, as indeed all historical movements inevitably do. One obvious and unintended result, for instance, was the aberration of clericalism. There are others, but I want to focus tonight on one that has had serious consequences for all of Western Civilization and beyond. The reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries produced a new and virulent form of misogyny that is still all too pervasive.<sup>32</sup>

One of the tactics used by the reformers to encourage celibacy was to denigrate women. Priests would not want to marry, it was argued, if women were presented as undesirable. The choice the reformers made here was not inevitable. Celibacy and marriage need not be understood as in conflict, nor is the denigration of women somehow an unavoidable outcome of celibacy. The situation, however, was presented as such by many of the reformers. Since the position of the reformers, perpetuated by theology and canon law is not, perhaps, as well known as it should be, I am going to beg your indulgence while I present this material in some detail.

Peter Damian, the eleventh century monk and cardinal, in particular described women in the most loathsome terms:

I speak to you, o charmers of the clergy, appetizing flesh of the devil, that castaway from paradise, you, poison of the minds, death of souls, venom of wine and of eating, companions of the very stuff of sin, the cause of our ruin. You, I say, I exhort you women of the ancient enemy, you bitches, sows, screech-owls, night owls, she-wolves, blood suckers, [who] cry "Give, give! Without ceasing" (Proverbs 30: 15-16). Come now, hear me, harlots, prostitutes, with your lascivious kisses, you wallowing places for fat pigs, couches for unclean spirits, demi-goddesses, sirens, witches, devotees of Diana, if any portents, if any omens are found thus far, they should be judged sufficient to your name. For you are the victims of demons, destined to be cut off by eternal death. From you the devil is fattened by the abundance of your lust, is fed by your alluring feasts.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>"Separation from women reinforced the dislike and fear fostered by monastic polemic. We are so accustomed to thinking of the medieval clergy as violently abusive towards women that we have missed a chronological subtlety. Clerical misogyny reached a crescendo between the mid-eleventh and the mid-twelfth centuries. The struggle to separate men from women caused reformers to rave against married priests and, by implication, the whole sexual act." Jo Ann McNamara, "The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Clare Lees, ed., Medieval Cultures, 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 8. On the continuing influence of this misogyny, see Margaret Miles, "Violence Against Women in the Historical Christian West and in North American Secular Context: The Visual and Textual Evidence," in *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, Clarissa Atkinson, Constance Buchanan and Margaret Miles, eds., Studies in Religion, 5 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 13-29.

<sup>33</sup>"Interea et vos alloquor, o lepores clericorum, pulpamenta diaboli, projectio paradisi, virus mentium, gladius animarum, aconita bibentium, toxica convivarum, materia peccandi,

While Peter Damian was perhaps the most lurid and vicious of the reformers in his attack on women, he was not alone.<sup>34</sup> In the canonical literature of the twelfth century, women were similarly described as unclean. Following the third-century writer, Julius Solinus, Paucapalea, a twelfth century canonist, explained “For only a woman is a menstrual animal by contact with whose blood fruits do not produce, wine turns sour, plants die, trees lack fruit, rust corrupts iron, the air darkens. If dogs eat [the blood], they are made wild with madness.”<sup>35</sup> The much more influential twelfth-century law professor, Rufinus of Bologna, repeated the claim to prove that women who were menstruating should not be allowed to enter churches.<sup>36</sup> The cardinal and canon lawyer, Sicard of Cremona, held that women should not enter a church after childbirth for the same reason.<sup>37</sup>

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ocasio pereundi. Vos inquam, alloquor gynecaea hostis antiqui, upupae, ululae, noctuae, lupae, sanguisugae, Affer, affer sine cessatione dicentes Venite itaque, audite me, scorta, prostibula, savia, volutabra porcorum pinguium; cubilia spirituum immundorum, nymphae, sirenae, lamiae, dianae, et si quid adhuc portentii, si quid prodigii reperitur, nomini vestro competere iudicetur. Vos enim estis daemoneum victimae ad aeternae mortis succidium destinatae. Ex vobis enim diabolus, tanquam delicatis dapibus pascitur, vestrae libidinis exuberantia saginatur.” C. 7 of *Contra Intemperantes Clericos* in *PL* 145: 410B. English translation by Anne Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates*, Texts and Studies in Religion, 12 (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1982), 60-61. On Peter Damian’s opinion of women, see Dyan Elliott, “The Priest’s Wife: Female Erasure and the Gregorian Reform,” in Berman, *Medieval Religion*, 136-45.

<sup>34</sup>On the misogynist language of the reformers, see Barstow, *Married Priests*, 47-104 and Elliott, “The Priest’s Wife,” 136-45.

<sup>35</sup>“Nam solum mulier menstruale animal est, cuius contactu sanguinis fruges non germinant, aescunt musta, moriuntur herbae, amittunt arbores fructus, ferrum rubigo corrumpit, negrescut aera; si canes inde ederint in rabiem efferuntur.” *Distinctio 5*, *Summa des Stephanus Tornacensis über das Decretum Gratiani*, Johann von Schulte, ed. (Giessen: Verlag von Emil Roth, 1891), 11. English translation by the author.

<sup>36</sup>“Adeo autem execrabilis et immundus est sanguis ille, sicut ait Iulius Solinus in libro de mirabilibus mundi, ut eius contactu fruges non germinent, arescant arbusta, moriantur herbe, amittant arbores fetus, negrescant era, si canes inde edertint in rabiem efferantur.” *Distinctio 5*, c. 1, in “Adeo autem execrabilis et immundus est sanguis ille, sicut ait Iulius Solinus in libro de mirabilibus mundi, ut eius contactu fruges non germinent, arescant arbusta, moriantur herbe, amittant arbores fetus, negrescant era, si canes inde edertint in rabiem efferantur.” *Distinctio 5*, c. 1, *Rufinus von Bologna (Magister Rufinus), Summa Decretorum*, Heinrich Singer, ed. (1902, reprint, Paderborn: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1963), 16. English translation Ida Raming, *The Priestly Office of Women: God’s Gift to a Renewed Church*, trans. Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, vol. 2 in *A History of Women and Ordination* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 104, n. 84.

<sup>37</sup>“As parientem, ut si mulier masculum pareret, XLta diebus ab ingressu templi veluti immunda cessaret: quia puerperium in immuditia conceptum dicitur XLta diebus infrome; at is feminam, spatium temporis duplicaret: sanguis enim menstruus, qui partum comituatur, usque adeo censetur immundus, ut eius tactu, sicut Solimus ait, fuges arescant et herbae moriantur. Sed quare tempus pro femina duplicatur? Solutio: quia dupla est

How could the sacrifice of the altar be performed worthily by men who had intercourse with such filthy beasts? The papal legate, John of Crema, was reported to have urged the papal reforms in England in the early twelfth century by stating that it was the greatest sin to rise from the side of a whore and then go create the body of Christ at Mass.<sup>38</sup> The language used to encourage and justify celibacy provides an important background for a form of misogyny that would become a mainstay of medieval teaching.

At the heart of this new understanding of women was the firm belief that women were naturally inferior to men based on the philosophy of Aristotle.<sup>39</sup> Notes on the lectures on the Letters of St. Paul by the thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas offer an insight into his use of Aristotle in understanding women.<sup>40</sup> According to the notes, “three things are appropriate to women, of course, silence, discipline and subjugation as these three proceed from one reason, of course, the defect of reason in them . . . since it is natural that the body be dominated by the soul and reason (dominate) inferior powers. And for that reason, as (Aristotle) teaches, whenever any two thus are mutually constituted as soul to body . . . the other is subject to the principal one.”<sup>41</sup> Women, then, are to men as the body is to the soul.

feminei germinis maledictio; habuit enim maledictionem Adae, et insuper, ‘In dolore paries,’ vel quia, sicut air peritia physicorum, feminae in conceptu manent informes duplo tempore masculorum.” Text in Ida Raming, *Der Ausschluss der Frau vom priesterlichen Amt; gottgewollte Tradition oder Diskriminierung? Eine rechtshistorisch-dogmatische Untersuchung der Grundlagen von Kanon 968 1 des Codex Iuris Canonici* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1973), 98-99, n. 130. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 109, n. 130.

<sup>38</sup>The incident is described in Barstow, *Married Priests*, 95-96. See also Elliott, “Priest’s Wife,” 142-3 for a similar opinion by Peter Damian.

<sup>39</sup>On the teaching of Aristotle on women, see Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997-2002): 1:95121, 392-99 and 426-36.

<sup>40</sup>The notes come from Thomas’s student, Riginald of Piperno. On the notes and their reliability, see John Hilary Martin, “The Ordination Of Women And The Theologians In The Middle Ages,” *Escritos del Vedat*, 36 (1986): 115-77 and “The Ordination Of Women And The Theologians In The Middle Ages (II),” *Escritos del Vedat*, 36 (1988): 166. English translation in Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, *A History Of Women And Ordination 1* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 1:67. For a fuller discussion of Thomas’s teaching on women, see also Mayeski, Marie Anne. “Excluded by the Logic of Control: Women in Medieval Society and Scholastic Theology” in *Equal at the Creation: Sexism, Society, and Christian Thought*, Joseph Martos and Pierre Hégy, eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 70-95; Allen, *Concept of Women*, 1:385-407, and Kari Elisabeth Børresen, “God’s Image, Is Woman Excluded? Medieval Interpretation of Gen. 1, 27 and I Cor. 11, 7,” in *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, Kari Elisabeth Børresen, ed. (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), 218-24.

<sup>41</sup>“Circa primum tria ponit eis competere, scilicet taciturnitatem, disciplinam, et subiectionem: quae tria ex una ratione procedunt, scilicet defectu rationis in eis.” Text in Martin, “Ordination of Women,” 1:166, n. 113. English translation in Cooke and Macy, *History*, 1:127, n. 113.

Women need to be guided by men just as the body needs to be controlled by reason. Aquinas is quite explicit about this: “The reason why (women) are subject and not in command is because they are deficient in reason which is of the greatest necessity in presiding. And for that reason (Aristotle) said in his *Politics* (book 4, chapter 11) ‘that corruption of government exists when government falls to women.’”<sup>42</sup>

Henricus de Segusio, or Hostiensis as he is more commonly known, was one of the most influential of the thirteenth century professors of Church law and later an important cardinal.<sup>43</sup> He goes even further than his fellow theologians in denigration of the natural state of women. “The sex of women is naturally worse, hence commonly she lives less [long] since she also has less natural heat and therefore as she is more quickly ended, so she naturally ought to come to completion (that is, mature) more quickly. . . . Plato truly said that therefore this is so since weeds grow more quickly than good plants.”<sup>44</sup> Hostiensis’ observation was repeated by Aegidius de Bellamera, a canonist writing in the late thirteenth century, who compares women to flies, since they mature and die quickly.<sup>45</sup>

Women were forbidden to give testimony in canon law since they lacked the mental and moral capacity for veracity. Surely, the most sarcastic comment on this issue occurred in the standard commentary on later canon law written in the thirteenth century. The canonist, Bernard of Botone, rejected any testimony by women in court with the snide comment, “What is lighter than smoke? A breeze. What [is lighter] than a breeze? The wind. What [is lighter] than the wind? A woman. What [is lighter] than a woman? Nothing!”<sup>46</sup> Bernard goes on to note, however, that women do have some advantages under the law. They are too stupid to know the law, so they cannot be held accountable to it. Based on Bernard’s comment, Hostiensis

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<sup>42</sup>“Huius autem rationem assignat, dicens, ‘Non enim permittitur eis loqui,’ scilicet ab Ecclesiae auctoritate; sed hoc est officium earum, ut sint subditae viris. Unde cum docere dicat praelationem, et praesidentiam, non decet eas quae subditae sunt. Ratio autem quare subditae sunt, et non praesunt, est quia deficiunt ratione, quae est maxime necessaria praesidenti. Et ideo dicit Philosophus in *Politica* sua (bk 4, c. 11), ‘quod corruptio regiminis est, quando regimen pervenit ad mulieres.’” Text in Martin, “Ordination of Women,” 1:167, n. 115. English translation in Cooke and Macy, *History*, 1:127, n. 115.

<sup>43</sup>“Hostiensis,” *Oxford History of the Christian Church*, F.L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., 3rd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 795.

<sup>44</sup>“Naturaliter debilior est sexus muliebris, under communiter minus vivit: quia et minus habet caloris naturalis, ideo quanto citius finitur, tanto citius naturaliter perfici debet . . . Plat(o) vero dicit, quod hoc ideo est, quia citius crescit mala herba quam bona.” Text in Raming, *Ausschluss*, 149, n. 102. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 155, n. 102.

<sup>45</sup>“Et est ratio, quia mala herba cito crescit. . . alia ratio, quia naturale est, quod quanto quodcumque ens citius ad finem tendit, citius perficiatur, ut apparet in musca.” Text in Raming, *Ausschluss*, 151, n. 107. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 156, n. 107.

<sup>46</sup>“Quid levius fumo? flamen; quid flamine? ventus, quid vento? mulier; quid muliere? Nihil.” Text in Raming, *Ausschluss*, Raming, 143, n. 85. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 152, n. 85.

noted that “nuns truly not only through ignorance, but also through simplicity, [ought to be excused] for it is permitted for women to be ignorant of laws.”<sup>47</sup>

Women were in effect considered to be naturally monsters. Unnatural in birth, incompetent in mind, and disgusting in their bodily functions, they were clearly inferior to men. What they lacked in nature was equally matched by their divine defects. Supposedly quoting Ambrose and Augustine, canon law clearly stated that women were not made in the image of God. “This image of God exists in the male that he might be made the one from whom all others originate having the dominion of God; in some sense as His representative as he has the image of the one God. Therefore, woman is not created in the image of God. For indeed it is said, ‘And God made man; in God’s image he made him.’ Here also the Apostle: ‘A male,’ he said, ‘ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, for that reason a woman covers her head because she is not the glory or the image of God.’”<sup>48</sup>

The teaching became a mainstay in both theological and canonical writing. Thomas Aquinas agreed that in some sense, the image of God is found in both male and female, however “in a secondary sense the image of God is found in a male that is not found in a woman; for a male is the source of a woman and her end, as God is the source and end of all creatures.”<sup>49</sup> Thomas’s student, Peter of Tarantase, the future Pope Innocent V, repeated his master’s teaching, “a male is situated closer to God as a male is the image and glory of God; a woman, on the other hand, [is the image and glory] of a male. Thus women ought to be led back to God through males and not the reverse.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>“Moniales vero non solum per ignorantiam, sed etiam per simplicitatem, nam permissum est mulieribus ignorare iura.” Text in Raming, *Auschluss*, 149, n. 102. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 155, n. 102.

<sup>48</sup>“Hec imago Dei est in homine, ut unus factus sit ex quo ceteri oriantur, habens imperium Dei, quasi uicarius eius, quia unius Dei habet imaginem, ideo que mulier non est facta ad Dei imaginem. Sic etenim dicit: ‘Et fecit Deus hominem; ad imaginem Dei fecit illum.’ Hinc etiam Apostolus: ‘Vir quidem,’ ait, ‘non debet uelare caput, quia imago et gloria Dei est; mulier ideo uelat, quia non est gloria aut imago Dei.’” *Causa 33, questio 5*, c. 13, *Corpus iuris canonici*, Emil Friedberg, ed., 2 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck-und-Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 1: 1254. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 30.

<sup>49</sup>“Sed quantum ad aliquid secundario imago Dei invenitur in viro, secundam quod non invenitur in muliere: nam vir est principium mulieris et finis, sicut Deus est principium et finis totius creaturae.” *Summa theologiae, pars 1, questio 93, articulus 4, ad 1, S. Thomae Aquinatis Summa Theologiae*, 4 vols. (Marietti: Rome, 1948), 4: 456. English translation in Cooke and Macy, *History*, 1:128, n. 121.

<sup>50</sup>“Vir immediatus se habet ad Deum, cum vir sit imago et gloria Dei, mulier autem viri, 1 Cor., 11: 14. Unde per viros mulieres debent in Deum reduci, non e converso.” *Commentary on the Fourth Book of Sentences*, dist. 25, q. 3, a. 1, 4.; *Innocenti Quinti... qui antea Petrus de Tarantasia dicebatur, In IV Librum Sententiarum Commentaria*, 4 vols. (A. Colomerius: Toulouse, 1649-52), 278b. English translation in Cooke and Macy, *History*, 1:130, n. 131.

The condition of women, already one of subjugation to men, became worse with the Fall, since the Fall was fundamentally caused by Eve and only secondarily by Adam. The extremely influential thirteenth century scriptural scholar and later cardinal, the Dominican Hugh of St. Cher, made the point in his commentary on 1 Timothy by noting that “the nature of all women was made in transgression through that (sin).”<sup>51</sup> Duns Scotus, the Franciscan theologian teaching at end of the thirteenth century put it this way, “In fact, natural reason agrees with this saying which the apostle intimates in 1 Cor. 14 [34]. For nature does not permit a woman, at least after the Fall, to hold the eminent grade in the human species, since indeed it was said to her for the punishment of her sins, ‘Under the power of men you will be.’”<sup>52</sup> Guido de Baysio, writing at the same time agreed, “a woman was the effective cause of damnation since she was the origin of lying and Adam was deceived through her.”<sup>53</sup>

Since it was a woman who first seduced a man to sin, medieval scholars were very wary of the seductive powers of women. Thomas Netter, the fifteenth century Carmelite and theologian put it movingly, “The alluring voice truly entices and the species of woman inveigles and in the end the intellect is spun around in a net of sweet words. . . . On that account, it is not permitted to her to teach because she is a weaker sex than a male. And one should be warned lest as seduced through the serpent she brought about the death of the world, so likewise easily falling into error herself, she would lead astray others to the same error.”<sup>54</sup> William of Rennes, paraphrasing Augustine, put it more bluntly, “a woman taught one time and the whole world was overthrown.”<sup>55</sup>

Dangerous, seductive, and alluring, it was up to men to control these mindless creatures. The law professors were quite clear about the control that men had,

<sup>51</sup>“Omnis natura mulierum in transgressionem facta est per illam.” Text in Martin, “Ordination of Women,” 1: 124, n. 18.

<sup>52</sup>“Ratio autem naturalis huic dicto consonat, quam Apostolus innuit 1. *ad Corinth.* 14 [34]. Nam natura non permittit mulierem, saltem post lapsum, tenere gradum eminentem in specie humana, siquidem est dictum sibi in poenam peccati sui Genes. 3. ‘Sub viri potestate eris.’” Bk. 4, *distinctio 25, questio 2, Questiones in librum quartum sententiarum (Opus Oxoniensis)* in *Joannis Duns Scoti, Opera Omnia*, 19 (Paris: Vivès, 1894), 140. English translation in Cooke and Macy, *History*, 1:136, n. 152.

<sup>53</sup>“Preterea mulier fuit causa effectiva damnationis quia fuit principium prevaricationis (*text*: privationis) et Adam per ipsam deceptus est.” Text in Raming, *Auschluss*, p. 117, n. 199. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 120, n. 199.

<sup>54</sup>“Allicit enim blanda voc et illicit species muliebris, et tandem in rete verbi dulcis volvitur intellectus. . . . Idcirco non permittitur ei docere, quia fragilior est sexu quam vir. Et cavendum, ne sicut per serpentem seducta mortem attulit mundo, ita etiam facile ad errorem lapsa, alios ad eundem errorem pertrahat.” Text in Martin, “Ordination of Women,” 2: 123, n. 196. English translation in Cooke and Macy, *History*, 1:150, n. 196.

<sup>55</sup>“Mulier semel docuit, et totum mundum subvertit.” See Raming, *Auschluss*, p. 136, n. 62. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 149, n. 62.

and needed to have, over women. Gratian included in the *Decretum* a strange law from the Council of Toledo held in the year 400: "If their wives sin, it is furthermore allowed for clerics to hold them in custody without the severity of death and to force them to fast, not however to weaken them to death." The law was understood to extend to all husbands.<sup>56</sup>

The canonist, Johannes Teutonicus wrote a famous commentary that became the standard text for studying canon law for centuries. John's commentary on this law understood it to apply to all husbands, giving them extraordinary powers to control their wives. "A husband is able to judge a wife, correcting her . . . But not beating her . . . but he is able to chastise with moderation since she is of his family . . . as lord his servant . . . and likewise his hired hand."<sup>57</sup> Later in his commentary, John continued, "Wives are subjects to their husbands and children to their parents and servants to their lords; hence they are to be restrained by them and according to the law ought to be rebuked lest they enter into an offense worthy of excommunication." John does add, "not that they should be beaten immoderately, however."<sup>58</sup> His commentary on clerics' right to punish their wives simply repeated his general opinion. "It is stated here that if the wives of clerics should sin, they should not kill them, but guard them lest they have the opportunity of sinning in something else, weakening them by beatings and hunger, but not to death."<sup>59</sup>

I think the picture is very clear. Starting in the twelfth century and continuing at least up until the proclamation of a new code of canon law in 1917, the picture of women in both theology and canon law was clearly misogynistic. I would simply like to add that the description of women contained in the theologians and canonists described above was new. Not that those women had been treated

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<sup>56</sup>"Clericis autem conceditur, si uxores eorum peccauerint, sine mortis acerbitate habere eas in custodia, et ad ieiunia eas cogere, non tamen usque ad necem affligere." *Causa 33, questio 2, c. 9, dicta*, in Friedberg, *Corpus*, 1:1154. English translation from Raming, Priestly Office, 39. "Gratian. Hoc quamquam de sacerdotibus uideatur specialiter dictum, generaliter tamen de omnibus penitentibus oportet intelligi." *Causa 33, questio 2, c. 11, dicta*, in Friedberg, *Corpus*, 1:1155.

<sup>57</sup>"Judicare potest maritus uxorem, corrigendo eam . . . sed non verberando eam . . . sed temperate potest eam castigare, quia est de familia sua . . . sicut dominus seruum . . . et etiam mercenarium suam." Text in Raming, *Ausschluss*, 115 n. 191. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 118, n. 191.

<sup>58</sup>"Uxores viris, et filii parentis et serui dominis subditi sunt, unde ab illis coerceri et secundum ius debent corripri, ne in causam anathematis incidant." "Non tamen quod immoderate verberentur." Both texts in Raming, *Ausschluss*, 115 n. 191. English translations in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 118, n. 191.

<sup>59</sup>"Dicitur hic quod si uxores clericorum peccauerint, eas non occidant, sed eas custodiant, ne de caetero habeant licentiam peccandi, macerando eas verberibus et fame, sed non usque ad mortem." Text in Raming, *Ausschluss*, 115 n. 191. English translation in Raming, *Priestly Office*, 118, n. 191.



fairly or kindly in earlier periods in Church history, but this description of women as deformed, dangerous, stupid, and in need of harsh physical control by men was not the inevitable result of its historical setting. Part of this change was a loss of ecclesiastical status for women within the Church structure. Again, this loss was not inevitable, nor caused solely by the culture in which the Church found itself.

Theologians and canonists chose to rely on Aristotle and on the harsher elements of Roman law to create this picture of women. It was not kings, princes, or even ordinary husbands who studied Aristotle and Roman law. It was not your “man on the street” who applied these teachings to the treatment of women in the Church and in Church courts. Rather, the teaching of the theologians and canonists shaped to a large extent medieval society’s understanding of women, and not vice versa.

The lesson here I hope is clear. We may be free to change the present, but we must take great care to assess the consequences of those changes. There are, perhaps, unintended consequences to all reforms, and we cannot foresee all the implications of what we do, but we must pray and work to discern carefully, and then avoid, creating greater injustices in the future. It goes without saying that we must work equally hard to correct the injustices of the past. In that regard, people much more learned and insightful and prayerful than I are already telling a new and different story of women and their role in Christianity. It is important, however, to know the origins of the hate-filled story of women we have inherited and to face it honestly.

### DEALING WITH OUR HISTORIES

I would like to suggest one last lesson we might glean from the story of the reform movement from the last millennial change. It is perhaps the most difficult. We must let the past be past. I am not speaking of history here. History is the present story we tell ourselves now about the past. History is alive and well; the past is over. Yes, we carry the effects of that past with us, but those effects are in the present. The past is what is not present. We have only present memories of it. It is gone.

My point here is really quite simple. We cannot begin to deal with our memories until we admit that they are memories and that we have a past. When we clothe our frail and ephemeral human structure in eternal trappings, we cannot admit that we even have a history. We cannot, for instance, begin to deal with the present church structure as a relic of the past until we first admit that that structure is part of human history and not intrinsically and eternally part of the divine plan itself. If the present church structure is understood as part of God’s eternal plan, then the church cannot change, and has never changed. We have no future because we have no past. We are eternally trapped, frozen motionless and helpless in the eternal moment. Women cannot be ordained, for example, because Jesus did not ordain them, and therefore God did not intend

them to be ordained from all eternity and for all eternity. And other examples could be given.

To break out of this trap, we first must realize we created the trap in the first place. We even know when this particular trap was created and why it was created. The eleventh and twelfth century reformers found a way out of their impasse by creating a new structure that they justified by divinizing it. They, of course, would never put it that way. They believed the structure to be divine and went to great lengths to demonstrate that it was. They did so, however, at a great cost. We inherited their story of the clerical church structure as eternally inevitable. In order to tell ourselves a different story, in order to appropriate other memories, we first have to admit that the vision of an eternally clerical church is itself a story, a set of memories, and only one of many to which we are heirs.

Only when we admit that we have a history can we begin the difficult work of appropriating that history. Then we can mourn what we have lost and that mourning can open up the possibility for a new and creative future.<sup>60</sup> We can continually suffer those memories that can never be justified, appropriated, or forgotten as Stephen Ostovich suggests in his article on Johann Baptist Metz.<sup>61</sup> We must also praise and honor those memories that inspire us. After all, if we cannot honestly understand ourselves as part of an honorable and valuable tradition, then we have nothing to pass on and youth will wisely continue to leave the church.

The past must be allowed to be past before we can deal with the memories we have inherited from it. This can involve a very difficult letting go. To quote Paul Ricoeur: "A healthy memory, and maybe a happy memory, implies the inclusion of an element of loss. First, this is because the past disappears: in a sense there is something lost by the very fact that it is past."<sup>62</sup> For most people in this room, the "letting go" of the church structure of the eleventh and twelfth century reformers may not be all that wrenching. However, there are other more recent pasts that may more difficult to understand as past. The European immigrant church of the late nineteenth and twentieth century is past. The church as portrayed by Barry Fitzgerald and Bing Crosby is past. Those churches are now memories to be

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<sup>60</sup>The literature on the mourning of the passing of a culture is extensive. For a recent discussion the application of this concept to religion, see William Parson, Diane Jonte-Pace and Susan Henking, eds., *Mourning Religion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008). I found particularly valuable the essay, Diane Jonte-Pace, "Melancholia and Religion in French Feminist Theory," in Parson, *Mourning Religion*, 81-94.

<sup>61</sup>"Melancholy History," in *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology*, John Downey, Jürgen Maneman and Steven Ostovich, eds., (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 93-101.

<sup>62</sup>"Conversations on Freud, Memory, and Loss," in *Mourning Religions*, 232.

mourned and praised, as is their due, but not to be reified as “Catholicism” in such a way that their passing constitutes the loss of the tradition itself. We cannot bring those churches back, nor should we.

It probably does not need to be said, but simply retaining the practices of the past, as many so-called “traditional” Catholics wish to do, does not preserve that past. Nicholas Lash likes to tell a story about the market place in Cambridge that makes this point beautifully. If, Nicholas says, you went down to the market place in Cambridge in the early thirteenth century and you saw a man with an undyed woolen robe, a rope for a belt and sandals you would probably think, “Drat, another stupid beggar. Get a job!” If you went down to the market place today (and it is in exactly the same place, and, in my opinion, selling the same cheeses), and you saw a man with an undyed woolen robe, a rope for a belt and sandals, you would probably think “There goes a mildly eccentric, but harmless ecclesiastic.” To do the same thing in a different cultural context or historical period is really to do something very new and different. It is a form of unintended novelty. To say the Rosary, or hear the Mass in Latin outside the world that included and created the movies “Going My Way” and “On the Waterfront” is to introduce something brand new to the Church, not to preserve its past. This may be a good thing or a bad thing, but it is certainly a new thing. The loss of the past is inevitable, and not to face the inevitable is psychologically, culturally, and, I suspect, spiritually dangerous.

Finally, and I say this with great trepidation, we must let Vatican II be past. The memories of the Council continue to form and inspire us, but the moment of the Council is past. The solutions of the Council were solutions for a world that no longer exists. We must be careful that we do not “fire our big guns where the enemy was last seen forty years ago,” as G. K. Chesterton was accused of doing. The implementation of the reforms of Vatican II now may indeed be the best approach to church reform, but it will not be the reform envisioned by Council, but something brand new, that is, the Council reforms in a twenty-first century setting. The implications of such an implementation must be carefully considered, for the solutions offered then may not fit the questions that need to be asked now.

But now I have traveled far outside my field, and I apologize if I have overstepped my mark. I leave to those with more expertise the difficult task of how best to appropriate the many stories that make up our many histories. My role is merely to tell a story of how Christianity found itself at an impasse and survived. Yet, perhaps I should not say merely. The stories we tell ourselves about who we are do much to fire our imaginations about who we can be. Perhaps the memory of that past impasse that was not an impasse will help us better understand our present situation and free us to imagine new ways forward.

Our future depends on how creatively we appropriate our memories of our complex and diverse past, and the first step in that appropriation is to realize that we have a past, and that it is past. We are never completely free of our history, but

it can be a history that liberates us or binds us. As Walter Principe said many years ago to this very body, history can be fortress or a launching pad.<sup>63</sup> That all depends on us, and how we tell each other the graced and sinful stories of who were are. I know the Spirit will show us how to do this. She always has. My prayer is that she grants us the grace to hear her.

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<sup>63</sup>“The History of Theology: Fortress or Launching Pad,” in *The Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 43, John P. Boyle and George Kilcourse, eds. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 19-40.