



ST ANDREWS STUDIES IN
REFORMATION HISTORY

From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife

*Clerical Marriage and the
Process of Reform in the
Early German Reformation*



Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer

ROUTLEDGE


From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife

For my parents, for all their love and support

From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife

Clerical Marriage and the Process of Reform in the
Early German Reformation

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Abbreviations

Archives

AMS	Archives municipales de Strasbourg
AST	Archives du Chapitre St. Thomas in Archives municipales de Strasbourg
BAA	Bistumsarchiv Augsburg
BSB	Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München
EAF	Erzbischöfliche Archiv Freiburg
EvDeKt	Evangelische Dekanatsarchiv Kitzingen
EvPfAK	Evangelische Pfarrarchiv Kaufbeuren
FÖWAH	Fürstliche Oettingen-Wallersteinisches Archiv Harburg
GLAK	Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe
HAB	Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel
HHStAW	Hof, Haus u. Staatsarchiv Wien
HStAM	Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Marburg
HStAS	Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart
LAELKB	Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch- Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern
LHASA-MD	Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt Magdeburg
LHASA-MD/Wn	Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt Magdeburg— Abteilung Wernigerode
LKAB	Landeskirchliches Archiv Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel
LKAS	Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart
SächsHStA Dresden	Sächsische Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden
SLUB	Sächsische Landesbibliothek—Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden
StAA	Staatsarchiv Augsburg
StABa	Staatsarchiv Bamberg
StadtAA	Stadtarchiv Augsburg
StadtAE	Stadtarchiv Erfurt
StadtAEssl	Stadtarchiv Esslingen
StadtAHn	Stadtarchiv Heilbronn
StadtAK	Stadtarchiv Konstanz
StadtAKe	Stadtarchiv Kempten
StadtAKt	Stadtarchiv Kitzingen
StadtAMm	Stadtarchiv Memmingen
StadtAN	Stadtarchiv Nürnberg

StadtANö	Stadtarchiv Nördlingen
StadtARo	Stadtarchiv Rothenburg ob der Tauber
StadtASH	Stadtarchiv Schwäbisch Hall
StadtAU	Stadtarchiv Ulm
StadtAWitt	Stadtarchiv Wittenberg
StadtAWo	Stadtarchiv Worms
StadtAZ	Stadtarchiv Zwickau
StAL	Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg
StAM	Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg
StAN	Staatsarchiv Nürnberg
StASig	Staatsarchiv Sigmaringen
StAWü	Staatsarchiv Würzburg
SuStBA	Staats- und Stadtbibliothek Augsburg
ThHStAW, EGA	Thüringischen Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar Ernestinisches Gesamtarchiv
ThStAG	Thüringischen Staatsarchiv Gotha

Collected Editions and Journals

ARC	Georg Pfeilschifter, ed., <i>Acta reformationis Catholicae ecclesiam Germaniae concernentia saeculi XVI. Die Reformverhandlungen des deutschen Episkopats von 1520 bis 1570</i> (6 vols, Regensburg, 1959–1974)
ARG	<i>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte</i>
LW	Martin Luther, <i>Luther's Works</i> (55 vols, Minneapolis, 1955–1975)
<i>Chroniken</i>	<i>Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert</i> (32 vols, Leipzig, 1862–1917)
RTA JR	<i>Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V. Jüngere Reihe</i> (9 vols, Göttingen/Munich, 1893–).
Sehling, <i>Kirchenordnungen</i>	Emil Sehling, ed., <i>Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts</i> (24 vols, Leipzig, 1902–)
StLA	Johann Georg Walch, ed., <i>Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften</i> (25 vols, St. Louis, 1880–1910)
UrkBHN	Eugen Knapfer and Moritz von Rauch, eds, <i>Urkundenbuch der Stadt Heilbronn</i> (4 vols, Stuttgart, 1904–1922)
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Schriften</i> (c. 80 vols, Weimar, 1883–)
WA Br	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel</i> (18 vols, Weimar, 1930–1985)

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This book has taken me down an intellectual and personal road that I never anticipated, but thoroughly enjoyed. The topic for this book began as an idea for an article to work on after completing my dissertation. What had been intended to be a brief look at the real experiences of clergy depicted in published defenses of clerical marriage in the early 1520s gradually expanded into an exploration of how the debate and experience of clerical marriage shaped and was shaped by the reform process from the parish to the imperial levels. Too many years, over 40 archives, two transatlantic moves, a closed university, and a new academic life later, and with a very different project from the one I first envisioned, I complete this book owing many debts of gratitude.

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Chapter 6 is a modified version of a previously published article “‘Partner in his Calamities’: Pastors’ Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation,” published in *Gender and History* 20 (2008): 207–27. Reprinted with permission of the Wiley Company. Portions of Chapter 2 appeared in

“Clerical Marriage and Territorial Reformation in Ernestine Saxony and the Diocese of Merseburg in 1522–1524” published in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 98 (2007): 45–70.

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Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer,
St. Andrews, Scotland,
27 June 2011

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A Note on Translations and Spellings

All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. Where I have quoted the original German I kept the original syntax and spellings where possible, but have used the more modern *u*, *v*, *i*, and *j* for clarity. Where appropriate, I regularized proper names for consistency and ease of reading, using current place names of towns and provinces to make them easier to locate and standardizing proper personal names. In the cases of well-known individuals and places, I have used the current standard usage in English to avoid confusion. For instance, I have used Strasbourg rather than Straßburg and Frederick the Wise as opposed to Friederich the Wise.

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Introduction

On 13 June 1525, after weeks of speculation, Martin Luther secretly married Katharina von Bora, a former nun, in a private ceremony officiated by city preacher Johann Bugenhagen and attended by jurist Johann Apel, professor Justus Jonas, and artist Lucas Cranach and his wife. Over the last centuries, scholars, writers, artists, Wittenberg citizens—in their popular, annual *Lutherhochzeit* [Luther's wedding] festival—and even a recent filmmaker have characterized this event as one of the iconic episodes of the Lutheran Reformation.¹ Yet Luther's marriage neither legalized nor heralded an immediate acceptance of priestly marriage even in reformed territories. Luther certainly was not the first cleric to marry. Three of the witnesses at his wedding—Apel, Bugenhagen, and Jonas—were former Catholic clergy who had all married by mid-1523, a full two years before this event. Only a few weeks prior to this event, Luther expressed hesitation about marriage even for political reasons, suggesting perhaps he would agree to a chaste marriage, a *Josephehe*, to support married clergy.² Luther's marriage does illustrate many aspects of the ongoing reform process. His mixed feelings about marrying, the atmosphere that led him to a decision, the subsequent outcry about marriage, and the personal trials that faced him and his wife in their married life had much in common with the many clergy who married before and after him in the first decades of the German Reformation.

The prevailing scholarly focus on the theological debate over celibacy and marriage led by major reformers such as Luther, Karlstadt, Melancthon, and Bucer obscures the ambivalence that many, including supporters of the evangelical reform movement like Luther, felt about priestly marriage. Debating the merits of celibacy and marriage for clergy was not new nor did ensuing discussions end in the sixteenth century.³ However, the years between the 1520s and the early 1540s in Germany, when thousands of Catholic priests, monks, and nuns married, were a period of unprecedented transformation in the relationship between

¹ Barry Stephenson, *Performing the Reformation: Public Ritual in the City of Luther* (Oxford, 2010). The annual celebration of the publication of the 95 Theses in Wittenberg draws only 15,000 visitors compared to over 100,000 for the annual re-enactment of Luther's wedding.

² WA Br 3:522 (3 June 1525).

³ For a recent overview of European discussions of celibacy, see Helen Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West, c. 1100–1700* (Farnham, 2010).

the clergy and their communities, precipitating a rapid reevaluation of spiritual, social, and political boundaries that were to impact marriage, gender, and social expectations.

Exploring how the reform movement developed from a theological debate to a social movement involves not only understanding the methods used by evangelical polemicists to spread their messages, but also investigating how these teachings influenced individual choices and changed social norms. It also is necessary to reverse that process to seek an understanding about how individual experiences and local reactions led to shifts in the content of the evangelical message and changes in institutional methods of regulation. Marriage, with its combination of secular and religious symbolism and practical implications, altered the position of the married priest in relationship not only with the church, but also with his congregation. It also generated a significant, and unexpected, redefinition of social, gender, and political roles. This book examines the experience of clerical marriage by many groups in the early German Reformation using an interdisciplinary approach that juxtaposes theological, legal, and political perspectives with a consideration of popular culture and gender. The process of religious and social reform unleashed by this debate provides a unique case study of the reform process, emerging simultaneously from above and from below. Diverse communities, at least in sixteenth-century Germany, alternately opposed one another and cooperated fully to create an ever-changing dynamic during this process.

This topic presents an opportunity for insight into how reform ideas were transformed through the lens of the experiences of the first married clergy. Unlike previous debates over clerical celibacy, the debate over clerical marriage during the German Reformation rapidly moved from purely theoretical discussions among theologians and church officials to arguments conducted in imperial meetings, city council chambers, guildhalls, taverns, and individual homes. One of the reasons for this shift is the approach taken by early Lutheran reformers in spreading their message. Certainly, evangelical authors wrote theological tracts directed at exhorting ecclesiastical authorities to reform their stance on clerical celibacy or defending their position against Catholic theologians and polemicists. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the polemical pamphlets were designed to gain support from two large groups, the clergy and the common man. These works sought to encourage the hesitant to marry and to persuade communities to accept those marriages. Evangelical clergy and authors also sought to convince local city councils and territorial princes of the necessity of accepting this change. However, it is the individual debates, personal decisions and experiences, and changing political and social circumstances that inspired, and were inspired by, these printed materials that became determinative in the process of reform.

One of the most identifiable differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic churches is the marital status of the clergy. Yet, little research has been done on how this shift from a celibate to a married clergy took place during the Reformation in Germany or what reactions such a move elicited. What specialized scholarship does exist on the topic of celibacy and clerical marriage in the German Reformation concentrates almost exclusively on the theological debate on clerical celibacy and priestly marriage by Catholic and Lutheran theologians and reformers. Such research rarely addresses the practical implications of the marriage of priests for individuals, communities, and rulers. In addition, few discussions note that even as the long-running debate over clerical celibacy continued for centuries, many priests lived in long-term stable unions with concubines, a situation that was accepted in their congregations. It is my interest in exploring why an ongoing theological debate resulted in very unexpected responses in the sixteenth century, and from very different quarters than previous discussions, that led to the main questions that concern my research here: how, where, when, and even why did clerical marriage become accepted as a behavioral norm for the clergy; why would monks, nuns, and priests and their sexual partners risk taking the step of marriage when they already had tacit toleration for their households; what were the public and official reactions to the change that marriage implied; and what impact were these changes and the events of public weddings of clergy to have on attitudes to and regulation of marriage, gender, and sexuality?

While many scholars have commented on the ongoing debate on clerical marriage or studied specific cases of a priest or monk marrying, very little comparative research has been done on the interaction between theology and individual reception of priestly marriages as the reform process progressed.⁴ The growing divide between those studying clerical marriage in theological debates and print culture⁵ and those focusing on the

⁴ Bernd Moeller, "Die Brautwerbung Martin Bucers für Wolfgang Capito. Zur Sozialgeschichte des evangelischen Pfarrerstandes," in *Philologie als Kulturwissenschaft: Studien zur Literatur und Geschichte des Mittelalters: Festschrift für Karl Stackmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Ludger Grenzmann, Hubert Herkommer and Dieter Wuttke (Göttingen, 1987), 306–25; Thomas A. Fudge, "Incest and Lust in Luther's Marriage: Theology and Morality in Reformation Polemics," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34 (2003): 319–45; Ulrich Bubenheimer, "Streit um das Bischofsamt in der Wittenberger Reformation 1521/22: Von der Auseinandersetzung mit den Bischöfen um Priesterethen und den Ablass in Halle zum Modell des evangelischen Gemeindebischofs," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 104 (1987): 159.

⁵ See, for instance, August Franzen, *Zölibat und Priesterehe, in der Auseinandersetzung der Reformationszeit und der katholischen Reformation des 16. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1971); John Yost, "The Reformation Defense of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI," *Church History* 50 (1981): 152–65; Otto Clemen, "Seltene Schriften

shifts in marriage, gender, and family or confessionalization and discipline methods⁶ imposes an intellectual divide that did not exist for sixteenth-century clergy and their communities. Some recent scholarship has begun to address this through local urban studies showing how clerical marriage played out in one setting.⁷ But, such studies generally do not consider the interaction of these local developments and experiences with changes at the regional and transregional level. A growing number of scholars have begun investigating the problems of concubinage before and after the Reformation, but few have looked at how concubinage was viewed and experienced during the debate in the 1520s and 1530s. Almost none of the existing research on the shift from a celibate to a married clergy during the Reformation addresses the popular reactions that this move elicited or how those reactions influenced the way that reformers framed their subsequent theological writings, sermons, and reform policies.

The first impetus for clerical marriage came not from the leadership of the reform movement, but from the parish clergy and their congregations. They transformed the theological debate over celibacy into a crisis of local authority by attempting to justify the communal need for clerical marriage, by circumventing the law and allowing priests to marry, and by otherwise advocating the acceptance of these marriages. Unlike other disputed church rituals or doctrinal debates, clerical marriage was simultaneously an intensely personal issue and a consciously public move by clergy challenging established social, legal, and theological institutions.

gegen den Konkubinat der Kleriker aus dem Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts," ARG 85 (1925): 115–27; Leon E. Halkin, "Érasme et le célibat sacerdotal," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 57 (1977): 497–511; Hans-Christoph Rublack, "Zur Rezeption von Luthers *De votis monasticis iudicium*," in *Reformation und Revolution: Beiträge zum politischen Wandel und den sozialen Kräften am Beginn der Neuzeit*, edited by Rainer Postel and Franklin Kopitzsch (Stuttgart, 1989), 224–37; Stephen Buckwalter, *Die Priesterehe in Flugschriften der frühen Reformation* (Gütersloh, 1998).

⁶ Susanna Burghartz, "Ordering Discourse and Society: Moral Politics, Marriage, and Fornication during the Reformation and the Confessionalization Process in Germany and Switzerland," in *Social Control in Europe, Vol. 1, 1500–1800*, edited by Pieter Spierenburg and Herman Roodenburg (Columbus, 2004), 78–98.

⁷ Rainer Postel, "Horenjegers und Kökschen. Zölibat und Priesterehe in der hamburgischen Reformation," in *Städtische Gesellschaft und Reformation*, edited by Ingrid Batori (Stuttgart, 1980); Robert W. Scribner, "Practice and Principle in the German Towns: Preachers and People," in *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays in Honour of Arthur Geoffrey Dickens*, edited by Peter Newman Brooks (London, 1980), 97–117; Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Woman and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford, 1989); Thomas A. Brady, "'You Hate us Priests': Anticlericalism, Communalism, and the Control of Women at Strasbourg in the Age of the Reformation," in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Peter A. Dykema and Heiko Oberman (Leiden, 1993), 167–207; Joel Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge, 1995), 25–47.

Once officials—territorial princes, city councils, and Lutheran leaders—took control of the process, however, the uniformity of popular support broke down and diverse voices emerged.

The laity, local pastors, and magistrates played a more active role than previously understood in situating and shaping public controversies over clerical marriage in the early German Reformation. A focus on disputes over clerical marriage and celibacy provides a unique window into the interactions between social identity, theology, and religious practice. Evangelical clergy appealed to city councils for citizenship and protection and to their congregations for toleration and support. Many congregations openly supported their pastors in defiance of imperial or territorial decrees and risked much so that their pastors could marry. At the same time, individuals, sometimes the same ones who helped clergy marry, expressed their ambivalence, and even hostility, about married priests and their households in their community. This is even more the experience of the nuns and monks. The use of the term “priest’s whore” to describe a pastor’s wife, sporadic rumors accusing married clergy of sexual impropriety, or continued distrust of former monks and nuns as oath-breakers all show the residual doubts and hostility. Less obvious are the financial and personal costs that such resistance imposed on the first generation of married clergy. The resulting disputes led to the creation of new cultural and social norms of clerical and lay behavior, and connected this change to broader intellectual and public concerns about marriage and social identity.

The political debates on clerical marriage provide an interesting insight into the political as well as theological divisions emerging during the Reformation. Clerical marriage emerged as a major issue shaping the relations between cities as they banded together in support of their married clergy and between cities and the emperor as they sought a resolution over this issue in the imperial councils between 1525 and 1544. In addition, territorial princes and city councils found themselves confronting broader social and political concerns as acceptance of clerical marriage led to debates over the position of the newly married clergy in the political and social fabric of the community. Should they be granted citizenship, be expected to carry weapons in defense of the city, and be allowed to enter into trades? Should their children and wives be able to inherit? City councils sympathetic to the married clergy found themselves mediating between the clergy and members of the community as resistance to the clergy and their wives became clear. Mediations were often necessary for reasons that were remarkably prosaic, such as conflicts between neighbors or marital squabbles, but secular authorities saw them as challenging their own emerging expectation of the clerical, and lay, household.

This book investigates the way that clerical marriage was received, and the progress of reform on this issue, in the dioceses of Mainz and Magdeburg under Archbishop Albrecht of Brandenburg from 1513 to 1545, concentrating on three key regions within this territory: Saxony, Franconia, and Swabia. Within these areas, I have explored a cross-section of rural and urban settings, independent imperial cities and those subject to territorial rule, and territories and cities that ranged from strongly confessional in identity to more ambivalent and flexible to gain a broad comparison of reactions. This book focuses on the first half of the sixteenth century when the debates were undecided and the intellectual and institutional situation remained fluid and changeable. It ends in 1545/1546, which marked a generational shift in leadership with the death of many of the primary players in the process such as Albrecht of Mainz, George of Brandenburg-Ansbach, George Spalatin, and Luther. In addition, the opening of the first session of the Council of Trent in 1545 and Interim of 1547/1548 began a more complicated relationship between the papacy, emperor, and evangelical states in the archdioceses of Mainz and Magdeburg. It is against this backdrop that confessional positions hardened and the confessional split became irrevocable.

My analysis utilizes the results of archival research in southern Germany and Saxony where a wide spectrum of official reactions to clerical marriage developed. Cities such as Nuremberg and Ulm and regions such as the Brandenburg-Ansbach and Ernestine Saxony rejected clerical celibacy and legalized priestly marriages. Others like Augsburg and Nördlingen publicly stated their intent to uphold imperial decrees and laws, but in practice tolerated clerical marriage. Cities such as Würzburg and territories like Albertine Saxony strictly upheld mandates and acted decisively against married clergy leading to the seeming elimination of clerical marriage. Much of this reaction seems indicative of later support or rejection of evangelical reform. However, the reactions of local clergy and congregations demonstrate an even more complex, nuanced, and fluid set of opinions and reactions that often defy such simple categorizations.

Although considering traditional legal, political, and theological sources, the following exploration of the debate over clerical marriage focuses on untapped archival sources and under-utilized contemporary printed sources such as published sermons, pamphlets, and woodcuts. Because there is no single collection or easy access to early sixteenth-century documents directly from the perspective of nuns, local clergy, artisans, concubines, or even concerned parents, I sought these voices in unusual locations—letters of appeal, chronicles, official and personal correspondence, city council records, visitation reports, court testimonies—and looked for snippets of conversation recorded in other documents. Using these archival sources and the published lists of pastors, I compiled a database consisting of the

demographic and career information of over 2,500 clergy who became Lutheran pastors during the 1520s and early 1530s.⁸ This provides information about marriage patterns, social status of the married priests, monks, and nuns, and their spouses, and geographic differences.

The first chapter outlines the pre-Reformation background on clerical marriage and celibacy. While bishops, princes, and city councils sought to control clerical sexual misconduct in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, my research indicates that such efforts led to profound jurisdictional conflicts and increasing demands for action from communities. Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the first clerical marriages at the parish level in Electoral and Ducal Saxony before moving on in Chapter 3 to an examination of the methods used by reformers to spread their message on clerical marriage in the early 1520s. Chapter 4 examines the unique experiences of former monks and nuns whose marriages and laicization were considered as more transgressive than those of the secular clergy. Chapter 5 explores how differences in the way evangelical and Catholic authorities confronted clerical concubinage, an issue they both condemned, led to divergent policies and patterns of discipline. Chapter 6 focuses on the question of why the laity, male and female, would choose to marry former clergy. Chapter 7 shows how and why a wedding or local legalization of clerical marriage did not end the debate on marriage and celibacy even as clerical households individually and collectively became embroiled in continuing imperial discussions on the legitimacy of clerical marriage and were subject to local conflicts over social integration of clerical families.

Many reformers initially thought that clerical marriage would be resolved at a national council. What they were to discover was that the numerous transregional meetings of bishops, theologians, and secular authorities during the 1520s through the 1540s did not lead to the single imperial policy they wanted. In the place of unified decision, regional secular authorities instead stepped in to make and enforce their own policies on clerical households. This was done sometimes in conjunction with evangelical reformers and sometimes in opposition to their recommendations. Evangelical reform leaders, whether secular or clerical, discovered that they had limited control over discussions on concubinage, clerical marriage, and celibacy occurring at the individual or local level. They often found themselves facing new and unexpected

⁸ For this study, I used available edited *Pfarrerbücher* from across Germany as well as other biographical sources such as the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (ADB) and *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB). For a comprehensive list of the *Pfarrerbücher* used for this database, Max-Adolf Cramer, "Pfarrerbücher," *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* 91 (1991): 382–92; <http://www.hab.de/session/highlight?url=/forschung/projekte/vd17/bibh-pfarrer.htm&words=pfarrer%20&color=red>.

debate and controversies as local clergy married, often with the full support and encouragement of their communities. But, there is also a surprisingly personal element in behavior and acceptance of many aspects of the reform program.

The reform process is often presented as imposed, successfully or not, and seeking to limit personal choice, and in some ways it did. Yet, the social and moral values of individuals did matter and this is evident in the imperfect, incomplete social integration of the married clergy. While married clergy could and did live peacefully in a community, they were still recognized as different long after theologians and politicians argued and legislated that they were not. This becomes evident when local events or social norms highlighted the uncertainty about clerical role in the community and led to local reactions demonstrating distrust of an imperfectly rigged social identity. The reason can be confessional, but not always. What were long-existing tensions in the community found expression through the new vocabulary of faith without always being conversations about belief. Theological doctrines often are lived in ways their proponents had not considered or imagined.



Map I.1 Archbishopsrics of Magdeburg and Mainz, c. 1500

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Medieval Dichotomies: Concubinage and the Celibate Clergy

Furthermore virtually all of them [priests] had concubines; in fact, the peasants generally encouraged them to do so. For they said, “A priest cannot be chaste; it is therefore better that he have only one wife, than that he entice and seduce all other women.”¹

In May 1522, Walpurgis Ulle approached magistrate Seifried Blümlein to press charges against Hans Ott, a canon in the Feuchtwangen collegial church [*Kollegiatstift*]. She explained she had been Hans Ott’s concubine for some time, but when she became pregnant he held her captive seeking to induce an abortion. First, he fed her funny-tasting foods that made her feel sick. When this did not induce a miscarriage, Ott put pepper on his “manly thing” [*mannlichen Zeug*] and had intercourse with her, leaving her whole body feeling as if it was burning up.² She reported her escape after the botched abortion attempts led Ott to panic, probably fearing citation to Christoph von Stadion, bishop of Augsburg. In order to gain funds to escape, Ott demanded 300 Gulden from Johann Klinger, the chapter dean, threatening to tell everyone how the dean rode all over the parish “whoring” leaving not a “single honorable woman in town.”³ Uncertain how to proceed, but also shocked by her story, Blümlein appealed to Margrave Casimir of Brandenburg-Ansbach for instructions. After interviewing Ott and Ulle, Blümlein wrote to the margrave of his uncertainty about the truth of Ulle’s testimony.⁴ Given the circumstances,

¹ Anonymous scribe from the Dominican convent at Colmar, as quoted in Paul B. Pixton, *The German Episcopacy and the Implementation of the Decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1216–1245* (Leiden, 1995), 95.

² John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), esp. 137–9. Pepper was a common ancient and medieval abortifacient vaginal suppository, one delivery method being as part of herbal preparations applied to the penis.

³ StAN, Rep. 165a, Nr. 553, 1522 and 24 May 1522; Wilhelm Schaudig, *Geschichte der Stadt und des ehemaligen Stiftes Feuchtwangen* (Feuchtwangen, 1927).

⁴ StAN, Rep. 165a, Nr. 553, 30 May 1522.

it is perhaps not surprising Blümlein dropped the investigation a few weeks later when Ott appealed to the bishop for protection against the margrave.

The example of Walpurgis Ulle and Hans Ott, like many in this chapter, reveals a great deal about attempts to control clerical concubinage, and the existence of shifting reactions to breaches of clerical discipline in the late Middle Ages. The actors involved in this case represent various groups for whom clerical celibacy and sexual misconduct were a serious concern in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The bishop, chapter dean, margrave, and the local town magistrate held intertwined ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction over Hans Ott and Walpurgis Ulle, which often hindered or complicated investigations and disciplinary efforts. This episode also shows one additional party in this process: the community. Most of the canons in Feuchtwangen had concubines, and the community and local magistrate Blümlein were well aware of their existence. Most clerical concubines lived quietly in their communities leaving no official mention except when something exceptional happened, as in this case. The awareness shown by Ulle and Ott of having transgressed a line by making public knowledge and official notice of their relationship unavoidable is evident in their strategies and stories. In so doing so, they removed the selective local and communal enforcement of official regulations generally hindering the direct episcopal commands and the indirect secular methods designed to force clergy to refrain from sexual activity.

Why begin a book on priestly marriage in the Reformation with a discussion of late medieval clerical sexual misconduct? Many studies about clerical marriage begin with theological texts, presenting clerical marriage as an extended intellectual debate conducted by theologians and elite authors and establishing a single ideological model. Other scholars have focused on clerical marriage as a product of jurisdictional conflicts between bishops and secular rulers in which control over social order played a major role. Some have presented the successful Reformation call for priestly marriage as a reaction to growing popular discontent with the immoral lives of clergy. An oft-repeated pattern in local case studies of the reform process in Germany has been to show the terrible moral state of the clergy and point to ecclesiastical authorities' failure to successfully eradicate clerical sexual misconduct as a necessary precursor to reform. All these approaches ignore the longer-term process of establishing socio-sexual norms for the clergy involving protracted negotiation by many parties, whose definitions of right behavior remained fluid and situational.

Clerical concubinage in practice remained notably unremarkable despite ecclesiastical prohibitions since the eleventh century. It is where concubinage is remarkable, as in the case cited above, that social identity and the process of reform become evident and more interesting. As recent studies have shown, clerical concubines remained an established part of communal life

in many parishes before and after the Reformation despite considerable efforts by secular and ecclesiastical authorities to ban them from priests' households. By focusing only on the existence of dramatic cases, like that of Ott and Ulle, without considerations of the local circumstances and reasons for the specific conflict, scholars overlook the more complicated social and legal dynamic existing in most communities that hindered enforcement efforts. This chapter is by no means an exhaustive study of every instance of concubinage, sexuality, or even sexual misconduct of the clergy in late medieval Swabia, Franconia, and Saxony. It is also not an attempt to list the *gravamina* levied against the clergy as evidence of the need for reform. Rather this chapter represents an attempt to understand the late medieval creation of a negotiated process of establishing sexual norms during a time when bishops reformed their disciplinary efforts and secular leaders sought to control sexual misconduct and criminal behavior, and began to include clergy in that process. The resulting criminalization of concubinage, a traditionally accepted form of sexual behavior, did not change behavior, except when it matched local interests.

Medieval theologians, canonists, and jurists advocated a celibate, chaste clergy, a call repeated by ecclesiastical leaders and temporal rulers. In reality, clergy, like Ott, were not always chaste, and, one can argue, not particularly celibate considering the prevalence of long-term, marriage-like unions of clergy with their concubines. Despite the didactic dichotomy of marriage or celibacy, a spectrum of sexual behavior remained that left definitions of spiritual purity, social identity, and acceptable sexuality quite fluid.⁵ During the late Middle Ages, secular and episcopal authorities promulgated regulations defining illicit sexuality and expanded disciplinary efforts to establish a stricter separation between sanctioned sexuality within marriage and a tighter control of sexual activity outside of marriage. Despite these efforts, communities proved unwilling to turn their priests in for violating their vows of celibacy, even though considerable evidence demonstrates they were more than aware these men were not chaste. Many clergy lived more or less openly with long-term female sexual partners, making only half-hearted attempts at dissembling, about which their neighbors readily feigned ignorance. Although it is almost impossible to estimate the percentage of concubinary clergy given the fragmentary and sporadic nature of the late medieval German episcopal records, that clerical concubines existed and in large numbers in many German parishes

⁵ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York, 2005); Susanna Burghartz, *Zeiten der Reinheit Orte der Unzucht. Ehe und Sexualität in Basel während der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1999), 9–21.

is indisputable.⁶ This acceptance of clerical concubinage masked deeper issues, debates, and understandings of marriage and acceptable sexuality. These multiple understandings became more evident as secular and ecclesiastical authorities put clergy under pressure to conform to a norm. An exploration of the elements emerging in the midst of the new reforms in discipline and attempts at strengthening institutions of justice in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries helps explain why eliminating clerical celibacy, ending concubinage, and even gaining an acceptance of priestly marriage during the Reformation was not quickly achieved.

Late Medieval Episcopal Efforts at Enforcing Clerical Celibacy

In an impassioned speech concluding his first synod in Dillingen in 1517, Augsburg bishop Christoph von Stadion admitted he “could not hold back his tears at the thought of those carrying the honor of the church living an immoral life” and asked in what other century vices such as concubinage had been allowed to go so unpunished. Stadion identified “the continual pursuit of the company of women” as the root cause for clergy acting not as pious servants of God, but rather as “dogs” or “pigs” seeking filth.⁷ He then explained how, according to St. Paul, celibacy was established not for personal glory or control of the body, but as a prerequisite for true perfection. The newly appointed Augsburg bishop, like many reform-minded late medieval bishops, condemned breaches of clerical celibacy and other immoral behavior of the clergy and claimed this effort as a personal

⁶ Paul Tschackert, “Die Rechnungsbücher des erzbischöflich mainzischen Kommissars Johann Burns aus den Jahren 1519–1531,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 21 (1901): 340–42; Francis Rapp, “Klerus und Illegitimität in der Diözese Straßburg (1449–1523),” in *Illegitimität im Spätmittelalter*, edited by Ludwig Schmugge (Munich, 1994), 228, 236; Rudolf Herrmann, *Thüringische Kirchengeschichte* (2 vols, Jena, 1937), 1:285; Ingeborg Buchholz-Johanek, *Geistliche Richter und geistliches Gericht im spätmittelalterlichen Bistum Eichstätt* (Regensburg, 1988), 153; Thomas D. Albert, *Der gemeine Mann vor dem geistliche Richter: kirchliche Rechtsprechung in den Diözesen Basel, Chur, und Konstanz vor der Reformation* (Stuttgart, 1998), 208–9, 214; Eva Labouvie, “Geistliche Konkubinate auf dem Land. Zum Wandel von Ökonomie, Spiritualität und religiöser Vermittlung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000): 105–6. While numbers range from assertions as low as 3–4 percent to assertions that it was 50 percent, Eva Labouvie perhaps best sums up the uncertain nature of such studies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by stating the number of concubinary clergy as somewhere between 10 and 90 percent.

⁷ Alois Lerchenmüller, ed., *Rede Christophs von Stadion, Bischofs von Augsburg, vorgetragen in der zu Dillingen im Jahre 1517 gefeierten Synode* (Augsburg, 1843), 5–10; Friedrich Zoepfl, *Geschichte des Bistums Augsburg und seiner Bischöfe* (2 vols, Augsburg, 1955–1969), 2:13; Peter Rummel, “Die Augsburger Diözesansynoden. Historischer Überblick,” *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Augsburger Bistumsgeschichte* 20 (1986): 27–9. Part of his speech was copied directly from Erasmus, *Enchiridion milititis* (1503).

cause. His actions matched his rhetoric, as he carried out visitations in 1518 and announced plans for additional visitations in 1520.⁸ Stadion's inaction in Hans Ott's case becomes more puzzling given its dramatic shift from his earlier avowal of a tough stance on clerical concubinage.

Celibacy and clerical marriage were and remain thorny subjects for the Catholic Church. Until twelfth-century reforms, canon law did not forbid marriage for secular priests and evidence of institutional acceptance of married clergy had existed since the early church. Enforcing clerical discipline became a perennial topic in papal councils even while marriage was debated. Early church conciliar decrees demanded clergy remain above reproach by avoiding "suspicious" women and, for those vowing celibacy, by living chaste.⁹ The late eleventh-century calls for universal celibacy for all clergy, secular and regular, under Gregory VII met with resistance from married clergy and some theologians.¹⁰ This began a vigorous, and often divisive, debate on whether clergy could marry and whether marriage damaged clerical ability to carry out spiritual functions. Eleventh- and twelfth-century theologians and preachers vilified women living with clergy, whether concubine or wife, as endangering communal spiritual welfare, with the very presence of wives/concubines in the clerical household heralding the ongoing sexual sin and moral failing of the priest.¹¹ Ultimately theologians and canonists supporting universal clerical celibacy prevailed. Beginning with the First Lateran Council (1123), papal councils treated clerical marriage and concubinage as equally immoral and used the same methods to punish transgressions.¹² The Second Lateran Council (1139) ordered married or concubinary clergy stripped of their office and benefice, arguing "it is unbecoming that they give themselves up to marriage and impurity." It also barred the now illegitimate priests' sons

⁸ Joseph Steiner, ed., *Synodi Dioecesis Augustanae quotquot inveniri potuerunt, Collectae, ac notis historicis, criticis et liturgicis illustratae* (Mindelheim, 1766), 142; Friedrich Roth, *Augsburgs Reformationsgeschichte 1517–1530* (4 vols, 1901–1911; repr. Munich, 1974), 1:46–7, 63; Zoepfl, *Bistums Augsburg*, 2:11–12, 17.

⁹ Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (2 vols, Washington, DC, 1990), 1:7, 93–4, 152.

¹⁰ Charles Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church," *Church History* 41 (1972): 149–67; Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy, the Eleventh-Century Debates* (New York, 1982); Christian Cochini, *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* (San Francisco, 1990); Michael Frassetto, ed., *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York, 1998).

¹¹ Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999), 107.

¹² Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:189–94.

from entering the priesthood. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) sent an unambiguous message: marriage or priesthood.¹³

This shift established separate sexual norms and expanded the perceived spiritual distinction for laity and clergy. In theory, celibate clergy in renouncing sexuality and family life were removed from the daily experience of the laity and elevated to a higher state of grace and ritual purity. Marriage, in contrast, excluded one from this possibility of spiritual authority and bodily perfection and left open the question of salvation.¹⁴ The reality was far more complex and the boundary between marriage and celibacy not always as clearly defined as canon law and prescriptive models demanded. Priests, monks, and nuns were not always celibate, nor did the laity always marry, leading to considerable criticism of the "spiritual" estate of the clergy.¹⁵ Clergy and the women with whom they continued to live regularly violated the essential distinction between marriage and celibacy. The priest's wife and priest's child, redefined as whore and bastard, became terms of derision and legal marginalization.¹⁶

Long after twelfth-century reforms, lax enforcement of clerical celibacy meant priests continued to marry in many areas, including Germany.¹⁷ Even when technically in compliance with prohibitions against marriage, many clergy lived with long-term female sexual partners in the nebulous socio-legal status of secret marriage, *wilde Ehe*, and concubinage. Recent research shows a relatively consistent pattern across medieval Europe with evidence from France, Spain, Italy, England, and Scandinavia of a high percentage of secular clergy, especially rural priests, living openly in settled, marriage-like unions officially designated concubinage. Most of

¹³ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:198–202, 217, 242.

¹⁴ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, translated by Elborg Forster (Baltimore, 1978); Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage, a Twelfth Century View* (New York, 1982); Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, translated by Barbara Bray (New York, 1983), 26–7; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), esp. 428–47.

¹⁵ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, 1993), 94–131.

¹⁶ Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 81–106, esp. 82–4; Heiner Lück, "Zwischen Rechtsgebot und Begierde: Mätressen geistlicher Amtsträger als Rechtsproblem des späten 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts," in "... wir wollen der Liebe Raum geben." *Konkubinate geistlicher und weltlicher Fürsten um 1500*, edited by Andreas Tacke (Göttingen, 2006), 98–9.

¹⁷ Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy," 126; Oskar Vasella, *Reform und Reformation in der Schweiz. Zur Würdigung der Anfänge der Glaubenskrise* (Münster, 1958), 36–7; Pixton, *The German Episcopacy*, xiv–xv. Such toleration of marriage in Germany may have stemmed from episcopal unwillingness to enforce papal decrees in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries during the German conflicts with the pope.

these relationships more closely resemble patterns of binding unions than temporary liaisons.¹⁸

By the late Middle Ages, the unchaste priest, monk, or nun had become the source of village humor and ribald bawdy tales.¹⁹ While not all clergy were the concupiscent figures of medieval literature and song, a discipline problem did exist. Clerical sexual misconduct emerged as a popular topic in the sermons and writings of late medieval preachers, theologians, and humanists. John of Capistrano, Thomas Murner, Arnold von Tongern, Jakob Wimpfeling, Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, and Jean Gerson dedicated considerable effort to publicize the deplorable moral state of the clergy. They disagreed on whether episcopal or lay authorities were best suited to deal with the problem.²⁰ In a sermon in the Strasbourg cathedral held before the 1482 episcopal synod, Geiler von Kaysersberg condemned clergy for spending time drinking in taverns, indulging in fleshly pursuits, and living with women rather than pursuing their spiritual development. He admonished the bishop to discipline the clergy since “when the clergy are healthy and righteous, the entire of Christendom blossoms.”²¹ Ecclesiastical officials recognized clerical sexual misconduct, especially

¹⁸ Michelle Armstrong-Partida, “Priestly Marriage: The Tradition of Clerical Concubinage in the Spanish Church,” *Viator* 40 (2009): 221–53, esp. 222–3; M.A. Kelleher, “‘Like Man and Wife’: Clerics’ Concubines in the Diocese of Barcelona,” *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): 350–351; Jennifer Thibodeaux, “Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy,” *Gender & History* 18 (2006): 387–91; Daniel Bornstein, “Parish Priests in Late Medieval Cortona: The Urban and Rural Clergy,” *Quaderni di Storia Religiosa* 4 (1997): 165–93; Janelle Werner, “Promiscuous Priests and Vicarage Children: Clerical Sexuality and Masculinity in Late Medieval England,” in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Jennifer Thibodeaux (Basingstoke, 2010), 159–84; James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), 404–5; Joseph Löhr, *Methodisch-kritische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sittlichkeit des Klerus besonders der Erzdiözese Köln am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Münster, 1910), 1.

¹⁹ Albrecht Classen, “Anticlericalism in Late Medieval German Verse,” in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden, 1993), 91–114; Ralph Tanner, *Sex, Sünde, Seelenheil: die Figur des Pfaffen in der Märenliteratur und ihr historischer Hintergrund (1200–1600)* (Würzburg, 2004), 268–9; Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525* (London, 2008), 155–7; Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte: Geistliche in den Mären des Deutschen Mittelalter* (Bielefeld, 1999).

²⁰ For example, Arnold von Tongern, *Avisamentum de concubinarijs non absolvendis quibus cumque, ac eorum periculis que plurimi*, edited by Jakob Wimpfeling (Nuremberg, 1507); Paul Olearius [Jakob Wimpfeling], *De Fide concubinarum in sacerdotes* (Basel, 1505); Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, *Oratio habita in Sinodo argentinensi iij praesentia Episcopi cleri* (c. 1482).

²¹ Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, *Ein heilsam kostliche Predig Doctor Johans Geiler von Keisersperg die er zu Bischoff Albrechten von Straßburg und andern erwirdigen Prelaten und seiner gantzen ersamen Priesterschafft vor Zeiten gethon hat* (Strasbourg, 1513), v.

concubinage, as a major discipline problem within the church and a cause for considerable tensions within parishes. Yet little uniformity existed in how to end it.

Late medieval papal reform policies condemned breaches of celibacy and worked to develop an effective system for punishing concubinary clergy. The decrees of the Council of Constance (1417) stated secular and regular clergy, including those in higher offices, violating celibacy or living in concubinage should lose benefice and position.²² The *Decretum de concubinariis* (1435) issued at the Council of Basel established an automatic three-month suspension of any concubinary clergy from his benefice, indefinite removal for non-compliance, and permanent suspension for recidivism. In addition, ecclesiastical officials were held accountable for failing to punish such clergy.²³ The Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517) reinforced the papal position in 1514, stating all concubinaries were to be “severely punished.”²⁴ Establishing celibacy as the expected norm for clergy was one thing, enforcing it, another.

The fifteenth-century papal and conciliar push for reform of clerical discipline had immediate impact, leading to a significant number of synodal decrees prohibiting clerical concubinage and increased visitations in many dioceses. These decrees left exactly how clerical concubinage was to be discovered and compliance monitored to the bishops and archbishops. Evidence of successful implementation is limited.²⁵ Whatever the initial response to clerical marriage, late medieval German archbishops and bishops intensified their efforts to improve clerical discipline and institutional organization. The fifteenth-century monastic reform movement focused on stricter enforcement of monastic rules and enclosure, while the episcopal reform concentrated on curbing involvement of secular clergy in activities such as drinking, fighting, gambling, and concubinage.

Fifteenth-century archbishops in Mainz and Magdeburg forbade clerical concubinage at numerous provincial synods.²⁶ In 1423, Archbishop Conrad of Mainz placed concubinage along with fencing, tournaments, dancing, and bowling as activities forbidden clergy, reminding them “to protect against every sin of unchastity [*Unzucht*] so they could serve God with a pure heart.” The prohibition included concubines residing in their

²² Anton Joseph Binterim, *Pragmatische Geschichte der Deutschen National-, Provinzial- und vorzüglichsten Diöcesanconcilien* (7 vols, Mainz, 1831–1848), 7:75.

²³ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:485–6.

²⁴ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:622–3.

²⁵ Franz Machilek, “Beweggründe, Inhalte und Probleme kirchlicher Reformen des 14./15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Kirchliche Reformimpulse des 14./15. Jahrhunderts Ostmitteleuropa*, edited by Winfried Eberhard and Franz Machilek (Cologne, 2006), 58–60.

²⁶ Binterim, *Geschichte*, 7:92.