

THE SHALLOW INTERPRETATION OF CLERICALISM

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IN A SHALLOW INTERPRETATION OF CLERICALISM, many Western commentators in the liberal or progressive wing of Roman Catholic media, as well as Pope Francis, have argued that clericalism is a problematic "culture" needing to be reformed. But, as my book *Roman Catholic Clericalism* (Pacem in Terris Press, 2018) has documented, **clericalism is also a deep-seated institutional system**. With roots going back over a millennium and half, the ancient clerical system has been overlaid as an anti-evangelical institution upon the lay Catholic sacrament of Orders.

The anti-evangelical Roman Catholic clerical institution was systemically constructed by **three historical stages of legislation**, which were first imperial, then papal, and finally conciliar.

- IN THE 4TH CENTURY, the Roman Empire constructed through imperial legislation the **priestly-hierarchical "clerical state."** It mutated the Eastern and Western Catholic Church's lay episcopal and presbyteral servant-leaders into a priestly-hierarchical clerical class mandated to rule over the *Laos* (laity) – in direct violation of the New Testament's servant-leader model.
- IN THE 11TH CENTURY, papal legislation by the so-called 'Gregorian Reform' rejected the thousand-year-old apostolic tradition of married episcopal and presbyteral pastors. It misogynistically further mutated Western Catholic "clergy" – still by and large married and with children – into a **monastic-like clerical-celibate caste**. That mutation was designed to provide loyal male celibate cadres to support the high-medieval papacy's new and anti-evangelical theocratic power, administered by the new imperial-papal Curia.
- IN THE 16TH CENTURY, when Protestant evangelization began to spread into Catholic territories through the extended kinship-system, the Council of Trent legislated that candidates for ordination be segregated into **monastic-like clerical seminaries**. It thus clericalized and isolated the intellectual and spiritual formation of those candidates for the lay sacrament of ordination from the vast majority of Jesus' lay disciples within the one and holy *Laos*.

Clearly anti-evangelical, the Western Catholic **clerical-celibate-seminary system** has long constituted an institutional structure disfiguring ordained servant-leaders within Jesus' egalitarian lay movement. Now, with the late-modern collapse of Catholic church-state partnerships, that clericalist, celibate, and monasticized institutional system has become dysfunctional and eccentric, and too often pathological. **As a result, it is now crippling the Western Catholic evangelization.**

The anti-evangelical Roman or Western Catholic institution of clericalism now needs to be dismantled in Canon Law, in order to liberate the lay servant-leadership sacrament of Orders from imprisonment within the non-evangelical clerical-celibate-seminary system, and in order to re-ground the Western evangelization in all the baptized disciples of Jesus' holy *Laos*.

While canonically dismantling that anti-evangelical institutional system is urgent, such dismantling will nonetheless take time, as well as love, courage, and prudence. It will probably also require an **ecumenical council that gives special voice to Eastern Catholic Churches**, with their rich traditions of lay participation and synodality.