

THE SHALLOW INTERPRETATION OF CLERICALISM

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Pope Francis and a long series of Catholic commentators, including in America, Commonweal, LaCroix, and National Catholic Reporter, have insisted that clericalism is a problematic "culture." But that is a shallow interpretation of clericalism. As my 2018 book titled ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERICALISM documented, **clericalism is not a culture but rather a deep-seated institutional system.** With roots going back over a millennium and half, the ancient clerical system has been superimposed as an anti-evangelical institution upon the lay Catholic sacrament of Orders.

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

- In the 4th century, Roman imperial legislation established **the priestly-hierarchical clerical state** by mutating the Christian community's lay episcopal and presbyteral servant-leaders into a priestly-hierarchical class imperially mandated to rule over the *Laos* (laity);
- In the 11th century, papal legislation by the so-called 'Gregorian Reform' further mutated Western Catholic clericalized episcopal and presbyteral pastors into **a monastic-like clerical-celibate caste**, which rejected the 1000-year-old apostolic tradition of married bishops and presbyters for the purpose of training loyal celibate cadres to support the papacy's new and anti-evangelical theocratic power, administered by the new imperial-papal curia;
- In the 16th Century, legislation by the Council of Trent intellectually and spiritually segregated Western candidates for ordination into **monastic-like clerical seminaries**, thus isolating these candidates from the majority of Jesus' baptized disciples within the one and holy *Laos*.

Clearly counter-evangelical, **the Western Catholic clerical-celibate-seminary system** always constituted an institutional system that uprooted ordained servant-leaders from Jesus' egalitarian lay movement. Now, however, since the modern collapse of Catholic church-state partnerships, that clericalist institutional system has also become dysfunctional, eccentric, and sometimes even pathological. Most importantly, it is now crippling the Western Catholic evangelization.

The Roman Catholic institutional system of clericalism needs to be dismantled in Canon Law, in order to liberate the lay servant-leadership sacrament of Orders, and to re-center the Western evangelization in the all the baptized disciples of Jesus' holy *Laos*. While canonically dismantling all three historical stages of that anti-evangelical system is urgent, such dismantling will nonetheless take time, as well as love, courage, prudence, and, probably, an ecumenical council that gives special voice to Eastern Catholic Churches with their rich traditions of participation and synodality.