

The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement:  
A National Study  
of its  
Liturgy, Doctrine, and Leadership

A DISSERTATION

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*In India, there was a great master who was renowned for giving a secret mantra, and there was a young boy who wanted initiation. But the boy was in an untouchable caste and the master was in a Brahmin caste. So the young boy approached the master, but the master wouldn't take him as a student.*

*The young boy observed the master for some period of time and he noticed that very early in the morning, just as the sun was rising, the master would walk to the bathing ghats to take a bath. So the boy went and he lay down on the steps that led to the bathing ghat.*

*When the master walked down the steps he didn't notice the boy, because the sun hadn't risen yet, and so he stepped on him. And when he stepped on him, in the master's shock he said the mantra, out loud, because the master was saying the mantra all the time.*

*When the master realized what had happened, he got somewhat annoyed. He said to the boy, "You tricked me." He said, "You've tricked me and it's not right. It's not a formal initiation."*

*But the boy, who was a wiseguy, said, "Well, you said the mantra with all devotion and all purity, and therefore I received it in the same way, and...Too late! I've got it! So lick me," he said. No, he didn't!*

*When a master has prejudices, there are ways of getting the teaching anyway. You just have to be very tricky, that's all.<sup>1</sup>*

*...the issues raised by EVs [episcopi vagantes] will not go away; and we need a more thoughtful, less hostile, and more discriminating approach to a subculture that, however odd and marginal, deserves to be treated with respect, compassion, and intelligence.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Lozowick, *Zen Trash: Irreverent and Sacred Teaching Stories of Lee Lozowick* (Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 2002), 51-52.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Leech, "Oversight, but no see," *The Church Times* (March 17, 2000, available on line at <http://copies.anglicanonline.org/churchtimes/000317/feat.htm>, November 21, 2004). Leech is a priest and theologian in the Church of England.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### *I. Beginnings*

On a bright Sunday morning in Chicago, a number of colorfully robed deacons, priests, and bishops have gathered in a chapel in the basement of a member's house for the elaborate weekly liturgy of a church with almost no lay members, and no listing in the phone book. In Wilmington, a grandmother kneels before a piano bench which serves as her altar, as she lifts a golden chalice in adoration. On the outskirts of Baltimore, a group of housewives, lawyers, and artists, among others, have gathered in a hotel room. They have donned blue robes, and surround a novice who kneels before their abbess, nervously holding the handwritten vows he is about to recite. These persons are faces of the independent sacramental movement in the United States today.<sup>3</sup>

By the independent sacramental movement, I refer to a broad range of communities which share a number of characteristics in common: small communities and/or solitary clergy; experimentation in theology and liturgy; mostly unpaid clergy; ordination available to a large percentage of the membership; a sacramental and eucharistic spirituality, with a mediatory priesthood, in most cases preserving the historic episcopate. Traditionalist groups which seek to return to an earlier era (the 1928 Prayer Book for Anglicans; or the Tridentine rite, for Roman Catholics) have different dynamics, although they are closely related to their liberal cousins, and there is more

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<sup>3</sup> The described communities are the Christos-Sophia Church of Chicago, Illinois; the ministry of Bishop Linda Beaman of Wilmington, Delaware; and a meeting of the general chapter of the Order of Saint Michael in Baltimore, Maryland.

cross-fertilization than either side generally cares to admit.<sup>4</sup> Our focus will be weighted toward the liberal groups, but with reference to the traditionalists, especially those who adhere to orthodox theology but are experimenting in other areas. In the interest of space, we will confine our examination of the contemporary phenomenon to the United States. While found around the world, independent sacramental Christianity is quintessentially American in its entrepreneurial, voluntarist spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Many persons are aware of some communities which have left the larger liturgical, sacramental churches, such as Imani Temple in Washington, DC, or Spiritus Christi in Rochester, New York, both prominent schisms from the Roman Church. Actor and movie producer Mel Gibson has recently drawn attention to Catholic traditionalist groups, to one of which he belongs. Contemporary disputes in the Episcopal Church have seen some Episcopalians leaving for splinter groups, whether liberal or conservative. These more sizeable groups are only the tip of the iceberg. The United States today is home to literally hundreds of tiny ecclesiastical jurisdictions, which share the sacramental life of the Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches. Dissatisfaction with the larger churches, as well as recent scandals, has led a growing number of people to these small bodies.

Independent sacramental churches are often under the radar - small, moving, and not always easy to find. Some priests exercise a primarily solitary vocation, and even

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<sup>4</sup> I have met a large number of persons who began within the traditionalist groups, and then later moved to more experimental or liberal groups, and vice versa. I also recall attending a consecration of a continuing Anglican bishop in 1998. The new bishop and his jurisdiction were opposed to women's ordination and increased openness to gay and lesbian persons. Nonetheless, his episcopal consecrators were two gay men and a lesbian. The female co-consecrator was cropped from photos which later appeared on the jurisdiction's website.

<sup>5</sup> In Thomas Frank's account of his meeting with one of the several independent popes, Michael I (David Bawden), who lives in Kansas, he also points to the very American nature of the "conjunction of spiritual grandiosity and humble surroundings" often found in this movement. What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2004), 223.

many of their close associates may not be aware of their ordained status. Clergy are often very attached to their individual views of theology, liturgy, and other matters. One independent priest expressed this tendency well in a project he called “Anarchrist: The Heterodox Communion.”<sup>6</sup> In sharp contrast, a former independent bishop who is now a lay member of the Roman Church asked me, “Just how perfect does the church have to be?”<sup>7</sup> He accurately pointed to the fact that many persons in the independent movement are not willing to live with perceived faults and imperfections of the mainstream, and would rather belong to miniscule groups which more closely approximate their vision of Christianity, or where they are free to believe whatever they please. Perhaps this is a sin against unity. The former bishop probably thinks so. Nonetheless, one might ask how much uniformity is needed for unity. Perhaps the anarchic confusion of the independent movement is actually a creative ferment, where valuable ecclesiastical experiments are taking place, the results of which can then be offered to the larger church.

The reader will note that, while I openly acknowledge problems, difficulties, and controversies, I will give a largely positive portrayal of the independent sacramental movement. This has been my experience of this version of Christian faith, and I believe it is an accurate picture. In any religious tradition, and in any Christian denomination, one can find tragic examples of unhealthy persons and clergy misconduct. While important to an accurate portrayal, such failings are not the core of the story, whether one is discussing mainstream or alternative churches.

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<sup>6</sup> The priest in question was Jan Valenin Saether of the Ecclesia Gnostica. Saether lived in Los Angeles until the mid-1990s, when he returned to his native Norway. I am not aware of the current fate of the Anarchrist project, which is no longer found on Saether’s website, <http://www.janvalentinsaether.com> (December 2, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Ken Jensen, former Evangelical Orthodox bishop of Indianapolis, interview conducted in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 12, 2004.

## *II. Method*

The independent sacramental movement presents significant barriers to academic study. It is widely scattered, anarchic, and sometimes difficult to locate, as groups are often without stable physical locations or phone numbers. It is virtually impossible to determine the overall number of jurisdictions (in the 100s), communities (in the 1000s), clergy, and members in the United States today. Due to the experimental nature of many groups, they are in a state of constant redefinition. In addition, both clergy and laity move with relative ease from one jurisdiction to another. Thus, one can only hope for a reasonably accurate snapshot.

The limited scholarly literature is reviewed in the next chapter. Independent sacramental churches and clergy have also produced an ever-growing amount of promotional, liturgical, and spiritual writings, the vast majority of which are self-published. While some institutions (such as the Institute for the Study of American Religion and Emory University) hold some papers related to these groups, most of the material remains in private hands. More serious effort to archive documents in publicly available collections is desperately needed. I have collected several boxes of papers, pamphlets, photographs, sermons, liturgies, ordination certificates, codes of canon law, and the occasional book or recording in the past twenty years. I have also benefited from many persons who willingly shared items from their collections, and allowed me to rifle through their basements and attics.



The explosion of the internet in the past fifteen years has been a great boon to all students of the independent sacramental movement. A quick glance at the web will reveal hundreds of websites devoted to these groups, orders, and churches. Some jurisdictions seem to exist primarily in cyberspace. The internet has provided a cheap and efficient means for these groups to disseminate their message to potentially interested persons. Email has enabled far-flung brothers and sisters to maintain a level of contact previously impossible. Of course, it is notoriously difficult to confirm information posted on the internet. It is also worthy of note that there are a significant number of clergy and jurisdictions who do not maintain any web presence, and do not wish to do so.

When dealing with ephemeral material produced by a multitude of tiny groups, it is often all but impossible to clearly distinguish between reality and visionary hope, not to mention the occasional intentional deception. I have attempted to confirm all facts from multiple sources, whenever possible, and to set aside claims which seem patently unreasonable. I trust that my readers will inform me of any errors of fact, which I will happily correct.

My most important source material has come from personal visits with a wide range of communities, and interviews (by phone, email, and in person) with several dozen past and present participants in the movement. Subjects were informed of the nature of my project, and consented to the use of the information they shared. Here again the potential distortions of a subject's memory and his or her personal agendas have challenged my ability to present a fair and accurate account. In addition to the visits and interviews undertaken specifically for this project, I have drawn on other contacts and visits of the past twenty years. In the case of multiple visits to one community or several

conversations with one individual, I have often condensed the account, without altering the content. Whenever requested by interview subjects, and in other cases when information seemed sensitive, I have concealed identities.

Working with this material was akin to taking a snapshot of a fast-moving dancer (or perhaps a tornado of newsletters, websites, and liturgical pamphlets). The snapshot may be reasonably accurate, but only conveys a particular moment and posture. The vitality of the living dance is, at best, only suggested. The story of the independent sacramental movement is growing and changing in every moment. Any account will quickly become out of date. I can only hope that this dissertation provides a valuable guide to the state of the movement, at the time of my writing.

### *III. Onward*

Following a review of the scholarly literature, we will turn first to the historical roots of the contemporary independent movement, which run back for several centuries. After having surveyed the development of the most significant strands of this ecclesiastical phenomenon, we will undertake detailed examinations of liturgy, theology, and leadership in these communities, as currently practiced in the United States. Our intent will be accurate understanding, rather than judgment or prescription. Finally, we will consider what themes and insights have emerged from our consideration of this unusual new form of Christianity in North America today.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

The existing academic literature on independent sacramental churches is relatively sparse, and not generally sympathetic. Through reviewing the current state of the literature, we will quickly see the value of the present dissertation.

We should first note the various studies related to the Old Catholic churches in Europe, most notably C.B. Moss' classic, The Old Catholic Movement.<sup>8</sup> While the work of Moss, an Anglican priest, remains an invaluable English language resource for tracing the history of Old Catholicism, he is primarily focused on the large Old Catholic churches in continental Europe, which have become mainstream denominations. He gives only a short and unfavorable treatment of the tiny churches in Britain and the United States, which are the focus of our study:

There are several sects which claim to derive their episcopal succession from [Mathew], which are often confused with the Old Catholics, and which in some cases make use of the name "Old Catholic". It cannot be too strongly emphasized that none of these sects is Old Catholic or is recognized in any way by the genuine old Catholic churches in communion with the Archbishop of Utrecht.<sup>9</sup>

Anglican theologian Kenneth Leech reports that Moss once remarked that “such people should be gathered up and put on a desert island, where they could hold ceremonies, excommunicate one another, and argue about valid orders until the *eschaton*.”<sup>10</sup> Later scholarship has added substantially to our knowledge of the origins of Old Catholicism,

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<sup>8</sup> C.B. Moss, The Old Catholic Movement (London: SPCK, 1948). Moss' work supplanted the earlier treatments by J.M. Neale, History of the So-called Jansenist Church of Holland (Oxford: J. Henry and J. Parker, 1858), and A.M.E. Scarth, The Story of the Old Catholic and Kindred Movements: Leading Up to a Union of National Independent Churches (Bath: R.E. Peach, 1883).

<sup>9</sup> Moss, 308.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Leech, “Oversight, but no see,” The Church Times (March 17, 2000, available on line at <http://copies.anglicansonline.org/churchtimes/000317/feat.htm>, November 21, 2004).

especially William Doyle's work on Jansenism, and the publication of the correspondence of Dominique-Marie Varlet.<sup>11</sup> There are also excellent works on the later path of the European churches, which has been very different from that of their more anarchic American cousins.<sup>12</sup>

The first sustained treatment of the churches under our consideration is found in Episcopi Vagantes and the Anglican Church by Henry Brandreth, an Anglican priest, who was assigned to prepare a report on the topic for the Church of England.<sup>13</sup> On the first page of the preface, Brandreth refers to "that light-hearted trafficking in holy things which characterises so many of the *episcopi vagantes*," as well as "the harm done by these misguided men."<sup>14</sup> With such a preface, the reader is well warned to expect a biased study. Brandreth also stresses the need for the "sanction of the Church" in regard to holy orders, and expresses his opinion that "Orders which are wantonly irregular are, in fact, invalid and worthless."<sup>15</sup> Despite his prejudices, and occasional errors,<sup>16</sup> Brandreth's work remains valuable due to his direct contact with many independent bishops of his day. The ephemeral nature of many independent churches, and the lack of reliable, centralized record-keeping, forces the historian to place heavy reliance upon such accounts. The bishops of the 1940s are no longer with us, but we can at least examine the information they provided to Brandreth.

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<sup>11</sup> William Doyle, Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000); Basil Guy, ed. Domestic Correspondence of Dominique-Marie Varlet, Bishop of Babylon 1678-1742 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Gordon Huelin, Old Catholics and Anglicans 1931-1981 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Henry R.T. Brandreth, Episcopi Vagantes and the Anglican Church (London: SPCK, 1947). A second edition of the book was produced in 1961.

<sup>14</sup> Brandreth, vii.

<sup>15</sup> Brandreth, 10.

<sup>16</sup> A case in point is Brandreth's doubt that Ulric Vernon Herford was ever consecrated as a bishop. See Brandreth, 53-56. This matter is discussed below in Chapter 3.

A similar, although much more lengthy, work is Bishops at Large, by the Roman Catholic layman, Peter Anson.<sup>17</sup> Anson's study, published in 1964, continues to be enormously helpful to any student of independent sacramental churches. Anson can rightly be seen as continuing Brandreth's work, in that Brandreth helped him with his research, and in the personal bias which runs through the book. Much as with Brandreth, Anson was helped by many independent bishops of his day, especially in Britain. The information he was able to gather is unparalleled, even if one might hope for a more sympathetic treatment. In the forward to the book, he writes:

This book should be read purely as an historical study. I have tried to refrain from passing judgment on any of the founders of splinter churches or their followers, for it would be presumptuous for me, as a Catholic layman, to express personal opinion on actions which it is difficult for me to appreciate or to understand. Assumptions and values are outside my province. My object has been to record facts, and let the reader form his or her opinion from them. Accordingly, some readers may feel that these autocephalous churches (as they now prefer to call themselves) are edifying examples of true Christian liberty; others that they are merely symptoms of tragic revolt against authority, and a warning to those who are tempted to follow in the footsteps of these free-lance ecclesiastics.<sup>18</sup>

In Anson's difficulty in appreciating or understanding the actions of his subjects, we can detect an unacknowledged judgment rearing its head. As if to confirm our suspicion, immediately following the paragraph above, Anson writes that "so many of these so-called autocephalous churches of the past hundred years belong to the world of *Alice in Wonderland* or *Alice Through the Looking Glass*."<sup>19</sup> While Anson's account is well documented, and generally accurate as to the facts, his treatment of bishops such as

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<sup>17</sup> Peter F. Anson, Bishops at Large (New York: October House, 1964).

<sup>18</sup> Anson, 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Anson, 25.

Hugh George de Willmott Newman (Mar Georgius of Glastonbury) approaches satire.<sup>20</sup>

Anson reports that Mar Georgius' work "has never been much more than an unsubstantial pageant, a fascinating castle in the air...."<sup>21</sup> Anson's book is highly entertaining and humorous, but misses much in his admitted failure to truly understand the motivations of the churches and clergy he describes.

In 1979, the Rev. Jonathan Trela, a priest of the Polish National Catholic Church, published his Master's thesis, A History of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> While not adding substantially to the work of Brandreth and Anson, Trela is more sympathetic, and provides more information on the history of these small churches after their arrival in North America. Trela's work is primarily focused on the more traditional, theologically orthodox bodies, especially the work of Bishop Carmel Henry Carfora. One might see a continuation of his work in the mostly unpublished research of Gregory Singleton, Professor of History at Northeastern Illinois University. Singleton is also an inactive priest in a conservative jurisdiction descended from Carfora's efforts, the Old Roman Catholic Church in North American, under Archbishop Francis Facione.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1978 edition of The Encyclopedia of American Religion, J. Gordon Melton provided some descriptions of a number of independent jurisdictions in the United States, perhaps the first catalog of its kind.<sup>24</sup> A more thorough review of the field is found in

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<sup>20</sup> See Anson, Chapter 10 ("The Catholicate of the West"), 443-501

<sup>21</sup> Anson, 500-501.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Trela, A History of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1979). The book originated as Father Trela's thesis for the degree of Master of Sacred Theology at Drew University.

<sup>23</sup> The ORCCNA website is <http://www.orccna.org/> (November 21, 2004). Singleton has put a small amount of his work on the internet at <http://www.neiu.edu/~history/ocp.htm> (November 21, 2004). His website states that, following the death of his co-investigator, John Hickey, in 2002, he has abandoned this project. One can only hope that Professor Singleton will reconsider.

<sup>24</sup> Melton, J. Gordon, The Encyclopedia of American Religion (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publishing, 1978). See also the later editions of this encyclopedia.

The Old Catholic Sourcebook, a collaboration between Melton and independent bishop Karl Pruter.<sup>25</sup> The sourcebook makes a particularly broad survey of many different groups, with some initial efforts toward classification, and a great deal of raw data. Much of the information was provided directly by the bishops and churches in question, and neither volume engages in much critical analysis. Melton's Institute for the Study of American Religion in Santa Barbara, California houses one of the larger collections of documents about the independent movement.<sup>26</sup>

Whereas Melton and Pruter largely focused on churches or other forms of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, a British bishop named Alan Bain chose to organize a study according to individual bishops. Given the fluctuating nature of independent churches, and the tendency of many bishops to move from one jurisdiction to another, or to serve in multiple organizations at once, one sees the wisdom of Bain's approach. The bishop, rather than the church, is the basic unit of this variety of Christianity. Bain's initial publication, Bishops Irregular: An International Directory of Independent Bishops is precisely that: a directory of names with minimal information on consecrations and jurisdictions, and little commentary.<sup>27</sup> However, Bain's introduction at least provides a more positive vision of the movement:

What I believe we are seeing are the seeds of a new kind of ministry that can adapt itself to the time and place of its exercise, the needs of the moment, and the people who are actually present in that particular place at that particular time. And yet is it so new? Is it not perhaps the very way that St. Paul set about spreading the Gospel and building the Church? Speaking as a Jew to the Jews, a Greek to the Greeks? Respecting the customs and ethos of the local people rather

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<sup>25</sup> Pruter, Karl, and J. Gordon Melton, The Old Catholic Sourcebook (New York, Garland, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> The ISAR webpage can be found at <http://www.americanreligion.org> (November 21, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Alan Bain, Bishops Irregular: An International Directory of Independent Bishops (Bristol: A.M. Bain, 1985).

than seeking to impose his personal will upon them? And yet he brought them the same Lord, the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same Gospel.<sup>28</sup>

Four years later, Bain published a supplement, updating his work.<sup>29</sup> Soon thereafter, in 1990, Bain collaborated with Gary Ward and independent bishop Bertil Persson to produce a larger directory, with more comprehensive narrative entries: Independent Bishops: An International Directory.<sup>30</sup> This is the famous “red book” found on the shelves of many independent clergy, and it comes closer than any of its predecessors to providing a comprehensive survey of the wandering bishops. As with earlier directories, much of the information has been provided by the subjects, and has not always been verified. While offering a gold mine of data, Bain, Persson, and Ward provide little overall analysis. Unfortunately, there have been no further editions of the directory, and it has become woefully out of date.

In addition to collaborating in the above noted projects, bishops Pruter and Persson have both authored a number of small monographs on the history of the independent sacramental movement. These self-published booklets are primarily directed to other independent clergy. While quite helpful, they are not academic studies. Examples include Pruter’s Bishops Extraordinary,<sup>31</sup> a survey presentation of some of the key figures in the history of autocephalous churches, and Persson’s Some New Contributions to the Biography of Joseph Rene Vilatte.<sup>32</sup> Other popular introductions to the independent movement include Andre Queen’s Old Catholic: History, Ministry,

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<sup>28</sup> Bain, Bishops Irregular, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Bain, Bishops Irregular: Supplement 1989 (Bristol: A.M. Bain, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Gary L. Ward, Bertil Persson, and Alan Bain, Independent Bishops: An International Directory (Detroit, Michigan: Apogee Books, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Karl Pruter, Bishops Extraordinary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Highlandville, MO: St. Willibrord’s Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Bertil Persson, Some New Contributions to the Biography of Joseph Rene Vilatte (Solna, Sweden: St Ephrem’s Institute, 1998).



Faith, and Mission<sup>33</sup>, and Lewis Keizer's The Wandering Bishops, which has seen wide circulation, especially within the liberal and esoteric segments of the movement.<sup>34</sup>

William Henry Hugo Newman-Norton, better known as Abba Seraphim of the British Orthodox Church, is researching a massive work on independent history, to be titled Flesh of Our Brethren.<sup>35</sup>

In 1992, independent bishop James Ishmael Ford was awarded the degree of Master of Arts by the Pacific School of Religion, with a thesis titled Episcopi Vagantes and the Challenge to Catholic Ministry.<sup>36</sup> Ford provides a detailed analysis of ministry within the independent context, drawing on his experiences in the 1980s to early 90s. He also shares fascinating historical information about key figures such as the gay activist and bishop Mikhail Itkin. By time Ford was completing his thesis, he was on the way out of the independent movement, and today is a Unitarian Universalist minister. He states that he is “inclined to believe the independent Catholic movement is simply an aberration, able to exist at all only through an unhealthy understanding of the nature of ministry.”<sup>37</sup>

Another significant thesis is that by Eric A. Badertscher, who is affiliated with the Traditional Episcopal Church. Badertscher's thesis, The Measure of a Bishop: The Episcopi Vagantes, Apostolic Succession, and the Legitimacy of the Anglican

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<sup>33</sup> Andre J. Queen, Old Catholic: History, Ministry, Faith, and Mission, (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Lewis Keizer, The Wandering Bishops: Heralds of a New Christianity (Seaside, CA: Academy of Arts and Humanities, 1976.) Keizer has published a revised and expanded edition: The Wandering Bishops: Apostles of a New Spirituality (Santa Cruz, CA: Home Temple Press, 2000), which may also be downloaded from Keizer's website, <http://www.hometemple.org> (December 17, 2004). The original edition also remains available from Sophia Divinity School.

<sup>35</sup> Abba Seraphim has graciously shared some of his unpublished manuscript with me. While Abba Seraphim was originally an independent bishop of the Catholice of the West, Orthodox Church of the British Isles, he has led his jurisdiction into full union with the Coptic Orthodox Church.

<sup>36</sup> James Ishmael Ford, Episcopi Vagantes and the Challenge to Catholic Ministry (MA thesis, Pacific School of Religion, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> Email from James Ishmael Ford, February 22, 2004.

“Continuing Church” Movement, remains the most complete treatment of Anglican traditionalist groups, to date.<sup>38</sup> Traditionalist movements which spring from Roman Catholicism have been ably covered by Michael W. Cuneo, in his The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism.<sup>39</sup> Cuneo’s level of thick description, and combination of scholarly objectivity with a genuine understanding of his subjects, is a fine model of research well done.

In addition to the above works, recent decades have seen studies of a few churches or groups which either belong to the independent movement, or are closely related to it, depending on how one draws the lines. Jerzy Peterkiewicz’s study of the Mariavites remains immensely helpful,<sup>40</sup> as does Stephen Wlodarski’s history of the Polish National Catholic Church.<sup>41</sup> Allen Guelzo has written a fine account of the Reformed Episcopalians, who have recently begun to play a larger role in Anglican traditionalism.<sup>42</sup> Finally, Phillip Charles Lucas’ telling of the remarkable story of the Holy Order of MANS and its various successor groups is both even-handed and enlightening.<sup>43</sup> Other books and articles of more limited scope will be noted in the text.

To date, there is no academic survey and analysis of the more experimental segment of the small autocephalous liturgical churches in contemporary North America.

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<sup>38</sup> Eric A. Badertscher, The Measure of a Bishop: The *Epsicopi Vagantes*, Apostolic Succession, and the Legitimacy of the Anglican “Continuing Church” Movement (M.A. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1998) available on-line at <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/pc/essays/badertscher/> (November 21, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Michael W. Cuneo, The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Jerzy Peterkiewicz, The Third Adam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Wlodarski, The Origins and Growth of the Polish National Catholic Church (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1975). See also Bernard Wielewinski, ed. Polish National Catholic Church: Independent Movements, Old Catholic Church, and Related Items: An Annotated Bibliography (Boulder: Eastern European Monographs, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians. (University Park, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Phillip Charles Lucas, The Odyssey of a New Religion: The Holy Order of MANS from New Age to Orthodoxy (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Nonetheless, these groups form a growing phenomenon, which deserves attention. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap in scholarship.

## Chapter 3

### The Historical Roots of the Independent Sacramental Movement

#### *I. Introduction*

When a visitor first encounters an independent sacramental community in contemporary North America, the initial questions are often historical: “Where did this come from? Who ordained you? Did you invent this?” These questions are natural, especially in contexts where words like Catholic, Orthodox, or Anglican are used, as this vocabulary points toward widely known historical traditions within Christianity. The answers are neither simple nor brief.

There are groups, primarily among Roman Catholic traditionalists, where history and priestly lineage are relatively clear-cut, but these organizations are the exception. Most independent churches have a bewilderingly complex ancestry. One small group may have history reaching back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century schism in Utrecht, several late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century missions sponsored by Oriental Orthodox churches, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian Catholic schism, not to mention added flavor from the new priesthood inaugurated in 1922 by the Austrian esoteric teacher Rudolf Steiner. And the contemporary liturgy and theology of the group may not closely resemble any of the foregoing. Many independent bishops have been consecrated multiple times, in an effort to insure sacramental validity and consolidate claims to the historic episcopate. Such consecrations, in which literally dozens of “lineages” can be transmitted from one bishop to another, only increase the difficulty of accurately describing the ancestry of any given group.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Such multiple consecrations are usually conducted under the theory of conveying a sacrament *sub conditione*, in which an unrepeatable sacrament is re-enacted, where there is doubt that all elements

This knotted web can be untangled into three main strands. First, there is the heritage received from the western liturgical churches, beginning with the schism of the church of Utrecht in the Netherlands in 1724, and continuing through later breaks from the Anglican and Roman communions. Second, there is a significant heritage received from the eastern churches: the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Orthodox, as well as the eastern churches in union with Rome. Finally, there are important claims to sacramental holy orders which are rooted not in the historic episcopate, but in direct spiritual experience, and non-physical transmission (e.g., ordination received directly from Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul, deceased Cathar bishops, or an angel).

Throughout this account, we will keep an eye on themes which will become critically important in the contemporary independent sacramental world, particularly the centrality of priesthood and the fluid nature of the groups involved. The way the story is focused on ordinations, bishops, and lineages indicates an overriding concern with the sacramental life, and the priesthood deemed necessary for it. As one independent prelate jokingly remarked to me, “Whatever else we may disagree about, we all believe earnestly in apostolic succession!” In many independent groups, a large percentage of the membership is ordained, to the point that one wonders whether (as with the Quakers) the laity has been abolished! Most independent clergy eschew traditional notions of ecclesiastical jurisdiction (such as confining episcopal ministry to a geographically limited diocese), or interpret the same in very free ways. These churches are also small and extremely fluid by nature, often shifting their names and theologies at will. New groups and churches are continuously being formed, whether out of true vocation and

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necessary for validity were present the first time. However, in independent sacramental groups, subconditional consecrations often occur where there is no expressed doubt concerning validity, but only the intention of acquiring additional claims to episcopal lineage.

freedom in Christ, or from intractable egotism and divisiveness. Our historical examination will illumine at least some aspects of the origins of these characteristics.

*I. Heritage from the Western Church*

Most independent sacramental churches in North America are first and foremost the descendents of the western liturgical churches, especially the European Old Catholic Churches, although there have been later schisms from both Rome and the Anglican Communion. As most independent churches stress the heritage they have received from these larger, historic churches, and claim continuity of faith and ministry with them, we must survey this complex history in some detail, beginning with Old Catholicism.

*A. Old Catholicism*

The Old Catholic Churches<sup>45</sup> trace their origins to the schism of the see of Utrecht (in today's Netherlands) in 1724. Catholicism was tolerated but not established in post-Reformation Holland, and in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Utrecht attracted many clergy who were associated with, or accused of a connection to the so-called "Jansenist" movement. Jansenism was named for Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres, author of a posthumously published book, Augustinus. At least according to its detractors, the teaching on grace and free will in Jansen's work, and in certain other interpretations of Augustine, veered too close to Luther and Calvin. It is often hard to disentangle theological Jansenism from

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<sup>45</sup> "Old Catholicism" is the name usually given to those churches in union with the see of Utrecht (in the Netherlands). It has also been adopted by other churches which trace their spiritual ancestry to Utrecht. The term points to western Catholicism prior to the solidification of centralized papal authority. It became a common label in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in opposition to the decree of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. See Moss, 233.

the desire to maintain local ecclesiastical autonomy in the face of growing Roman centralization.<sup>46</sup>

Pieter Codde, the Archbishop of Utrecht, refused to sign formularies against Jansenism, and was first suspended and then deposed from his position in 1702. The cathedral chapter of Utrecht refused to accept the deposition, and held that Rome did not have the authority for this action.<sup>47</sup> After the death of Codde in 1710, Utrecht was without a bishop. Rome had already placed the Dutch Catholics in the care of the papal nuncio at Cologne, but the civil authorities of the United Provinces “inspired by a new-found sense of nationalism” would not grant entrance to the nuncio’s emissaries.<sup>48</sup> Thus was the state of the church of Utrecht in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century – cut off from Rome, suspected of heresy, and deprived of any episcopal ministrations.

In 1718, a French missionary to the New World, Dominique-Marie Varlet, was recalled to France in order to be consecrated as Bishop of Ascalon, and co-adjutor to the Bishop of Babylon.<sup>49</sup> These regions are in contemporary Iran and Iraq. The same day as his consecration, Varlet learned of the death of the Bishop of Babylon, and was duly appointed as his successor.<sup>50</sup>

Varlet set off on his journey to Babylon, with the intention of sailing to St Petersburg and traveling overland through Russia. Bad weather forced an unplanned landing in Amsterdam on April 2, 1719.<sup>51</sup> Varlet walked into the state of the Dutch church described above, which was becoming more desperate as its isolation lengthened.

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<sup>46</sup> William Doyle, Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Moss, 106-107; Doyle, 70.

<sup>48</sup> Guy, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Guy, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Pruter, Bishops Extraordinary, 9-10.

<sup>51</sup> Guy, 6.

No confirmations had happened since the death of Archbishop Codde. Upon learning of a bishop in their midst, the Dutch Catholics urged Varlet to perform confirmations for them. The earnest missionary could not refuse.<sup>52</sup>

Varlet traveled onward within a few days, but never reached his see. While stopped at the Persian border, emissaries reached him with letters suspending him as he had not properly reported to the papal nuncio to accept the bull *Unigenitas*, condemning Jansenism, before his departure from France, and he had then proceeded to exercise his episcopal ministry outside his appointed jurisdiction – the confirmations in Holland. Varlet returned to Europe to argue his case. Stopping again in the United Provinces, he was pressed by the Dutch clergy to stay, which he did.<sup>53</sup>

The upshot of a free-thinking bishop with missionary convictions landing in the midst of the oppressed Jansenist Dutch Catholics was a heartfelt appeal to consecrate a bishop for them. The Dutch clergy properly elected Cornelius Steenhoven, and sent all the required documentation to Rome, with invitations to various bishops to participate in the consecration. Silence was the reply. So, on October 15, 1724, Varlet consecrated Steenhoven. Unfortunately, things were not to be so simple. Steenhoven died, and the identical procedure was repeated with Cornelius Wuytiers in 1725, and Theordorus van der Croon in 1734. They both died, also.<sup>54</sup> By the time of the consecration of van der Croon, Varlet was in poor health and had already suffered the first of a series of strokes that were to eventually take his life.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Guy, 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Guy, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Moss, 124-129.

<sup>55</sup> Guy, 126-127.



When Bishop van der Croon died in 1739, Peter-Jan Meindaerts was duly elected as his successor, and on October 18, 1739, the aging and failing Bishop Varlet consecrated him.<sup>56</sup> Varlet suffered several strokes in 1740, and after a particularly serious one on Christmas Day, 1740, his “health and mind seemed to be seriously impaired and he entered into a long decline.”<sup>57</sup> Those whom he had cared for in spirit now cared for him in body until his death on May 14, 1742.

Given the lifespan of his predecessors, Bishop Meindaerts lost no time in consecrating other bishops to insure the episcopal succession in Utrecht, despite the expected excommunications issuing from Rome.<sup>58</sup> Efforts toward reconciliation with Rome continued, but did not bear fruit, and the psychological divide deepened with passing years. The history of the Church of Utrecht continued quietly for a time. They did protest against the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854, with a call for an ecumenical council.<sup>59</sup> A council followed within a few years, but its actions were not in accord with the hopes of the Old Catholics.

The (First) Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church opened on the feast of the recently defined Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1869.<sup>60</sup> Opposition toward the drive to defining papal infallibility was centered in Germany, around the learned and sharp-witted Rev. Dr. Ignaz Dollinger.<sup>61</sup> On July 18, 1870, the council voted in favor of

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<sup>56</sup> Pruter, Bishops Extraordinary, 15-16; Guy, 22.

<sup>57</sup> Guy, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Moss, 132-133.

<sup>59</sup> Moss, 179.

<sup>60</sup> For an account of the lead up to the council, and its activity, see Moss, 190-214.

<sup>61</sup> For a brief summation of Dollinger’s life, and his critical book, The Pope and the Council, see Moss, 194-198. One might also note that, in Germany, the ground had been prepared by the earlier “German Catholic” schism of Ronge & Czerski, which began in 1844. Some of the final remnants of this movement were absorbed into Old Catholicism. See Wayne Detzler, “Protest and Schism in Nineteenth-Century German Catholicism: The Ronge-Czerski Movement, 1844-5,” in Derek Baker, ed. Schism, Heresy, and

the constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, defining papal infallibility. The theological permissibility of a papal primacy of honor, but not of jurisdictional and doctrinal authority, was thereby slammed shut.<sup>62</sup>

Clerical revolt broke out, especially in Germany and Switzerland. The Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, which had been quietly waiting for its moment to arrive, consecrated a bishop for Germany in 1873, and for Switzerland in 1876. Old Catholicism spread quickly in both countries, where it remains a large, institutionalized, mainstream religious force to the present day.<sup>63</sup>

On September 13, 1896, Pope Leo XIII issued a bull, *Apostolicae Curae*, pronouncing Anglican orders invalid. As Henry Brandreth has pointed out, anxiety in England about the validity of Anglican orders opened the door to the possibility of an Old Catholic mission.<sup>64</sup> The Old Catholics agreed with the Pope's position, and did not recognize the validity of Anglican orders until 1925.<sup>65</sup> Anglo-Catholic worries about valid orders, and Old Catholic interest in an English mission coincided in the person of Arnold Mathew.

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Religious Protest (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 341-349. Also, email correspondence with Wayne Detzler, March 9, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Moss, 202-205.

<sup>63</sup> Moss, 226-256, esp. 242, 256.

<sup>64</sup> Brandreth, x. Anglo-Catholic clerics were fretting over the validity of their orders well before the papal bull. Such worries are behind the odd story of the Order of Corporate Reunion. According to the generally accepted tale, Revs. F.G. Lee, T.W. Mossman, and J.T. Seccombe, Anglican clerics, were consecrated in Italy in 1877, by various mysterious bishops of Roman Catholic, and perhaps Orthodox and/or Old Catholic extraction. The most cited candidate for primary consecrator is Dominicus Agostino, the Patriarch of Venice. The OCR offered re-ordination, sometimes secretive, to Anglican clergy. As documentation regarding the original consecrations was intentionally destroyed, if it ever existed, it is all but impossible to adjudicate claims related to the OCR. The most recent attempt to sort out the history of the OCR is Bertil Persson, The Order of Corporate Reunion (Solna, Sweden: St. Ephrem's Institute, 1995). While this small book is composed of little more than Dr. Persson's fragmentary notes on the subject, it remains valuable. Many independent clerics continue to claim lineage from the OCR, and more than one contemporary "Order of Corporate Reunion" exists.

<sup>65</sup> Moss, 338.

Arnold Harris Mathew was born to British parents in France in 1852, and baptized as a Roman Catholic. At the age of two, he was re-baptized as an Anglican. He “went on oscillating between Rome and Canterbury for the rest of his life.”<sup>66</sup> After Anglican seminary, a return to Rome, and another conditional baptism, Mathew was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1877.<sup>67</sup> He later left the Roman priesthood, married, and worked for some time as an Anglican curate.<sup>68</sup> Mathew was a friend and correspondent of Catholic modernists<sup>69</sup> such as George Tyrrel and Hyacinthe Loyson.<sup>70</sup>

A dissatisfied Roman Catholic priest, Richard O’Halloran, raised to Mathew the prospect of contacting the Old Catholics, as an option which would avoid both the alleged invalidity of the Anglicans and the papal infallibility of the Romans. O’Halloran convinced Mathew and the bishops in Utrecht (with whom he had been corresponding since 1902) that there was a substantial number of priests and congregations, ready and willing to form an Old Catholic mission in England.

At this time, Gerard Gul, the Archbishop of Utrecht, had considerable interest in establishing new missions. Polish immigrants in the United States were chafing under the Irish and German hierarchy, and there had been a number of attempts at autonomy. Francis Hodur was a Polish immigrant priest who led an independent parish in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He and his followers were excommunicated in 1898, and by 1904 a new church, which became called the Polish National Catholic Church, was organized. On September 29, 1907, in Utrecht, Gul consecrated Hodur as a bishop. The PNCC is the

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<sup>66</sup> Anson, 156-157.

<sup>67</sup> Anson, 157-158; Pruter, *Bishops Extraordinary*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Brandreth, 12.

<sup>69</sup> “Modernism” was a catch-all term for theological liberalism in the Roman Church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>70</sup> Anson, 165-215.

only “Old Catholic” church in North America acknowledged by Utrecht, although no longer in union with it.<sup>71</sup> Gul also consecrated Jan Michal Kowalski, for the Mariavite Church in Poland, on October 5, 1909. The Mariavites began as a semi-Franciscan group within the Roman Church, based on the visions of the “Little Mother,” Mother Maria Franciszka Kozłowska. They were excommunicated in 1906, for failing to submit to Rome’s determination that the Little Mother’s visions were hallucinatory.<sup>72</sup>

Fired with zeal for expansion and believing Richard O’Halloran’s reports from England, Gul and other Old Catholic bishops consecrated Mathew, in Utrecht, on April 28, 1908, for a British mission. Upon returning to England, Mathew quickly discovered that he had been deceived about the size of his flock, and informed Utrecht without delay. Mathew seems guilty of being naïve, but not of being deceptive. Henry Brandreth

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<sup>71</sup> Stephen Włodarski, The Origin and Growth of the Polish National Catholic Church, (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1974). The Polish National Catholic Church proceeded with reforms such as general absolution (rather than an emphasis on private confession), the abolition of mandatory clerical celibacy, and a vernacular liturgy. There were also theological developments such as the proclamation of the Word of God being classed as a sacrament, with baptism and confirmation collapsed into one, to keep the number at seven. Perhaps even more significant, although less known, is the rejection of eternal punishment (and thus the embrace of a form of universalism) in the seventh of Hodur’s “Eleven Great Principles.” The Eleven Great Principles are reproduced in an appendix to Włodarski’s book, 214-226. For the 2003 break between Utrecht and the PNCC, primarily over the issue of women’s ordination, see Lawrence J. Orzell, “Disunion of Utrecht: Old Catholics Fall Out Over New Doctrines,” <http://www.touchstonemag.com/docs/issues/17.4docs/17-04-056.html> (December 5, 2004).

<sup>72</sup> For a full account of the Mariavite movement, from which the foregoing has been summarized, see Jerzy Peterkiewicz, The Third Adam, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). After the Little Mother’s death, Kowalski began to chart his own course. The radical developments included mystical marriages between nuns and priests, the ordination and consecration of women to all orders of ministry, and the “priesthood of all” with a form of the eucharist which could be celebrated by laypersons. The Mariavite sister, Isabel Wilucka, who was consecrated a bishop on March 28, 1929, may be the first female bishop in apostolic succession. (Jules Doinel of L’Eglise Gnostique had consecrated a woman, Marie Chavel de Chauvignie, in 1892, but Doinel’s female bishops were not linked to the historic episcopate.) More traditional Mariavites, led by Bishop Filip Feldman, revolted against Kowalski, with matters reaching a head in 1935. The war caused numerous difficulties and Kowalski himself died in the gas chamber at Dachau in 1942. The Mariavites continue to exist in two separate groups – one which strongly resembles the Old Catholicism of Utrecht, and the other loyal to Kowalski’s memory and continuing some of his practices (women’s ordination, lay-led eucharists) but not others (the mystical marriages).

reprints in full the letter of the Old Catholic bishops in which they exonerate Mathew:  
“We now wish to state that our confidence in Bishop Mathew remains unshaken...”<sup>73</sup>

For some time, Mathew remained in the good graces of Utrecht, and assisted in the consecration of Kowalski for the Mariavites in 1909. Matters began to unravel when Mathew, with only the tiniest of flocks, consecrated two priests to the episcopate, without consulting Utrecht and without clear reason, in 1910. In response to the ensuing protest, he declared his autonomy.<sup>74</sup> Mathew consecrated several other men, who fanned out though England and North America. Here we begin to see the small, endlessly multiplying groups, with a high percentage of the membership in holy orders, which came to characterize the independent movement.

From a historical vantage point, one of Mathew’s most important consecrations was that of an Anglican priest, Frederick Samuel Willoughby, who had lost his post due to charges of homosexuality, although that is almost certainly not what he told Mathew. After going through various sacramental formalities, beginning with conditional baptism, Willoughby was consecrated to the episcopate on October 28, 1914. Around this time, Mathew was attracting clergy, such as Robert King (a consulting psychic<sup>75</sup>) and James Wedgwood (scion of the famous china manufacturers<sup>76</sup>), who had an interest in the Theosophical Society. Mathew himself was not without sympathy for the TS, and even wrote in a letter that, “I so often have seen a sort of mental vision of Mrs. Besant [Annie

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<sup>73</sup> Brandreth, 12-13, is a succinct summary of the beginning of Mathew’s story, as well as providing the letter of the Old Catholic bishops.

<sup>74</sup> Moss, 301-304; Anson, 180-181.

<sup>75</sup> Brandreth, 19, n.3. An essay by King, “The Christian Mysteries,” with a linked biographical note and photograph, can be found on-line at <http://www.houseofthehorizon.org/public/documents.php?id=4> (April 19, 2004). For a further description of King’s psychic activity, see Gareth Knight, *Pythoness: The Life and Work of Margaret Lumley Brown*, (Oceanside, CA: Sun Chalice Press, 2000), 66.

<sup>76</sup> A short, relatively uncritical biography of Wedgwood, by James Burton, is included as the preface to James I. Wedgwood, *New Insights into Christian Worship*, (London: St. Alban Press, 1976), vii-xvi.

Besant, the current president of the TS] in the garb of an abbess!.... She would be another St. Teresa or a St Catherine of Siena – and I have for some time – quite a year – felt that that is her destiny.”<sup>77</sup>

Only a few months later, in May 1916, upon public revelation of the charges of homosexuality directed toward Willoughby, Mathew expelled him from his church, which was at that time called the Old Roman Catholic Church. On August 6, 1915, Mathew ordered the reading of a pastoral letter, addressed to all members of the church, forbidding membership in the Theosophical Society or the Order of the Star in the East (an organization formed to support Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was being promoted by the TS as the vehicle of the coming World Teacher<sup>78</sup>). Likewise, the doctrines espoused by these organizations, such as reincarnation, were condemned. Wedgwood, then a priest and canon, along with another Theosophical clergyman, wrote to Mathew “saying that he had broken faith with them, and that they must place their resignation in his hands.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Anson, 193-197. It is perhaps interesting, in light of Mathew’s vision, to note that there is a persistent rumor in Theosophical circles that Mrs. Besant was clandestinely consecrated as a bishop by Charles W. Leadbeater. I have heard this claim (always without any substantiating evidence) from a number of Theosophists, and it is alluded to by Lewis Keizer in The Wandering Bishops: Apostles of a New Spirituality. (Santa Cruz, CA: Home Temple Press, 2000), 26. Even if untrue, the rumor may have its origin in the fact that women were prohibited from sitting in the sanctuary of LCC churches, with the sole exception of Mrs. Besant. Mrs. Besant was also counted among the apostles of the coming World Teacher. See Gregory Tillett, The Elder Brother: A biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 217-225.

<sup>78</sup> See Roland Vernon, Star in the East: Krishnamurti: The Invention of a Messiah (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). The Theosophical Society taught that Krishnamurti had been selected to be the vehicle for the World Teacher, the Maitreya Buddha (believed to be the same being as the Christ who had indwelt Jesus of Nazareth), if all went well. Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star in 1929, but never completely disavowed his prophesied role. See Vernon, 243-245 for statements on this issue made near the end of Krishnamurti’s long life, wherein he clearly claims that he is the World Teacher.

<sup>79</sup> Anson, 198-201. The issues of Theosophy and homosexuality are separate, but the same clergypersons were associated with both. In addition to Willoughby, James Wedgwood and his better known co-worker, Charles Leadbeater, were both probably homosexually oriented, by today’s terms. Wedgwood clearly had sexual relationships with men. Leadbeater is a more difficult case to determine, as his sexuality is complicated by apparent pedophilic tendencies, although there is much debate on to what extent he acted upon these leanings. See Tillett for the most complete treatment of both men’s real and alleged sexual activities. Pedophilia and homosexuality are, of course, quite distinct, and should not be confused.

Mathew's life after the departure of the Theosophists is somewhat quieter, although he continued to ordain clergy – for his own church, as well as clandestine re-ordinations of Anglican priests. He attempted to reconcile with both Rome and Canterbury at different times, but without success. Mathew died on December 20, 1919.<sup>80</sup>

Not long after their respective exits from Mathew's jurisdiction, James Wedgwood was consecrated a bishop by Willoughby on February 13, 1916, in London's Co-Masonic Temple.<sup>81</sup> Very soon after his consecration, Wedgwood left for Australia to meet with Charles W. Leadbeater, a former Anglican priest who had left the Church of England in order to become a Theosophist, and had risen to the top ranks of the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater was reputed to be clairvoyant, and he and Wedgwood worked closely together to formulate a revised liturgy, and a theology, which accorded with their Theosophical perspective.<sup>82</sup> Meetings in Australia and Britain in 1917-1918 led to the formation of the separate Liberal Catholic Church,<sup>83</sup> which allowed complete freedom of belief, with an explicit openness to esoteric interpretations.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Pruter, Bishops Extraordinary, 22-24; Anson, 203-215.

<sup>81</sup> "A Short History of the Liberal Catholic Church and St. Raphael's Parish," <http://members.tripod.com/~SRLCC/lcchist.htm> (06 December 2003). One should note that Co-Masonry is another western, ritually oriented movement, with close ties to the Theosophical Society. Co-Masonry is similar to standard freemasonry, but women are initiated equally with men, and there is an emphasis on the esoteric meaning of the rites and symbols. For more on the history of these related movements, see Michael Gomes, The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1987).

<sup>82</sup> See Charles W. Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1929); Wedgwood, New Insights into Christian Worship; Annie Besant, Esoteric Christianity, or the Lesser Mysteries (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918); and The Liturgy according to the use of the Liberal Catholic Church, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: St. Alban's Press, 1983).

<sup>83</sup> "A Short History of the Liberal Catholic Church and St. Raphael's Parish."

<sup>84</sup> Basic Tenets of the Liberal Catholic Church, Leaflet No. 3 (Ojai, CA: St. Alban Press, n.d.)

## *B. Anglican Schisms*

Despite the doubts regarding the validity of Anglican orders, which provided an impetus for the spread of Old Catholicism, the Anglican Communion has made its own contributions to the ancestry of today's independent sacramental churches. The first significant Anglican schism, for our purposes, is that of the Reformed Episcopal Church. George Cummins was a former Methodist circuit rider who had become the assistant bishop of Kentucky in the Episcopal Church. Dismayed by the increasing power of the Anglo-Catholic movement, and in trouble for presiding over an ecumenical eucharist including ministers not ordained in apostolic succession, Cummins resigned his position on November 10, 1873. He quickly set about organizing what would become the Reformed Episcopal Church. The new church was formally inaugurated on December 2, 1873. The REC has continued to represent a very conservative, evangelical, low church Anglicanism, preserving apostolic succession, but with more stress upon apostolic doctrine.<sup>85</sup> Largely by way of REC missions to Puerto Rico and England, its claim to the historic episcopate has been inherited by many independent communities.<sup>86</sup>

One could hardly find anyone more radically different from the conservative evangelicals of the REC than William Montgomery Brown, who became the Episcopal Bishop of Arkansas in 1898. "Bad Bishop Brown" became an avid student of Darwin and Marx. In 1924, the Episcopal Church summoned Bishop Brown to be tried for

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<sup>85</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians. (University Park, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). A short summary of the beginnings of this church can also be found on its website: "The History and Founding Principles of the Reformed Episcopal Church," <http://rechurch.org/history.htm> (April 19, 2004). See also "Providence Reformed Episcopal Church: History Links," <http://www.providencerec.org/history/history.html> (April 19, 2004)

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Robert Angus Jones, The Complete Apostolic Succession, (Oakland, CA: Free Episcopal Church, 2004), 17-21. See also "The Free Protestant Episcopal Church – General History," <http://netministries.org/see/churches/ch18802> (April 19, 2004), as well as Seraphim Newman-Norton, "Anglican Attempts to Promote Reformed Armenian Churches," The Glastonbury Review, Edition 103 (February 2001) available online at <http://www.britishorthodox.org/103e.shtml>.



heresy, based on statements in his book, Communism and Christianity. He was found guilty. For a number of years after his conviction, Brown functioned as a bishop in the independent sacramental movement, taking part in ordinations and consecrations, as well as publishing a magazine provocatively titled: *Heresy*.<sup>87</sup>

The third major stream of holy orders from Anglicanism into the independent movement comes via the Philippine Independent Church. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines suffered from considerable troubles, political and ethnic. The Philippine Independent Church seceded from Rome on August 3, 1902, with a former priest named Gregorio Aglipay as self-appointed bishop, ordained through a laying on of hands by other priests. Efforts to obtain episcopal orders via the Old Catholics and Anglicans were fruitless for some years. Finally, in 1948, a deal was struck with the Episcopal Church in the United States, and three Episcopalian bishops consecrated three bishops for the Philippine Independent Church. The PIC eventually fractured, and one faction forged relationships with independent churches in the United States and Europe, resulting in significant consecrations such as that of the late Paul G.W. Schultz of the Apostolic Episcopal Church by PIC bishop, Francisco Patagkhan, in 1988. From Schultz and others, many ordinations and consecrations followed.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Brown's fascinating autobiography is titled My Heresy: The Autobiography of William Montgomery Brown, (Galion, OH: Bradford-Brown Educational Co., 1926). See also Ron Carden, "The Bolshevik Bishop: William Montgomery Brown's Path to Heresy, 1906-1920," Anglican and Episcopal History, 72 (June 2003), 197-228.

<sup>88</sup> Anson, 529-534; Jones, 22-23. See also "Iglesia Filipina Independiente," <http://ifi.ph/IFIstart.htm> (April 19, 2004). I have in my possession a photocopy of a signed Apostolic Mandate given to Paul Schultz by Macario V. Ga, Obispo Maximo (Supreme Bishop) of the Philippine Independent Church. The original is in the archives of Bishop Jorge Rodriguez-Villa, Montebello, California.

### *C. Modern Roman departures*

The last century has also seen a number of departures from the Roman Church, some including bishops who, directly or indirectly, contributed to the history of the independent movement. One of the largest – perhaps the largest – departure from the Roman Catholic Church in recent times was that of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church. This schism, consisting of several thousand priests and laypeople, was organized on January 8, 1920. The church's first patriarch was Karel Farsky, former Roman priest and noted modernist. Deep concern over Rome's opposition to "modernism" led to the formation of this independent church, which adopted the name "Hussite" pointing back to the earlier 15<sup>th</sup> century reform of Jan Hus, although the CHC is not officially or historically connected to the Moravian Church descended from Hus.<sup>89</sup>

The first bishops of the CHC were ordained by other presbyters through joint laying on of hands. In 1931, Louis-Charles Winnaert, who had been consecrated in 1922 by Liberal Catholic bishop James Wedgwood, consecrated two of the CHC's bishops, Gustav Prochazka and Rotislav Stejskai, thus transmitting the historic episcopate. The CHC first ordained a woman priest in 1947, and a female bishop in 1999. It once had some small missions in North America, but lost contact with them during the Communist era, and they slowly fell apart. Today in Europe, it reports approximately 180,000 members.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> There have been points of contact between the independent sacramental movement and the Moravian Church / Unitas Fratrum, which traces its history to Hus, and has a claim to the historic episcopate. One of the most prominent independent bishops alive today, Bertil Persson of the Apostolic Episcopal Church, is simultaneously a presbyter in the Moravian Church. Personal letters from Bertil Persson dated January 17, 2000, and February 7, 2000. Another bishop of the Apostolic Episcopal Church, Diederik Quatannens, is a former Moravian bishop. Cf. Bertil Persson, *The Order of Corporate Reunion*, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Email correspondence of March 23, 2004 with Hana Tonzarova, head of the External Relationship Department of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church. Also, "When Churches Started to Ordain Women," <http://www.religioustolerance.org/femclrg13.htm> (April 19, 2004); "Czechoslovak Hussite Church,"

Another relatively large schism was that led by Bishop Carlos Duarte Costa in Brazil. Bishop Duarte Costa (1888-1961) was openly critical of Vatican policies on clerical celibacy, divorce, vernacular liturgy, and other matters. He advocated for liberal social issues, such as land reform, and denounced Catholic clergy who were fascist sympathizers during World War II. As a result, he had trouble with the authorities in Brazil, and was excommunicated by Rome on July 7, 1945. He founded the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, which reported 20,000 members by 1973, and in which he is canonized as “St Charles of Brazil.”<sup>91</sup>

Since the exit of the Brazilian Catholics, the most important schisms from the Roman Church have been related to traditionalists, who oppose some or all of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, and who may or may not regard the current pope as legitimate. By far the most famous traditionalist Roman prelate of recent times is the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who founded the Society of St. Pius X in 1970. After years of fighting with the Vatican, on June 30, 1988, Lefebvre consecrated four bishops, with the assistance of Antonio de Castro Mayer, retired bishop of Campos, Brazil. Formal excommunications quickly followed from Rome. Lefebvre and Mayer

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<http://www.ccsch.cz/index1.php> (April 19, 2004); Miroslav Kank, “Charles Farsky, ThD, and the formation of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church,” *Modern Churchman* 22:4 (1979), 171-179; and David Frydl, “Apostolat CCSH,” [http://www.husuvsbor.cz/index\\_2.html](http://www.husuvsbor.cz/index_2.html) (November 16, 2004). See entries for Winnaert and Prochazka in Alan Bain, *Bishops Irregular*, 185, 229. For more on Winnaert and the later history of his L’Eglise Catholique-Orthodoxe de France, see “Obituary – Yvonne Catherine Winnaert,” *The Glastonbury Review*, Edition 96 (October 1997), available on-line at <http://www.britishorthodox.org/96f.shtml>; Francis DesMarais, “The Orthodox Church of France: Canonical Restoration,” <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/6516/canonrest.html> (April 19, 2004); and the L’Eglise Catholique-Orthodoxe de France website: <http://pagesperso.laposte.net/orthodoxie/> (April 19, 2004).

<sup>91</sup> A number of archival articles from *The New York Times* (from 1942, 1945, 1961, 1973), along with other information on Duarte Costa can be found at: Terrence Boyle, “Carlos Duarte Costa (1888-1961)” <http://www.tboyle.net/Catholicism/Duarte-Costa.html> (April 20, 2004). Duarte Costa’s church maintains an extensive website, in Portuguese: “Igreja Catolica Apostolica Brasileira,” <http://www.icab.org.br> (April 20, 2004)

both died in 1991, but the Society continues to grow, and professes its loyalty to Rome, despite its schismatic state.<sup>92</sup>

The SSPX's official loyalty to Rome became more than some of its clergy could bear. A number of priests started refusing to pray for Pope John Paul II at mass, and were expelled in April 1983. They quickly formed the Society of St. Pius V. The superior of the Society, Fr. Clarence Kelly, was consecrated as a bishop on October 19, 1993, by Alfredo Mendez-Gonzalez, retired bishop of Arecibo, Puerto Rico.<sup>93</sup> Although smaller than the SSPX, the SSPV also continues to grow. The SSPX and SSPV have, thus far, stayed largely aloof from, and contemptuous of their independent sacramental cousins, but one can only wonder how long this will remain the case.

Another bishop who felt that Lefebvre was not going far enough, and who sympathized with the frustration of many traditionalists at Lefebvre's pre-1988 reluctance to consecrate bishops, was Ngo Dinh Thuc Pierre Martin, an exiled Vietnamese archbishop, and older brother of the first president of South Vietnam. From 1975 until his death in 1984, Archbishop Thuc consecrated a large number of men from different groups, including "the broadest conceivable spectrum of theologies likely ever to be held by men all claiming to possess valid 'Catholic' priestly and episcopal orders that are derived from a single prelate alive in their lifetimes."<sup>94</sup> Perhaps it is no wonder that

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<sup>92</sup> Michael W. Cuneo, 91-93. See also Terrence Boyle's webpage: "The Lefebvre/Mayer Consecrations for the Sacerdotal Society of St. Pius X," [http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Lefebvre-Mayer\\_Consecratio.html](http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Lefebvre-Mayer_Consecratio.html) (April 20, 2004); and the official Society of St. Pius X website: <http://www.sspv.org/> (April 20, 2004).

<sup>93</sup> See official website of the Society of St. Pius V: <http://www.sspv.net> (April 20, 2004); also, Cuneo, 93-102; and Terrence Boyle's webpage on this lineage: "The Mendes Consecration for the Sacerdotal Society of St. Pius V," [http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Mendez\\_Consecration.html](http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Mendez_Consecration.html) (April 20, 2004).

<sup>94</sup> From Terrence Boyle's website: "The Ngo Dinh Thuc Consecrations for Various Groups," [http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Thuc\\_Consecrations.html](http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Thuc_Consecrations.html) (April 20, 2004); see also Cuneo, 99-100. One might note that pop star Sinéad O'Connor was ordained a priest in 1999, by a bishop whose orders descend from Archbishop Thuc. The following article is unduly critical, but does include the lineage back to Thuc:

Thuc's sanity has been questioned at times!<sup>95</sup> A significant number of the Thuc-derived churches are traditionalist in nature, as was the archbishop.

While there are other traditionalist groups with some claim to holy orders, beyond those enumerated above, these are the most prominent players on the field, especially in North America.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to willingly or unwillingly bequeathing their history and priesthood to the independent sacramental movement, the western churches are also the source of the sacramental theology which forms the base of the independent movement. The western churches have consistently held that where form, matter, intention, and proper minister are present, valid sacraments are celebrated, regardless of heresy or schism. The eastern churches have been less precise in their definitions and less willing to see schismatic sacraments as inherently valid, although such sacraments can be accepted on occasion, for reasons of pastoral economy. The independent sacramental movement relies on the western theory for its claim to continuity with the larger church. With the focus shifting to validity and continuity of priesthood and sacraments, rather than continuity of ecclesial community, priesthood assumes a position of priority in relationship to the church, in fact if not in theory. The priesthood remains constant, while the church it serves and the theology it teaches are often in a state of flux. While some western Christians may see

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John Loughnan, "Matters arising from the 'ordination' of Sinead O'Connor," <http://jloughnan.tripod.com/thucbish.htm> (April 20, 2004).

<sup>95</sup> For an essay addressing Thuc's mental competence and other issues, see Anthony Cekada, "The Validity of the Thuc Consecrations," <http://home.tampabay.rr.com/archbishop/cekada2.html> (April 22, 2004).

<sup>96</sup> For a comprehensive view, see Terrence Boyle's website, "Outline of Episcopi Vagantes," <http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Outline.html> (April 20, 2004). See especially the Cornejo and Pintonello lineages, which have not been considered above. Unlike the SSPX, SSPV, and the various Thuc groups, churches deriving (or alleging to derive) from Cornejo and Pintonello, have yet to appear in significant numbers in North America.

this state of affairs as a distortion, it is nonetheless the centerpiece of the independent sacramental inheritance from the west.<sup>97</sup>

## *II. Heritage from the Eastern Church*

Although the western liturgical churches form the largest, and perhaps most significant background to the independent sacramental movement, the eastern liturgical churches have also made important contributions and are ecclesiologicaly closer to the independent movement, in their long tradition of autocephaly. The most widespread claims arise from the Oriental Orthodox (non-Chalcedonian) churches, especially the Syrian Church and its Indian offshoots. These eastern churches functioned primarily as a fount of holy orders, more so than theology or liturgical practice. While some independent churches have adopted an eastern style, they remain the minority. This situation probably arises from the complexity of most eastern liturgies, especially when faced with lack of permanent space, and little funding, not to mention unfamiliarity to most North Americans.

### *A. Oriental Orthodoxy*

The earliest independent claim to an eastern heritage runs back to a young French Dominican missionary priest named Jules (Raymond) Ferrette, who was sent to Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in 1856. Ferrette was a convert to Roman Catholicism. While in the near east, he lost his Catholic faith, and resigned his priesthood to return to Protestantism.<sup>98</sup> He eventually became a Protestant missionary in the region, working

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<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of these matters, see Brandreth, 6-11. Brandreth is harshly critical, but does provide the classical theological sources.

<sup>98</sup> Seraphim Newman-Norton, *Flesh of Our Brethren*, (unpublished manuscript), Chapter 2, 1-2; Anson, 32-35.

primarily with the Presbyterians. In the course of arranging for some Arabic publications, he met Mutran Boutros, the non-Chalcedonian Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Emessa (Homs).<sup>99</sup>

After further trials with the Presbyterians, and driven by a longing to restore episcopal orders to his Protestant confreres, Ferrette met with his friend, Mutran Boutros. On July 2, 1866 (O.S.), the Syrian bishop elevated the erstwhile Presbyterian missionary and renegade Dominican to the episcopate, as Mar Julius, Bishop of Iona and its dependencies.<sup>100</sup> The new Mar Julius returned promptly to England and began his episcopal labors. Not unlike Arnold Mathew some years later, he found a less receptive audience than he expected.

Mar Julius' consecration as a bishop has often been doubted. Both Peter Anson and Henry Brandreth cast aspersions upon it, and suggest that the original instrument of consecration was never seen by anyone.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, this now appears to be either serious lack of information, or slander. One of Ferrette's spiritual heirs, Abba Seraphim (Newman-Norton) has provided detailed documentation of the correspondence of the British Consul in Syria with the Anglican authorities, as well as other evidence regarding the original documents, which go a long way toward confirming Ferrette's account.<sup>102</sup>

The only uncontested consecration by Ferrette is that of Richard Williams Morgan in 1874, although there may have been at least one other. Following some years

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<sup>99</sup> Newman-Norton, Flesh of Our Brethren, Chapter 2, 5.

<sup>100</sup> Newman-Norton, Flesh of Our Brethren, Chapter 2, 8.

<sup>101</sup> Anson, 36-47; Brandreth, 45-49.

<sup>102</sup> Newman-Norton, Flesh of Our Brethren, Chapter 2, 18-28; see also Seraphim Newman-Norton, "New Light on Ferrette's Consecration," The Glastonbury Review (September 1980), 175-181. The most critical letter, from the British Foreign Office to the Archbishop of York, is coded FO 78 1997 in the UK Public Records Office.

of quiet decline, Ferrette died in 1904.<sup>103</sup> It is worthy of note that the major body descending from the work of Mar Julius, the former Catholicate of the West (now known as the British Orthodox Church) entered into full union with the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria in 1994, received by His Holiness, Pope Shenouda III. The British Orthodox Church still lists Jules Ferrette as their founder.<sup>104</sup> The Coptic Orthodox Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church are both non-Chalcedonian and in full communion with one another. It is difficult to believe that these British Copts would still reference Ferrette, given their full communion with the Coptic and Syrian Patriarchs, if there was any substantial doubt regarding his claims.

As far as the contemporary independent sacramental movement is concerned, a more important and influential connection to the Oriental Orthodox churches was made through Ferrette's fellow countryman, Rene Vilatte. Joseph Rene Vilatte was born in Paris on January 24, 1854, to working class parents who were aligned with the schismatic Le Petit Eglise.<sup>105</sup> His mother died young, and he became a Roman Catholic by default, as he was raised in a Catholic orphanage. His early career forms a confusing trail of seminaries, religious orders, and crises of conscience, mostly in Belgium and Canada. Eventually, in 1884, having left the Roman Church, Vilatte headed to Green Bay, Wisconsin, as "still a layman.... a freelance Presbyterian missionary."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Anson, 43-47.

<sup>104</sup> See the British Orthodox Church website, [http://www.britishorthodox.org/about\\_boc.php](http://www.britishorthodox.org/about_boc.php) (March 7, 2004).

<sup>105</sup> Le Petit Eglise was formed by a protest of some French Catholics to the Concordat of 1801, when Napoleon made peace with the Holy See, and most of the bishops of the Constitutional Church (a creature of the French Revolution) submitted to the pope. See Anson, 299-300.

<sup>106</sup> Anson, 93. For an attempt to sort out Vilatte's complex career in Wisconsin, see William M. Hogue, "The Episcopal Church and Archbishop Vilatte," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church (34:1, March 1965), 35-55.



Vilatte was a correspondent of the modernist turned Old Catholic, Hyacinthe Loyson, who encouraged him to approach the local Episcopal bishop, John Henry Hobart Brown. The lay missionary told the bishop that he wanted to form an Old Catholic mission to the local Belgian and French population. With their Catholic background, Vilatte felt these generally irreligious settlers were ripe for Old Catholicism.<sup>107</sup> With the backing and recommendation of Bishop Brown, Vilatte traveled to Europe and was ordained as deacon and priest by Bishop Herzog, of the Old Catholic Church in Switzerland (in union with Utrecht).<sup>108</sup>

Matters progressed reasonably well under Bishop Brown, but his successor, Bishop Charles Grafton, attempted to assert a bit more control over the Old Catholic mission. Vilatte chafed under the bit and was soon campaigning for consecration as a bishop. When the Old Catholics in Europe refused him, he proceeded to contact both the Russian Orthodox and the Roman Catholics, to no avail.<sup>109</sup> Vilatte had better luck in 1891 with Mar Julius I (Antonio Francisco-Xavier Alvarez) of the Independent Catholic Church of Ceylon, Goa, and India. This church was the result of a recent schism from the Roman Catholic Church in 1888, and derived its orders from the non-Chalcedonian Syrian Orthodox Church, with which it was in communion.<sup>110</sup>

After some months in Ceylon, and with an approval from Patriarch Mar Ignatius Peter III of Antioch, Vilatte was consecrated on May 29, 1892 as Mar Timotheos.<sup>111</sup>

Brandreth and Anson make much of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate's later repudiation

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<sup>107</sup> Anson, 94; Pruter, *Bishops Extraordinary*, 30. Brandreth (31) is incorrect that the settlers were already Old Catholics.

<sup>108</sup> Anson, 96-97.

<sup>109</sup> Anson, 100-103.

<sup>110</sup> Anson, 105-106. It is worth noting that the reigning Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Ignatius Peter III, Moutran Boutros, was none other than the consecrator of Jules Ferrette.

<sup>111</sup> Brandreth, 33.

of the Vilatte succession in 1938, with the implication that Vilatte's consecration was never properly authorized. However, as late as 1928, only one year before Vilatte's death, Mar Severus Barsoum, Archbishop of Damascus and legate of the Syrian Patriarch, paid an official visit to Vilatte's followers in Chicago.<sup>112</sup> There are also records indicating that Vilatte sent money to Antioch for a number of years. He maintained contact with his consecrator, Alvarez, until the latter's death in 1923, as well as with other non-Chalcedonian hierarchs.<sup>113</sup> While the relationship between Vilatte's missions in North American and Europe, and the Syrian mother church, can be confusing, it was clearly cordial for some time.

Much like Mathew, Vilatte consecrated a number of men who are the episcopal ancestors of an enormous variety of descendents. One of his most interesting consecrations was that of the former Episcopal priest, George Alexander McGuire, in 1921. McGuire was part of a group of African-Americans who, under the influence of Marcus Garvey's work, had left the white-dominated Episcopal Church, and were seeking a black bishop. The resulting African Orthodox Church has been one of the most successful of all independent jurisdictions, and continues (in several branches) today.<sup>114</sup>

Vilatte spent his final years, from 1925 until his death in 1929, living in a cottage on the grounds of a Roman Catholic Cistercian abbey near Versailles, France. While he was, in theory, now a layman in submission to Rome, he began celebrating mass in his cottage, and possibly performing other clerical acts. A letter from one of his friends to Jean Bricaud (a bishop in Vilatte's lineage) after his death, claims that he was "on the

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<sup>112</sup> Newman-Norton, *Flesh of Our Brethren*, Chapter 5, 2-3.

<sup>113</sup> Newman-Norton, *Flesh of Our Brethren*, Chapter 5, 7-8.

<sup>114</sup> Karl Pruter, *The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey*, (Highlandville, MO: St Willibrord's Press, 1986).

verge of reclaiming his liberty.”<sup>115</sup> Death came too soon, on July 8, 1929, and Vilatte was buried as a layman.

### *B. Other Eastern Sources*

In addition to Vilatte and Ferrette, the independent sacramental movement has other eastern ancestry. The Assyrian (so-called Nestorian) lineage comes through Ulric Vernon Herford, who is surely one of the most endearing and genuinely saintly of these autocephalous bishops. Herford was a Unitarian (Liberal Christian) minister, with liturgical leanings. He suffered from the mistaken idea that the Assyrian Church was theologically compatible with his Unitarian views. Much as with the Oriental Orthodox churches, validity of holy orders was a much larger concern than theology. In 1903, he was consecrated bishop by Luis Mariano Suares (Mar Basilius), a bishop of the Assyrian Church in India. One can only assume that Mar Basilius did not inquire too deeply into Herford’s Christology. As a result of the continuously shifting theological and ecclesiastical loyalties of South Indian churchmen of that day, Mar Basilius had been ordained to the priesthood by Mar Julius I (Alvarez), the consecrator of Vilatte. Herford became a tireless worker for pacifism, animal welfare, and a wide array of social causes. The generally disheveled bishop was often seen bicycling around Oxford, promoting the

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<sup>115</sup> Anson, 126-129; Letter from A. Jouanny to J. Bricaud, dated January 12, 1930. An English translation of this document is included in Gilbert Tappa, “The Last Days of Vilatte,” <http://www.gnostique.net/documents/vilatte2.html>, English translation by Phillip Garver (March 15, 2004). The preceding correspondence between Vilatte and Bricaud, also available on this website, is fascinating as Bricaud is the bishop who joined the apostolic succession, acquired through bishops with lineage from Vilatte, to the Gnostic lineage of Doinel. (For Doinel, see below.) Vilatte’s doctrinal and ecclesiastical changeableness have been widely publicized, but not his friendly correspondence with a Gnostic bishop. While the French Gnostics have often been presented as strange stepchildren of the Vilatte family, it seems he was more open to them than some of his successors have been.

betterment of all creatures, before returning home to his patient Anglican wife and large herd of cats. Even his detractors note his sincerity and kindness.<sup>116</sup>

Among the Chalcedonian Orthodox, the most important and least contested lineage stems from Bishop Aftimios Ofiesh, a Syrian priest consecrated by the Russian church, with the intent of creating a fully American, English-speaking Orthodox jurisdiction. Largely as a result of the fighting among ethnic Orthodox jurisdictions, compounded by pressure from the Episcopal Church, which did not welcome potential competition from western rite Orthodoxy, the Russian church withdrew support from Ofiesh in 1929. Nonetheless, he continued onward with his American mission, which has survived in a number of groups, mostly western rite, although adhering to Orthodox theology. In some churches descended from his work, Ofiesh is venerated as a saint.<sup>117</sup>

There are many others minor sources of independent holy orders from the Christian east, ranging from Ethiopian missionaries, to various Russians stranded by political changes in their homeland, to stray Cypriots and Albanians, to an assortment of Greek Old Calendrists. There are also claims emanating from the Melkite and Chaldean

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<sup>116</sup> Anson, 130-155. This is the most widely available account of Herford's life, but heavily dependent upon George Francis Tull, Vernon Herford: Apostle of Unity. (Bradford: Bradford, 1958). Anson and Brandreth both question the truth of Herford's consecration by Soares (and his later consecration by Donkin, with lineage running back to the Roman Catholic Church). See Terrence Boyle, "The Alleged Sanchez Consecration for the Mexican National Catholic Church," [http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Sanchez\\_Consecration.html](http://tboyle.net/Catholicism/Sanchez_Consecration.html) (April 20, 2004) for details of the second consecration. In recent years, a substantial number of additional documents have come to light, attesting to the truth of these consecrations. The originals are housed in the archives of the British Orthodox Church in London, England, and are available for scholarly consultation.

<sup>117</sup> The story of Ofiesh is told in many places, but perhaps most succinctly in Jones, 52. More detail can be found in a biography by his widow, Mariam Namey Ofiesh, Archbishop Aftimios Ofiesh (Sun City West, Arizona, 1999). I am also reliant upon the account of Bishop W. Francis Forbes of the Holy Orthodox Church – American Jurisdiction, who knew Ofiesh, and has been a participant in groups which descend from him for over 50 years. I interviewed Bishop Forbes at his home in Nashville, TN, on March 10, 2004.

rites of the Roman Catholic Church. It would take us beyond our limitations of space to sort out these lineages.<sup>118</sup>

Throughout its history, the Christian east has modeled a less centralized, more locally governed church. Some eastern churches, the Assyrians and the Oriental Orthodox, have asserted their freedom from the rest of the larger Christian church since the fifth century. The Orthodox often claim a unity based on shared theology and worship, despite their incredibly confusing jurisdictional situation, especially in Western Europe and North America. Much as independent sacramental Christians have taken the western theology of priesthood to an extreme, so have they transformed the decentralized jurisdictions of the Eastern churches into “bishops at large” carrying their jurisdiction with them, wherever they may go.<sup>119</sup>

### *III. The New Priesthoods*

While deeply valuing the heritage received through the historic liturgical churches of east and west, the independent movement has charted its own course in many ways. Despite the undeniable importance of traditionalist groups, many independent churches hold quite radical positions on women’s issues, homosexuality, esotericism, and the creeds, to list only a few issues. The justification for such departures is usually the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and alleged growth into a deeper truth in Christ.

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<sup>118</sup> For a reasonably complete summary of these various Eastern streams, see Jones, 50-93.

<sup>119</sup> “Bishops at Large” is Anson’s title. It alludes to the medieval “*episcopi vagantes*,” wandering bishops who caused disruption by performing acts of episcopal ministry in dioceses other than their own. As far as I have been able to determine, Brandreth was the first to apply this term to the bishops of the modern independent sacramental movement.

The most extreme form of such fresh departures in the Spirit can be seen in the appearance of new priesthoods, transmitted directly from the Spirit, or Christ, or discarnate entities. Churches holding new priesthoods often appear essentially identical to other independent groups in all other respects. It is also an easily observed phenomenon that groups which begin with a new priesthood, usually wind up acquiring apostolic succession, with the new lineage being blended into the combined spiritual inheritance of the independent movement. At its best, this blending can be an outward sign of a creative union of tradition and inspiration.

*A. New priesthoods with esoteric theologies*

Many of the new priesthoods are found in esoterically inclined groups. As esotericism has an explicit openness to interchange with beings on other levels of reality, the idea of a new priesthood coming from such inner contact is not as much of a stretch as it might otherwise be.

One of the most important and widespread new priesthoods stems from the French occultist Jules Doinel (1842-1903). In 1888, Doinel had an experience of being spiritually consecrated by the “Aeon Jesus,” assisted by two bishops of the long destroyed Bogomil church.<sup>120</sup> The following year, Doinel had another experience of 40 deceased Cathar bishops charging him with restoring the Gnostic Church. These two experiences are only the most significant in a long series. Doinel followed this inner direction, and in 1890, founded the Gnostic Church of France, with himself as Patriarch

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<sup>120</sup> James Foster, *The History of the Modern Gnostic Apostolic Churches* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Apostolic Johannite Church, 2002), 6-7. This account draws heavily on David Scriven (Tau Apiryon) and Lynn Scriven (Soror Helena), “Mystery of Mysteries: A Primer of Thelemic Ecclesiastical Gnosticism,” *Red Flame: A Thelemic Research Journal*, Issue No. 2 (1995), 3-6.

Tau Valentin II. He took the name in honor of the ancient Gnostic teacher Valentinus.<sup>121</sup>

The Gnostic Church was very radical for its time in that women were ordained to every level of ecclesial ministry. The female bishops were called “sophias”.<sup>122</sup> Doinel’s church also restored the Cathar sacraments of the consolamentum and appareillementum.<sup>123</sup>

The Gnostic Church quickly became the sacramental and ecclesial refuge of Freemasons and occultists, as both groups were unwelcome in the Roman Catholic Church. Its bishops included some of the most prominent French esotericists of the day, such as Papus (Gerard Encausse), and a bit later, the traditionalist Rene Guenon, prior to his conversion to Islam.<sup>124</sup> The contemporary descendents of the Gnostic Church still have close ties to Freemasonry, and various esoteric orders, especially those of French derivation, such as the Ordre Martiniste and the Elus Cohens.<sup>125</sup>

In 1901, the twenty-year old Jean “Joanny” Bricaud was consecrated as a bishop in the Gnostic Church.<sup>126</sup> Bricaud is a critical figure, as he brought in lineal connections to other, earlier attempts at an esoteric church in France.<sup>127</sup> Bricaud was also responsible for uniting the spiritual succession of Doinel (as well as the earlier esoteric lineage of

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<sup>121</sup> Foster, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Foster, 7.

<sup>123</sup> For details of these sacraments as practiced in Doinel’s church, see Scriven and Scriven, 20-23

<sup>124</sup> Stephan A. Hoeller, Gnosticism: New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing. (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 2002), 177-178, 184. For more on Guenon’s history, see Mark Sedgwick, Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. 55-69.

<sup>125</sup> For the contemporary state of the churches descended from Doinel’s work, I am especially indebted to Phillip Garver of Indianapolis, IN, one of the bishops of the Ecclesia Gnostica Apostolica, whom I interviewed at his home on March 13, 2004.

<sup>126</sup> Scriven and Scriven, 7.

<sup>127</sup> Scriven and Scriven, 7. The churches in question are L’Eglise Johannites des Chretiens Primitif, founded by Bernard-Raymond Fabre-Palaprat in 1803, and Oevre de la Miseracorde (a.k.a. the Sanctuary Interior of the Carmel of Elie) founded by Eugene Vintras around 1839. For more detail, see Foster, 1-5, 15.

Eugene Vintras, and the purported Templar succession of Fabre-Palaprat) with apostolic succession as preserved in the larger Catholic tradition.

Similar examples abound. Rudolf Steiner was a former Theosophist who had separated from the TS largely due to his objections to the cultus around Krishnamurti. In 1922, Steiner allegedly mediated a new priesthood and new sacramental forms from the spiritual world, for the Christengemeinschaft (Christian Community). Steiner stressed that he did not ordain Friedrich Rittelmeyer, a former Lutheran minister who became the first priest in the movement. Rather, in the words of Hans-Werner Schroeder, Steiner acted as the “catalyst” for “a new spiritual breakthrough creating an inner connection with the stream of consecration flowing from Christ.”<sup>128</sup> There are a number of groups which descend from the Christengemeinschaft, some of which have acquired apostolic succession, as well as churches which use Steiner’s sacramental forms without a lineal connection to his new priesthood.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Hans-Werner Schroeder, The Christian Community: Origins-Goals-History, translated by James Hinds. (Undated, privately circulated translation of the German original: Hans-Werner Schroeder, Die Christengemeinschaft (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1990).) It is worth noting that Steiner was almost certainly aware of Doinel’s Gnostic Church, via Theodor Reuss, who provided him with a charter for an esoteric Masonic lodge in Berlin. Reuss was allegedly consecrated to the Gnostic episcopate by Encausse/Papus. Bertil Persson of St. Ephrem’s Institute, Solna, Sweden, has stated that Reuss consecrated Steiner as a Gnostic bishop. I have not been able to independently confirm this, and the Christengemeinschaft makes no such claim. Personal letters from Bertil Persson dated January 17, 2000 and February 7, 2000.

<sup>129</sup> Two examples of Christengemeinschaft-derived groups with apostolic succession are the Christian Temple of Revelation, headquartered in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, under Bishop Philip Very, and the Friends of Christ, headquartered in Pacific Palisades, California, under Bishop Jeff Ingle. The Institute for Johannine Christianity under Bishop W.J. de Campenhout (a.k.a. Jan Kooistra) of Scarborough, Ontario, is an instance of an independent catholic group which uses a modification of Steiner’s sacramental rites, but without a lineal connection to the priesthood of the Christengemeinschaft. Also, in 1975, a former Congregationalist minister named Rev. Mario Shoemaker founded a group which was modeled, to some extent, on the Christengemeinschaft, complete with yet another new priesthood. It was originally known as the Church of the Mystic Christ, but has changed its name to the Independent Church of Australia, with parallel names in other nations. The ICA maintains a web presence at <http://www.ica.org.au> (April 20, 2004). For further details, see Liturgy Handbook: An Introduction to the liturgical practices of The Centre, The Independent Church of Australia, (Victoria: The Centre, 1995); also Mario Schoemaker, The New Clairvoyance: Deeper Perspectives on the Aura and Reincarnation, (Bath, UK: Gateway Books, 1986).



In the United States, the Science of Man Church was founded in 1961 by Earl W. (Father Paul) Blighton. The SOM (as it is known) later gave birth to a vowed order known as the Holy Order of MANS (the HOOM, pronounced “Home”), which had several thousand members in the United States, before fragmenting in the early 1980s, when the leadership of the Order attempted to guide it into the Orthodox Church. While a significant number of members did convert to Orthodoxy, the SOM continues to exist, as do several churches and orders which use the sacramental forms of the HOOM. Father Paul claimed to have brought forth a renewed priesthood through inner contact with Ananias, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus.<sup>130</sup> Within a generation, most of the organizations which continue the spiritual transmission of Father Paul have acquired apostolic succession, although generally continuing to value the “Pauline” lineage from Blighton.

New esoteric priesthods are multiplying, and seem likely to continue to do so. Recent years have seen the emergence of groups such as Daniel Chesbro’s Order of Melchizedek,<sup>131</sup> Maury Johnston’s Ordo Arcanorum Gradalis,<sup>132</sup> and the secretive Ord

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<sup>130</sup> MANS is an acronym, with multiple meanings revealed to the initiate according to their grade within the spiritual system. The story of the SOM and HOOM is told in Phillip Charles Lucas, The Odyssey of a New Religion: The Holy Orders of MANS from New Age to Orthodoxy (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995). I have also been much helped by extensive conversations with current and former members, and by an unpublished, undated memoir by Father Paul’s widow, Mother Ruth Helen Blighton. Other important memoirs include Toni Sar’h Petrinovich, Beyond Belief: The Evolution of a Master Teacher (Anacortes, WA: Sacred Spaces, forthcoming) and Timothy D. Harris, The Journey: From the Finite to the Infinite (San Jose, CA: Euphotic Foundation, 2000.) A new compilation of excerpts from Father Paul was recently published: E.W. Blighton, The Middle Path: A guide for Spiritual Unfoldment, ed. by M.R. Blighton (Sandy, OR: Science of Man, 2001).

<sup>131</sup> The Order of Melchizedek / Sanctuary of the Beloved webpage is located at: <http://members.aol.com/sanbeloved/> (April 20, 2004). I have met Chesbro, a former American Baptist minister, twice, in Garden City, New York, in 2000 and 2001. To date, he has ordained over 12,000 priests, many of whom function as New Age teachers and healers, although there are also a number of priests serving independent sacramental communities. More information on the OM, and its origins can be found in Sidney Saylor Farr, What Tom Sawyer Learned from Dying, (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 1993), esp. 249-255. An example of an independent sacramental ministry arising from the OM is that of Rev. Michael Wolf, near Spencer, North Carolina. (Email correspondence with Rev. Michael Wolf, January 7, 2004.) I was first alerted to the existence of this group by Rev. Jim Waters, who was ordained in

Dyserth (Welsh for “Order of the Desert”).<sup>133</sup> Only time will tell whether these contemporary efforts will be as successful as Doinel, Steiner, and Blighton.

*B. New priesthoods with traditional theologies*

New claims to priesthood are not confined to esotericists, however. One of the earliest examples is the Catholic Apostolic Church (the so-called “Irvingites”), which arose from a charismatic revival in Scotland and England, beginning in the 1820s. Through ecstatic prophecy, beginning in 1832, twelve men (most notably Henry Drummond and John Bate Cardale) were called to a restored apostolate. On July 14, 1835, the Apostles were “separated,” but not ordained, as “the Apostle is commissioned and endowed immediately by the Lord Himself, without men’s intervention.”<sup>134</sup> The new Apostles were the fount of an elaborate clerical structure of angel-bishops, priests, and deacons, with a number of minor ministries as well. Worship was liturgical and eucharistic, with a largely orthodox theology. The last of the Apostles, Francis Valentine

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the OM fairly early in its history, and is now an independent catholic priest with the International Free Catholic Communion. I am aware of at least two other independent catholic priests and one bishop in apostolic succession who are also ordained in the OM. The OM priesthood has spread widely among the followers of the Christian esoteric teacher, Edgar Cayce, although there is no official connection to Cayce’s Association for Research and Enlightenment.

<sup>132</sup> More information on this “christo-pagan” order of priesthood can be found in a book which Johnston published under the pseudonym Shadwynn, The Crafted Cup (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1994). For this group’s understanding of their priesthood, see especially 43-50. In addition to Johnston, Jon Ryner and William Calhoun, both ordained GrailPriests in the OAG, have also provided valuable information.

<sup>133</sup> The Ord Dyserth (Welsh for “Order of the Desert,” also known as the Somers Group) is a private Christian esoteric group, with increasing ties to independent catholic and Anglican groups. Its claim to holy orders dates to February 2, 1974, when two leaders of the group were each “confronted by a vast Angelic presence,” and “sealed by a laying on of hands and an anointing with holy oil by the Angel.” The order has since acquired a claim to the historic episcopate, as well as this angelic lineage. The quotes are drawn from a private paper on the Ord Dyserth, provided by its Abbot-Bishop, one of the two leaders consecrated by the Angel in 1974. I have met this very well educated and professionally successful man twice, at his home in California, in 2001 and 2002. He holds advanced degrees in theology from accredited institutions. Out of respect for his privacy, and at his request, I am withholding additional identifying information.

<sup>134</sup> Francis Valentine Woodhouse, A Narrative of Events affecting the Position and Prospects of the whole Christian Church (London: Barclay, 1847), 49, quoted in Columba Graham Flegg, Gathered Under Apostles: A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 69.

Woodhouse, died in 1901. The Catholic Apostolic Church appointed no further Apostles, and went into inevitable decline. It still exists in a much reduced state. However, a number of splinter groups selected new Apostles, and have continued to thrive. Most important for our story, one of the Catholic Apostolic angel-bishops, Johann Brugger, assisted in 1924 with the consecration of Aloysius Stumpf, as an independent bishop in apostolic succession.<sup>135</sup> Hugh George de Wilmott-Newman (better known as Mar Georgius, Patriarch of Glastonbury in the Catholicate of the West) was a mid-twentieth century independent bishop in Britain, who had grown up in the Catholic Apostolic Church. He saw to it that the CAC lineage, through Stumpf, spread far and wide.<sup>136</sup>

Perhaps more familiar is the story of the Evangelical Orthodox Church, a group of low church protestants (mostly from Campus Crusade for Christ, and Christian churches of the Stone/Campbell variety) who gradually embraced Orthodox theology and liturgy. Some of the early leaders laid hands on one another, consecrating each other as bishops. The bishops then ordained priests and deacons. In 1987, a large part of this community joined the Antiochian Archdiocese, and beginning in 2001, a number of others joined the Orthodox Church in America. A group of seven congregations continues as an independent church, served by four bishops. These churches clearly see their priestly orders as unquestionably real, and understand the relation of their priesthood to the historic episcopate as similar to that between the Apostle Paul and the Twelve. They have an interest in receiving the historic episcopate, but feel strongly that this should only happen in a way that affirms the validity of their already existing priesthood. Most EOC members to whom I have spoken clearly feel that the Antiochian and OCA converts

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<sup>135</sup> Bertil Persson, The Succession of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Solna, Sweden: St. Ephrem's Institute, 1991)

<sup>136</sup> For something of Mar Georgius' background, and his remarkable episcopal career, see Anson, 443-501.

betrayed the EOC vision and the EOC priesthood, and they seem determined not to do so.<sup>137</sup>

Another group with a largely traditional theology and liturgical practice, but with a new priesthood, is the Catholic Church of the Apostles of the Latter Times (also known as the Apostles of Infinite Love). This group is led by Father John Gregory of the Trinity (Gaston Tremblay), who is also known as His Holiness, Pope John Gregory XVII.

Tremblay was ordained and consecrated by Michel Collin, a former Roman Catholic priest. Collin claimed to have been mystically consecrated as a bishop by Jesus Christ in 1935, and then mystically crowned as Pope Clement XV in 1950. He later secured a claim to the historic episcopate in 1966, although it is not clear whether clergy who were ordained earlier (including Tremblay, consecrated in 1962) were ever re-ordained.

Tremblay's group is headquartered at the monastery in Quebec where he lives, along with some 200 priests, brothers, and sisters. The Catholic Church of the Apostles of the Latter Times is the most prominent of a number of groups which stem from Collin, most of which are quite traditionalist. Tremblay is unique among Collin's heirs in that he ordains women, although the female priests only celebrate the eucharist privately.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> For the view of an Antiochian convert, see Peter Gillquist, Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith, (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1992). Fairly extensive information on the continuing EOC churches can be found on a website maintained by OCA converts: "About the EOC," <http://ogreatmystery.com/eoc/> (April 20, 2004). I am largely reliant upon a visit, in October 2003, to Holy Transfiguration Evangelical Orthodox Church in Terre Haute, Indiana. Over the course of a couple of days, I spoke at length with Bishop Christopher Murray, Father Steve Smith, and Father Bill Bruce, as well as Mother Pilar Callen and Mother Paula Seiple from the EOC Monastery of the Redeemer in Bloomfield, Indiana. I had more casual conversations with a number of lay members.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Cuneo, 121-134. Tremblay's community maintains a sizeable website: "The Order of the Magnificat of the Mother of God," <http://www.magnificat.ca> (April 20, 2004) and publishes a bimonthly magazine, Magnificat, where one can find the teachings of Pope John Gregory. Cuneo does not discuss the other groups and churches which also descend from Michel Collin. Many of Collin's ecclesiastical descendents can be traced with the help of the index in Ward, Persson, and Bain.

In both the esoteric and traditionalist new priesthoods, one sees a conviction that a mediatory priesthood is an important part of a properly constituted Christian church. Such priesthood is not self-chosen, but is bestowed by a greater reality, mediated through incarnate or discarnate persons. These groups also display the conviction that the Spirit still moves, and can renew the church's sacramental life when needed. The new priesthoods are generally not seen as simply standing in for the historic episcopate, but rather are often held in addition to apostolic priesthood, and are understood as valid and important spiritual transmissions in their own right. These priesthoods are a living symbol of the freedom of the independent sacramental movement to follow the Spirit's activity in creating new forms of ecclesial life.

#### *V. Conclusion*

The independent sacramental movement has an incredibly diverse heritage, from the historic churches of east and west, as well as from several new priesthoods inaugurated in the last two hundred years. These groups hold together a deep commitment to the catholic (in the broadest possible sense) sacramental tradition and its closely associated mediatory priesthood, with a radical freedom that at times veers close to anarchy. With such an extensive ancestry, each contemporary group makes its own choices of emphasis in terms of doctrine, liturgy, and other matters. Even the most traditional churches still make such choices (e.g., regarding the legitimacy of the pope, the different versions of the Tridentine liturgy, doctrines such as the Assumption or the prohibition of artificial birth control, disciplines such as clerical celibacy). In practice,

independent sacramental polity is often essentially congregational, despite claims to the contrary.<sup>139</sup>

Independent sacramental Christians have given a unique primacy to the priesthood, carrying the “priesthood of all believers” to an extent never before envisioned. In many such churches, most or all of the members are ordained, with ordination functioning more like confirmation, rather than a professional credential. For better or worse, there is great freedom to create new church structures, new forms for the sacraments, and new theologies, or at least a new synthesis of inherited elements. While this situation, and the history which has led to it, may initially appear as a confusing, if not scandalous, mess, it is more than that. In the struggles of the awkward ancestors of the independent movement, one can also see a striving toward new expressions of sacramental Christianity, where all God’s children can prophesy, freely bringing forth their treasures, both old and new.

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<sup>139</sup> While technically maintaining an episcopal polity, many local communities have at least one bishop, which situation lends itself to de facto congregationalism. I owe this insight to Tim Cravens.

## Chapter 4

### The Liturgical Life of the Independent Sacramental Movement

#### *I. Introduction*

We are sitting in a small group of chairs which have been gathered around the window of a hotel room on Central Park South in Manhattan. The room is on a high floor, looking north over the park. The lights of New York at night create a magical view. A small end-table has been placed against the window, with a single red beeswax candle burning upon it, probably in violation of hotel rules. A china plate holds communion wafers, and a wine glass is filled with water.

Sitting off to one side is a distinguished man in late middle age. He is dressed in business attire, but with a white stole over his shoulders. This is the Rev. John Wilson, who began his priestly career in the Independent Church of Australia, formerly the Church of the Mystic Christ, founded by Rev. Mario Schoenmaker. He now serves the loose community associated with the mystic, Gabrielle Brunsdon. John is in town on business, and a number of persons interested in Gabrielle's work have gathered to share communion with him.

Before beginning the liturgy proper, John leads us in some prayers which Gabrielle has allegedly received from "the Elder Brothers of Humanity." Whatever the source, the texts are lovely. One prayer to Christ strikes a chord in me:

When I know not  
Whom I am to be,  
When I know not  
Where I am to go,  
You are still beside me,  
Knowing for me...

Tonight we recite this prayer, but John has also set it to a beautiful melody that embodies the trusting grace of the words.<sup>140</sup> Many of us gathered here are spiritual wanderers, and it is comforting to think of Christ beside us “throughout all the ways, ventured in and upon,” knowing our true identities, and our destinies, until we are strong enough to know them for ourselves.

We prepare ourselves with the Lord’s Prayer and the “abscondance from sin” and move into the communion liturgy, recited from a small purple booklet. John speaks the words gently and with deep conviction. We share in the simple elements of bread and water (which is used instead of wine, in this community). As we look out over the city lights, John speaks the closing words: “... we partake in this, not only for our own soul’s sake, but on behalf of all those beloved to Christ,” to which we gratefully answer, “Amen.”<sup>141</sup> I feel the love and blessing of this tiny, essentially unknown community radiating over the city.

It is just such moments which constitute the heart of the independent sacramental movement. After all the history has been recounted, priestly lineages documented, theology and church discipline codified, it is liturgical experience and the sacramental life which continue to draw persons to this movement. The liturgical life of independent sacramental communities is all too often unknown beyond their own membership. Such fellowships can be difficult to locate, and may not always have a permanent location or a

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<sup>140</sup> The full text of the prayer is found in Prayers II (Victoria, Australia: B. Hive Publications, n.d.), 6. The musical setting can be found on John Wilson’s CD, *The Wheeling Sun* (Rosebud Studios, 2003), Track 5, and can also be located at <http://www.mp3.com.au/johnwilson>. My thanks go to John and Jocelyn Wilson, Bruce and Gabrielle Brunson, and Alice Despard, from this informal community. The liturgy recounted here took place in late 1998. Information regarding the Independent Church of Australia can be found on its website: <http://www.ica.org.au> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>141</sup> The communion liturgy in its entirety can be found in Holy Communion Handbook (Victoria, Australia: B. Hive Publications, n.d.). The quote is from p. 12.



listing in the phone book. Moreover, there are many independent clerics who primarily celebrate alone, whether by vocation or necessity.

The best way to grasp something of the sacramental experience of independent communities and their members in contemporary North America is through description, in which I will attempt to convey at least something of what these churches and groups have graciously shared with me. For ease of organization, I have divided these communities and their liturgies into the following categories: (1) traditionalists who have incorporated some new aspect, such as charismatic worship, without abandoning their conservative theological commitments; (2) churches which maintain traditional liturgy, but with a different social or theological vision, e.g., full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons; (3) groups with a particular focus on women's issues, and/or the recovery of the Divine Feminine in worship; (4) fellowships whose liturgies display their commitment to an esoteric spirituality; (5) groups who are seeking a very liberal, non-dogmatic approach to being the church; and (6) clergy who primarily celebrate alone. These categories constitute the most important "families" within the independent movement, although one should always remember that many groups and individuals belong to more than one of these families, or live on the boundaries between them. Only after considering representative communities from each family will we engage in some concluding analysis.

## *II. Renewing the ancient way...*

To the average North American churchgoer, the most familiar of the independent communities will doubtless be those who maintain a strong connection to the traditions of the historic liturgical churches. There are some organizations such as The Sacerdotal Society of St. Pius X who seek a wholesale return to an earlier era of church life. Beyond such traditionalists proper, there are many churches which are quite conservative, and yet bring some new aspects, or new combinations of old elements, to their liturgical life.

One of the best known and most successful of such groups is the International Communion of Charismatic Episcopal Churches, founded in 1992. The Charismatic Episcopalians hold to a deeply conservative theology which would likely be congenial to their “Continuing Anglicans” cousins who seek a return to the 1928 Prayer Book. However, the CEC has fully incorporated aspects of the charismatic/Pentecostal tradition into their liturgical worship. In a CEC parish, one is likely to sing contemporary “praise and worship” choruses, and to encounter speaking in tongues, an interest in prophecy, and claims to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.<sup>142</sup> A similar, and also fast-growing, group is the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches. The Evangelical Episcopalians present themselves as part of the “convergence movement,” bringing together impulses from the evangelical, charismatic, and liturgical churches.<sup>143</sup>

From the beginnings of the modern independent movement, there have been groups who have separated from the mainstream, in order to maintain the integrity of their ethnic, racial, and/or cultural group. The Polish National Catholic Church, founded

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<sup>142</sup> Extensive information on the International Communion of Charismatic Episcopal Churches can be found on its website at <http://www.iccec.org> (June 27, 2004). I am also reliant upon my experience with their congregation in Nashville, TN – the Church of the Messiah, pastored by Father Hunter Allen.

<sup>143</sup> See their website at <http://www.theceec.org> (June 27, 2004) for more information.

in 1904, was largely a protest against the control of the Roman church in the United States by an Irish and German hierarchy.<sup>144</sup> The African Orthodox Church was founded in 1921 by African American Episcopalians who wanted to assert their independence from a primarily white church.<sup>145</sup> The Imani Temple, also known as the African American Catholic Congregation, founded by George Stallings, a former Roman Catholic priest, in 1989, is a similar effort.<sup>146</sup>

There are also many groups which seek to create an indigenous, autocephalous American Orthodoxy, as opposed to the larger churches associated with the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America. The SCOBA jurisdictions are often viewed within autocephalous circles as mired in unfortunate ethnic politics and jurisdictional rivalries. Many of these American Orthodox groups are western rite, such as St. Basil's Cathedral in Nashville, Tennessee, the mother parish of the Holy Orthodox Church, American Jurisdiction. Worship at St. Basil's resembles the Tridentine rite, although simplified, and in English, but their "Gregorian Rite" liturgy also contains some eastern elements, such as the Great Entrance, and the use of leavened bread.<sup>147</sup> Conversely, there are eastern rite communities, with some western elements in their American synthesis, and it is to such a group that we now turn for a more detailed look.

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<sup>144</sup> Stephen Wlodarski, The Origin and Growth of the Polish National Catholic Church (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1974).

<sup>145</sup> Karl Pruter, The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey (Highlandville, MO: St. Willibrord's Press, 1986). While the AOC has been theologically and liturgically orthodox, for the most part, one of its most visible and successful parishes, St. John Coltrane African Orthodox Church in San Francisco, and its related mission, the Zion Trane Church of the Promise in Santa Cruz, are definitely eccentric. They have canonized the jazz musician, John Coltrane, and use his music in the liturgy. Bishop Franzo King has also expressed his interest in "Coltrane Consciousness". St. John's has a website at <http://our.homewithgod.com/fdrennan/SJAOC.htm> (June 29, 2004).

<sup>146</sup> Relatively current information on the Imani Temple and Archbishop Stallings can be found on-line at <http://www.ind-movement.org/denoms/aacc-imani.html> (June 29, 2004).

<sup>147</sup> I have had the opportunity to visit St. Basil's more than a dozen times in 2003 and 2004, and am thankful to Metropolitan Archbishop W. Francis Forbes, and his co-adjutor, Bishop Nicholas Boyle-Parsley for their hospitality, and warm willingness to discuss their church with me.

I pull up alongside a white clapboard church in Terre Haute, Indiana on a bright October morning in 2003. It looks similar to any number of older Protestant structures in this Midwestern town and indeed it once belonged to a Primitive Baptist congregation, until the declining, aging membership chose to sell the property. The sign now proclaims “Holy Transfiguration Evangelical Orthodox Church.”<sup>148</sup>

Upon entering, there is an icon of Christ set upon a stand for veneration in the vestibule, but the back half of the church has changed little from its Baptist days, with neat rows of pews on a brightly polished hardwood floor. However, a glance toward the front reveals striking transformation. The space is centered upon a freestanding altar in Orthodox style, with large icons placed across the back wall behind the altar. There is no iconostasis between the sanctuary and congregation. Bishop Christopher Murray, a tall, bearded man in his early 50s, is already attired in gold Byzantine vestments, and is readying the service books for the Sunday liturgy.

As with most Evangelical Orthodox congregations, the senior local pastor is a bishop, with priests and deacons to assist him. Bishop Christopher has two presbyters, Father Bill and Father Steve, as well as a deacon and a deaconess. The EOC has restored the female diaconate, although female deacons do not serve in the liturgy in Terre Haute. Other EOC congregations have allowed female deacons to serve liturgically, which has been a point of contention in recent synods. All the Terre Haute clergy also have secular jobs. Bishop Christopher is a professor of computer sciences at a local community college.

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<sup>148</sup> The following account owe much to Bishop Christopher Murray, Father Steve Smith, and Father Bill Bruce, all of the EOC congregation in Terre Haute, and Mother Pilar Callen and Mother Paula Seiple of the EOC Monastery of the Redeemer in Bloomfield, Illinois. Background information was also provided by Ken Jensen, former EOC bishop of Indianapolis, whom I interviewed in Indianapolis on June 12, 2004.

In the early 1970s, young Rob Murray (not yet Bishop Christopher) was in a youth group run by an Indianapolis pastor named Ken Jensen. Jensen served an independent Christian church, descended from the Stone/Campbell tradition, noted for its emphasis on striving to return to the primitive Christianity of the New Testament. Jensen was fascinated with the question of what happened to the early church after the apostolic age. Around 1974, he became aware of a number of pastors, many formerly connected to Campus Crusade for Christ, who were asking similar questions. This group became the New Covenant Apostolic Order, with Jensen as a local apostolic leader in Indiana. In February 1979, some of the senior leaders of the NCAO felt led by the Holy Spirit to consecrate one another as bishops, and formed the Evangelical Orthodox Church.<sup>149</sup> Jensen was not in the meeting where the six original EOC bishops consecrated each other, but was consecrated along with twelve others, shortly thereafter. He was now Bishop Samuel of Indianapolis.

The future Bishop Christopher continued to serve in Jensen's Indianapolis parish through these changes, and in 1982, he was sent to serve a new mission congregation in Terre Haute, about an hour away. In 1987, a large portion of the EOC joined the Antiochian Archdiocese, but a number of congregations resisted this move, and continued an independent existence, including Terre Haute and Indianapolis.<sup>150</sup> In 1988, Christopher was consecrated as Bishop of Terre Haute. In 2000, Ken Jensen retired from the Indianapolis congregation, and joined the Roman Catholic Church as a layman. Most of the EOC members in Indianapolis joined the Orthodox Church in America in 2002,

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<sup>149</sup> Peter Gillquist and Gordon Walker, "From Arrowhead Springs to Antioch," <http://www.sthermans.ca/strange/gillquist.html>, reprinted from *The Word* (October 1987), 5-10.

<sup>150</sup> See Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1992).

along with a number of other EOC congregations in other parts of the United States.<sup>151</sup> A small part of the Indianapolis community continued with the EOC, and now rents a Seventh Day Adventist church on Sundays.

Through these changes, the Terre Haute congregation has kept to its original course, believing that God has not called them to enter the larger Orthodox jurisdictions. The EOC today is composed of six parishes, one mission, and a female monastery. There are four bishops. The two nuns who reside at Holy Redeemer Monastery in Bloomington, Indiana, Mother Paula and Mother Pilar, are worshipping with the Terre Haute congregation this Sunday. Their monastic foundation is in between Terre Haute and Indianapolis, and they alternate between the congregations.

The liturgy begins. It is a strangely beautiful and well integrated combination of elements, representative of the journey of these people. The underlying structure is the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, familiar to anyone who has ever ventured into an Orthodox parish. However, the chant tones are not the usual Byzantine or Russian ones, and bear a closer resemblance to Western melodies. Father Bill Bruce is musically gifted, and with some other EOC members, he has composed new music for the liturgy. The singing is enthusiastically accompanied on keyboard and guitar. More striking still is the replacement of some of the set liturgical hymns of the Eastern church with choices that would be familiar to most Western Christians. The large black binders containing the hymnal include selections ranging from Isaac Watts to Charles Wesley to contemporary Christian artist Twila Paris. There are also hymns composed by EOC members:

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<sup>151</sup> See an extensive website maintained by some of the OCA converts: <http://ogreatmystery.com> (June 21, 2004), which contains several accounts of their journey.

Within these walls,  
His priests lift up their hands.  
Within these walls,  
His children learn to stand.  
Within these walls,  
you hear the Angels sing.  
Within these walls,  
we have an offering.<sup>152</sup>

There are about twenty-five people present this Sunday morning. I am not the only visitor. The congregation is warmly welcoming, and quick to introduce themselves. Bishop Christopher's sermon is informed by Orthodox theology, but strongly biblical and delivered with evangelical ardor. This parish practices a "family communion" to which only chrismated members are welcome. This is a point of tension with some other EOC congregations. In nearby Indianapolis, communion is open to other Christians.

With the departure of so many congregations to the Antiochians and more recently the OCA, the future of the EOC as a separate communion is clearly in question. Yet the members of Holy Transfiguration are committed to their mission, and believe that they still have great potential to bring Orthodoxy to the evangelical world. They point with concern to the fact that the EOC parishes which have joined the larger Orthodox jurisdictions have had to give up their distinctive identity, along with their music and their American, evangelical culture.<sup>153</sup> I recently visited St Ignatius Orthodox Church in Franklin, Tennessee, one of the parishes which joined the Antiochian Archdiocese in 1987. There was no discernable sign of their pre-Antiochian past, and the priest's wife

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<sup>152</sup> Doug King and John Finley, "Within These Walls," the complete text of which can be found on the website of a former EOC parish: <http://www.stathanasius.com/history/meeting.html> (June 21, 2004).

<sup>153</sup> For example, in 1997, the Antiochian Archdiocese instructed the former EOC parishes that they would have to conform to standard Antiochian liturgical and musical usages within two years. See "Notes from the May 7, 1997 Meeting of the Antiochian Bishops," <http://www.benlomondarchives.org/AntiochianDirective.1997.05.07.html> (January 16, 2001), reprinted from *The Word* (September 1997). Similar directives have been given to the parishes which joined the Orthodox Church in America.

was quick to tell me, “That’s ancient history, and not who we are now. Lots of people here wouldn’t even know what you were talking about, unless they’ve read the book [Becoming Orthodox by Peter Gillquist].”<sup>154</sup>

In recent years, the EOC has attempted to lessen its isolation by engaging in conversation with other autocephalous orthodox jurisdictions, but this has been complicated by their lack of tactile apostolic succession. Bishop Christopher states that they would be glad to receive the blessing of apostolic succession, but only in way that acknowledges the validity of their already existing ministry, given to their church through the Holy Spirit. Thus far, the EOC’s position on ordained ministry has proven a stumbling block to other autocephalous orthodox. Only time will reveal whether they are the last gasp of a movement on its way into the canonical Orthodox church, or if they have a future mission to their fellow evangelicals, from within the independent sacramental movement.

### *III. Tradition wears a red boa...*

There is another family of churches which also maintain an essentially conservative liturgical life, whether eastern or western or some combination thereof, and a traditional theology. However, they are distinguished from groups like the Evangelical Orthodox Church by the ordination of women and/or the full inclusion of persons of different sexual orientations (i.e., the ordination of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, and the sacramental recognition of same-sex marriages/unions).

Some are Roman in ethos (the United American Catholic Church, Bishop Anthony

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<sup>154</sup> Conversation with Terry Rogers, St. Ignatius Antiochian Orthodox Church, Franklin, Tennessee, June 19, 2004. Mrs. Rogers is married to the Very Rev. Fr. Stephen Rogers. She and her husband are both former members of the Evangelical Orthodox Church.



Hash<sup>155</sup>), some are Anglican (the Free Episcopal Church, Bishop Sherrie Albrecht<sup>156</sup>), and some are Orthodox (the Independent Greek Orthodox Church of the United States, Bishop Elias Shynkyevitch<sup>157</sup>), but there tends to be a significant amount of communication and cooperation across these lines.

One of the most recent of these groups is the Traditional Independent Roman Catholic Church, led by Father Michael Scotto, under the episcopal protection of Bishop Donald Battenbusch. The TIRCC illustrates the ways in which these churches can defy easy definitions. Father Michael celebrates the unaltered Tridentine liturgy, using both English and Latin, at The Loft, a gay and lesbian community center in White Plains, New York. Despite his commitment to equality for persons of all sexual orientations, including same-sex marriage, Father Michael is firmly opposed to the ordination of women on traditional grounds. He is also no proponent of modern liturgy or inclusive language. He is quick to point out the curious fact that the majority of his regular congregants are female, many of them lesbian.<sup>158</sup> We will now take an extended look at an older, more established church, belonging to this same general classification.

It is a bright sunny June morning in 2004 as I pull into the parking lot of a strip of business suites on the north side of Indianapolis. The two low buildings are painted a dark brown, and are home to a number of hair salons and construction companies. I look around and find #7 quickly, as it has icons and other typically Orthodox items in the

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<sup>155</sup> <http://www.uacatholicchurch.org> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>156</sup> <http://www.free-episcopal.org> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>157</sup> <http://www.orthopraxis.org> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>158</sup> Personal conversations by email and phone with the Rev. Michael Scotto, with reference to the TIRCC promotional brochure titled, "Renewing All Things in Christ."

window. A small plate by the door proclaims: Holy Eucharist Orthodox Church, and gives service times for Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings.<sup>159</sup>

I'm greeted warmly by Bishop Larry Terry of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America. Bishop Larry is a soft-spoken, middle-aged man in blue jeans and a black polo shirt. He has journeyed through a number of independent jurisdictions and is also a minister in the Divine Science branch of the New Thought movement.

We enter the church, which resembles a small Roman Catholic or Episcopal chapel in layout. There is an electric organ in the back, and rows of chairs with blue padding. The side walls are dotted with small icons and the stations of the cross. The front of the church is dominated by a large freestanding altar, with a reddish marble top, framed by a pulpit on one side, and carved wooden seats for the clergy on the other. A metal tabernacle with red presence lamp is in one of the back corners of the room. Larger icons are arranged on the wall behind the altar, although not in the typical fashion of a Russian or Greek church. In the center is a San Damiano cross, with icons of Christ and the Virgin descending along one side.

I am quickly introduced to Al Lankenau, the retired Metropolitan Archbishop of the OCCA, who founded this parish, almost 25 years ago. Al was a Roman Catholic priest who had gotten in trouble over his sexual orientation. After some time working with Dignity, an organization for gay Roman Catholics, he joined the OCCA, which was then led by George Hyde. Hyde began an independent sacramental ministry to the gay community, perhaps the very first of its kind, in 1946 in Atlanta, Georgia. Hyde and

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<sup>159</sup> In the following account, I am particularly indebted to Bishop Larry Terry and Archbishop Al Lankenau, and their very gracious community in Indianapolis. Further information on the OCCA has been provided by a number of other clergy, especially Mother Lynn Walker of Brooklyn, New York; Father Richard Cleaver of Grinnell, Iowa; and Archbishop Skip Carsten of Auburn, Indiana. The OCCA maintains a website at <http://www.orthodoxcatholicchurch.org> (June 26, 2004).

Lankenau trace the primary line of ancestry of their church to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century missions of Rene Vilatte.<sup>160</sup>

Archbishop Al is a large man with somewhat wild white hair. He is full of energy, even if his mobility is a bit limited by his age (somewhere in his 70s) and health concerns. He is gregarious and funny, and enjoys giving a gentle ribbing to his clergy. He begins telling stories about a funeral from the day before, for a priest in his care who served St Bridget's, a mostly African-American parish in Indianapolis, which affiliated with the OCCA en masse after the local Roman authorities closed their parish, and sold their building.

The congregation trickles in, numbering around ten. I am told that there are normally a few more, but some are away on vacations. Al says that Wednesday night can be even more crowded. Two other clergy appear – Father Michael and Deacon Roger. They both are long standing members of the parish. Father Michael explains that they once had a larger space closer to the center of the city, but that they moved to the current location over ten years ago. Deacon Roger is recently ordained. Many decades ago, he was kicked out of a monastic seminary only one week prior to his deacon ordination, due to his sexual orientation. The new deacon's charmingly flamboyant partner of forty-five years regales us with a dramatic account of how he wore a boa in the proper liturgical color (red) at Roger's ordination. The majority of this congregation is clearly composed of gay men, although the OCCA, as a jurisdiction, reaches well beyond the gay

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<sup>160</sup> For information on Hyde, see his entry in Ward, Persson, and Bain, 197. A more detailed account, including quotations from recent letters by Hyde, can be found on the website of the Eucharistic Catholic Church (Canadian branch), at <http://www.netministries.org/see/churches/ch04614> (June 28, 2004). Hyde is now quite elderly, and living in retirement in Bellaire, Florida. For the OCCA's account of its history and descent from Vilatte, see George Augustine Hyde, *Genesis of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America* (Indianapolis, IN: Orthodox Catholic Church of America, 1993). More information on the OCCA's theology and history can be found in Stephen F. Duncan, *This We Believe: Basic Tenets of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America* (Portales, NM: Holy Wisdom Orthodox Community, 1996).

community. Al's successor as Metropolitan Archbishop, Skip Carsten, is straight. Skip lives a couple of hours away in Auburn, Indiana.

It is the feast of Corpus Christi, and the altar is decked in white. The clergy disappear into the vestry behind the chapel, and return in white vestments in western style. Archbishop Al wears a chasuble and large pectoral cross, as he is to be the principal celebrant. He shifts the purple zucchetto on his head, as the organ music begins. The music is not unlike what one would find in most contemporary Roman parishes, and is drawn from a paperback hymnal found under the seats. The singing is enthusiastic, if not always on key. The liturgy itself is largely drawn from the Novus Ordo liturgy of the Roman Church, with a few additions, such as an epiclesis closer to that found in most Orthodox liturgies. The chalice and paten are also eastern in design, and the bread is leavened. Al stands behind the altar, facing the people, with the other clergy gathered around him.

The readings for the day are from the Roman lectionary, and Bishop Larry preaches the sermon. He speaks, with reflective pauses, about how the eucharist is the Christian version of a Zen koan, which stops the intellect in its tracks, allowing the possibility of spiritual illumination. He also points to the danger of trying to encapsulate such mysteries in words. The congregation is attentive. I am not the only visitor, so Larry makes sure that we know that communion is open. Later, in the silence following communion, Larry stands at the front to offer anointing, with laying on of hands and prayer, to any who desire it. Most of the congregants come forward again to be anointed.

With a few more prayers, a blessing, and a little music while the clergy procession makes its way down the very short aisle, the liturgy is over. Any practicing Roman

Catholic or Episcopalian would have recognized almost every word of it. The creed and responses rolled right off my tongue from memory. The folks here at Holy Eucharist are obviously not interested in doctrinal or liturgical innovation, but in widening the welcome of their community. Other OCCA parishes also use largely traditional liturgies, whether eastern or western. I found myself very moved by their obvious sincerity, and devotion to their church, as well as by the good humor and friendships that knit them together.

#### *IV. The Divine Feminine bears us upward...*

The independent sacramental movement has attracted many women who would have sought ordination in their churches of origin, if such had been possible, as well as men who cannot in conscience pursue ordination in a church which denies it to women. While many independent sacramental groups remain opposed to women's ordination, there are dozens of jurisdictions which have been ordaining women to all levels of ministry for decades. Other women and men seek out liberal jurisdictions within the independent movement, in order to theologically and liturgically embrace a more radical inclusivity, and/or a greater focus on the Divine Feminine, than is typically possible in mainstream congregations.

The most common liturgical phenomenon related to these issues is the attempt to bring a greater inclusivity to language, without radical change to the underlying dynamics. A fine example is the work of Bishop Marilyn Sieg, now retired from the Apostolic Catholic Community, and re-affiliated with the Orthodox Catholic Church<sup>161</sup>,

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<sup>161</sup> The Orthodox Catholic Church is not connected to the Orthodox Catholic Church of America of Al Lankenau and Larry Terry, despite the similarity of name. The current presiding bishop of the OCC is the

in which she was originally ordained. Bishop Marilyn was a Roman Catholic sister in a Franciscan order, who became involved in a non-canonical group called The Sisters for Christian Community in 1971. She served on the initial task force which led to the formation of the Women's Ordination Conference in 1975. The WOC gave her an award as a "Prophetic Figure" in 1988. Bishop Marilyn was ordained as a priest in 1990 and a bishop in 1991. Her liturgical work follows a fairly standard western Catholic pattern, although using inclusive Trinitarian invocations ("the Divine Creator, the Beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit'), and including references such as that to "Mother Mary, the first priest to birth you [Jesus] onto the altar of the expanded universe."<sup>162</sup>

Bolder moves in a similar direction have been made by clergy who have adopted explicitly feminine language for God. An example would be the Rev. Linda Lewis, ordained in the Catholic Church of the Americas, and now pastor of the Sophia Center in Nashville, Tennessee. A liturgy composed by Mother Linda begins, "Blessed be God, Mother, Father, and Child."<sup>163</sup> In Mother Linda's community, God the Mother seems to be equivalent to the Holy Spirit.

Other communities have brought the feminine aspect of God into the incarnation. In the teaching of The Christian Temple of Revelation and its associated Christos-Sophia Churches, under the care of Bishop Philip Stearns Very, the Holy Spirit, who is also the Divine Sophia, has become incarnate in Mary of Nazareth. The CTR has abandoned the traditional eucharist of bread and wine in favor of a new Eucharistic rite in three

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Most Rev. Memo (William) Grassman. The OCC maintains a website at <http://www.ohioocc.org/occ/index.htm> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>162</sup> Marilyn L. Sieg, "Autobiography," unpublished, no date; Marilyn L. Sieg, "Summary of Religious Background and Ministries," unpublished, no date; Marilyn L. Sieg, *Liturgy of Thanksgiving*, (Orlando, FL: The Apostolic Catholic Community, 1994). I owe a debt of thanks to Bishop Marilyn, and her colleague, Bishop Evelyn Hill, for generously sharing documents.

<sup>163</sup> Rev. Linda Lewis, unpublished liturgy dated January 11, 2004.

movements: the washing of feet, the sharing of a cup of consecrated water, and the passing of a lighted lamp.<sup>164</sup> A similar, yet distinct, teaching is found in the Order of Christ Sophia, led by the Rt. Rev. Peter Bowes, where both Jesus and Mary are “Christed Beings.” A song by Father Peter proclaims: “Jesus and Mary, Co-mediators. They are our Masters. They hold us in their love.”<sup>165</sup> Here, Jesus and Mary both incarnate the Christ, and it is possible for us to do likewise. The OCS Trinitarian invocation is “In the name of the Creator, and of the Mediators [*plural*], and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>166</sup>

The contemporary fascination with the figure of Mary Magdalene is also not absent from the independent movement, and was significantly prefigured by a church which deserves a more extended examination, as a striking example of the resurgence of the feminine.

It is Sunday, November 11, 2001, and I am riding in a bright red car, with a sporty design, driven by Bishop Jessika Lucas of the Gnostic Order of Christ. We are traveling from Jessika’s home in San Jose, California, to the Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum, in the neighboring town of Palo Alto. The EGM is presided over by Rosamonde Miller, a woman I am most interested to meet. We have had some email correspondence in preceding months, and Rosamonde was particularly interested in my perspective on the September 11 tragedy, as I was working in Manhattan on the day of the terrorist attack.

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<sup>164</sup> I have had extensive conversations with both present and former members of The Christian Temple of Revelation, from 1998 until the present. I have attended their liturgy twice, in Chicago, Illinois, in 1998 and 2000. They maintain a website at <http://www.christian-temple.org> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>165</sup> Father Peter Bowes, *In the Hour Before Dawn* (Oakland, CA: Sophia Records, 2004), Track 10.

<sup>166</sup> I am indebted to conversation with Mother Clare Watts, Co-Director of the Order of Christ Sophia, and Rev. Cynthia Clapp, priest of their center in Atlanta, Georgia. For more detail, see their website at <http://www.orderofchristosophia.org> (June 28, 2004), and Mother Clare’s book, *Giving Birth to God: A Woman’s Path to Enlightenment* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003). The OCS is descended from the Holy Order of MANS, via the work of Rt. Rev. Anthony (Raeson) Ruiz. The teaching that Mary was a Christed Being was present in the original Holy Order, but is much further developed within OCS.

Jessika has been acquainted with Rosamonde for some years, although they have not seen one another in a long while, and she volunteered to take me to the sanctuary.<sup>167</sup>

We pull into the Alma Plaza Shopping Center. Straight ahead are a grocery store, and some other shops, with a low office building off to the left side. Jessika parks the car, and we walk up to the office complex. There is a directory immediately inside the door, but it proves completely unnecessary, as a thick cloud of incense is wafting from one of the upstairs suites. We follow our noses and enter the door to find a small vestibule, which is obviously used for coffee after church, or for visitors waiting to meet with Rosamonde in her office. The door to the sanctuary is open. There is a table before it, graced with a large icon of Mary Magdalene, by Robert Lentz, and a small basket for donations.

The sanctuary has rows of chairs and could probably hold around forty persons. This morning, there are about twenty-five. In the back, Rosamonde's ex-husband, Michael, and several other musicians are sorting out drums and rattles and various other instruments. The front of the chapel is centered upon an exquisite altar of wood and stone, with a colorful canopy hung above it. Behind the altar is a narrow statue of the Black Madonna. Flowers and living plants decorate the sanctuary, as well as carefully chosen paintings and stained glass. I recognize one painting by the Russian artist Nicholas Roerich. The altar is set with candles and a chalice and paten which look to be

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<sup>167</sup> In the account which follows, I am indebted to Bishop Rosamonde Miller and her congregation, who warmly welcomed me in both 2001 and 2002, as well as to Bishops Jessika Lucas and Ken Keach, who helped in various ways. Jay Kinney, a priest ordained in the EGM and former editor of Gnosis magazine, also provided helpful information, and Hannah Shapero of the Order of St Michael, loaned me a large file of back-issues of The Gnostic, the EGM house publication. The Order of St. Michael has a historical connection to the EGM, as its Abbess-Bishop, Katherine Kurtz (better known as the author of fantasy novels) was trained and ordained to the priesthood by Rosamonde. Abbess-Bishop Katherine has since moved in a more orthodox direction, theologically and liturgically.



of alabaster, or at least a material of similar appearance. A box filled with crystals and stones of various colors spill over on the surface of the altar.

I quickly notice that several of the gathering congregants have brought their dogs and cats with them, for animals are welcome in this church. Most of them seem familiar with their surroundings, and are alarmingly well-behaved. Rosamonde brings her own cats to the service every week, and they spend the hour wrapped in a blanket, sitting on her tall wooden episcopal throne. One person volunteers that someone once brought a boa constrictor. I am relieved that snake handling does not seem to be on the agenda for this morning!

Ken Keach, an independent bishop who is a friend of both Rosamonde and Jessika, goes to find Rosamonde so that I can be introduced. Upon her arrival in the room, one can see why she has built a following, as she has an electrifying charisma, as well as startling beauty, looking much younger than her approximately sixty years. She has olive skin, with long dark hair, and intense eyes. She is barefoot, and clad in a simple alb. She takes my hands and greets me effusively. Her accent is thick and lilting, showing something of her French familial origins, as well as the Cuba of her youth. It is hard to imagine that this gracious woman was imprisoned and gang-raped due to her political activism, in Castro's Cuba.<sup>168</sup>

Rosamonde tells me that after September 11, exactly two months earlier, and my journey to California from New York, she would like to give me the Mary Magdalene blessing, even though she normally offers this blessing only once a year, on the feast of

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<sup>168</sup> For Rosamonde's account of her imprisonment in Cuba, and its effect on her spiritual development, see Rosamonde Miller, "The Experience of Gnosis," in Robert A. Segal, ed., The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Psychology and Contemporary Culture (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1995), 199-203.

the Magdalene in July. How could I refuse? Rosamonde is not only an independent bishop in “regular” apostolic succession, but claims to be the recipient of a hidden succession from Mary Magdalene, and the current hierophant of the Holy Order of Mary Magdalene. This order, which was exclusively feminine until our time, allegedly carried forward the tradition and lineage of the Magdalene in France, to which land she traveled after the Resurrection. Thus far, Rosamonde and her order have not presented any historical evidence for these claims, and later at dinner she dismissed a question about this history by asking whether the outer, historical truth is really important.<sup>169</sup>

Rosamonde disappears and all settles into silence. The small choir in the back begins the opening hymn. The community’s music has been written by present and former participants, and bears a resemblance to both traditional chant, and the “tribal groove” of world music. We sing: “She weaves with silver and she weaves with gold. She weaves the ancient tales untold. She weaves the breath of young and old, and with her love she does unfold....” As the song winds gently forward, I realize that this is quite different from any church I’ve ever attended. “She is the lover and she is the mother. She is the virgin as well as the whore. She is my sister as well as my friend. She’s the beginning and she is the end...”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> An account of the Holy Order of Mary Magdalene can be found on Rosamonde’s website: <http://www.gnosticsanctuary.org> (June 28, 2004), and also in Rosa Miller, “The Mary Magdalene Succession and The Gnostic Mystery of the Eucharist,” *The Gnostic* (Summer 1984), 1-3. One should note that the blessing given with the mantle, on the feast of Mary Magdalene in July and other special occasions, does not confer any type of ordination. For more on Rosamonde’s ordinations, both in the historic episcopate and the Magdalene succession, see the entry for her in Ward, Persson, and Bain, 278. It is worthy of note that Rosamonde’s primary consecrator in traditional succession, Stephan Hoeller of the Ecclesia Gnostica, has also emphasized devotion to the Divine Sophia, and has composed a special vespers service for that purpose. See Stephan Hoeller, *Sophia: A Service of Devotion to Our Lady* (Hollywood, CA: Ecclesia Gnostica, 1985.)

<sup>170</sup> This and other hymn texts are taken from *The Gnostic Book of Chants* (Palo Alto, CA: Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum, 1993). Rosamonde also graciously provided me with a CD of their choir performing this music: *Music for the Holy Eucharist* (Palo Alto, CA: Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum,

Rosamonde appears, with a blue veil wrapped around her alb. She is attended by her husband, David, also in a plain alb. The liturgy commences with purification with holy water and incense, and invocations of the suffering, blinded Sophia, joined to the pain of this world. I recall that Rosamonde was an early and important participant in AIDS hospice work in the Bay Area, caring for many of her friends in their final, painful days. The liturgy's cover page states that it is the Rite of the Bridal Chamber, and it quickly becomes apparent that the underlying pattern is the union of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Logos and Sophia, Jesus and Mary Magdalene, as well as the reunification of our divided selves. Perhaps it is no wonder that a number of Jungian therapists and writers, such as June Singer, have associated themselves with Rosemonde's work.

Prior to beginning the Eucharistic part of the liturgy, Rosamonde pauses. Someone brings her a book, and she adjusts her veil over her shoulders. She begins chanting a plaintive litany to the Magdalene. People in the congregation are visibly moved, and I find myself flowing with them in a sea of strange longing. Rosamonde's dark beauty seems one with the Black Madonna behind her. A prie-dieu is placed in front of the altar, and she invites those who wish to receive the Magdalene blessing to come forward, and state, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I wish to be put under Her mantle." As each person goes forward to kneel, Rosamonde wraps her veil around the person's head, and leans over them, speaking intimately for a moment. Perhaps it is some deep need for maternal comfort after September 11, but I'm stunned by the experience, and even those who have been through this rite many times before are somehow changed in the moment. Faces relax into a lost innocence, and tears flow.

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2002). Liturgical texts are from The Gnostic Holy Eucharist (Palo Alto, CA: Ecclesia Gnostic Mysteriorum, n.d.)

The liturgy continues with the eucharist. Rosamonde stands behind the altar, the blue veil flowing down from her shoulders and wrapped around the chalice and paten, The blue roundness before her belly looks for all the world like pregnancy. Speaking words of blessing, she opens the mantle and the bread and wine are born upon the altar stone. Following the consecration, we sing the following to an 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn tune: “O glorious Mystery! Heaven’s holy tremors resound on earth. For in Thy reunion Thou hast come, the Two-in-One, the Two-in-One....”

One by one, we go again the prie-dieu to receive the bread dipped in wine, the Body and the Blood of the Two-in-One. After the cleansing of the chalice, Rosamonde cries out: “I have recognized myself and gathered myself together from all sides. I have sown no children to the ruler of this world, but have torn up his roots. I have gathered together my limbs that were scattered abroad, and I know Thee, who Thou art.” There are final words of blessing and dismissal, and a closing song: “You remain in our hearts, you are with us to stay, Beloved Lady, how do we pray?”

I stay afterwards for coffee and cookies, with assorted dogs looking hopefully up at my plate. The cats seem only concerned to avoid being stepped on. The congregants represent a wide diversity, male and female, gay and straight, from many backgrounds, but all drawn to this sacramental worship focused on the Divine Feminine. Rosamonde takes a stone from the box on the altar, and warms it in her hand as we talk, before giving it to me. We adjourn to a local Italian restaurant where the intensity of the morning’s liturgy is lightened by bawdy jokes, and some wine. I leave both moved and confused. The theology is far from anything a traditional Christian would recognize. (Rosamonde would call it “wild Gnosis.”) The history of the Mary Magdalene Order, by outer

standards, is questionable at best. Yet something transformative is moving in this community, and the disturbing beauty of their worship astounded me. This is a church of the mysteries (*ecclesia mysteriorum*) in many different senses.

#### *V. Entering the Mystery...*

While we have considered Rosamonde Miller and the *Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum* under the rubric of the recovery of the Divine Feminine, they could just as correctly have been classified with esoteric communities. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with l’Eglise Gnostique and Jules Doinel, through the Liberal Catholic Church with its connections to the Theosophical Society and the Christengemeinschaft connected to the Anthroposophical Society, and continuing to the present, esotericism has played a very significant role within the independent movement. Many prominent occult teachers, such as Paul Foster Case, founder of the Builders of the Adytum (ordained priest in the Liberal Catholic Church) and Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, director of The Servants of the Light occult school (ordained priest in the Church of the Holy Grail), have had connections to the independent churches, even if not always well-publicized.<sup>171</sup>

In sacramental liturgy, through hieratic ritual which speaks to all of the senses, a living connection to the divine is mediated to the participants, with hopefully transformative effect. At least according to members of esoteric churches, this is not so different from theurgy, or high magical ritual, in which changes in consciousness are effected (at least allegedly) in accord with Divine will. In an apocryphal story told about

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<sup>171</sup> Father Cameron J. Mandrake of the Apostolic Church of the Risen Christ kindly provided documentation of Paul Case’s ordination. The BOTA website is <http://www.bota.org> (June 29, 2004). Bishop Sharon Hart, formerly of the Church of the Holy Grail, confirmed Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki’s ordination at the hands of Bishop David Goddard. The Servants of the Light website is <http://servantsofthelight.org> (June 29, 2004).

Bishop Charles Leadbeater of the Liberal Catholic Church, it is recounted that Leadbeater wasn't bothered in the least when he was accused of being primarily a ritual magician, with the mass as his preferred form of magic.<sup>172</sup> Perhaps something of the experience of such sacramental magic will be conveyed through an account of a visit to an esoteric community.

It is midnight in February, the eve of Candlemas, 1999. I'm sitting on hard wooden chair in a back room of a house in San Jose, California. A coffee pot is on the edge of a bookshelf beside me, containing the hot condensed remains of the day's brew, still steaming away. The back corner of the room has a bed and dresser, for Father Phil Willette, resident manager of Uriel House, and priest of the Royal Order of Christ the King. The opposite corner has a desk stacked with papers, mail, and a cordless phone. The front part of the room, where we are sitting, is the house chapel. Lack of space has led to this jumbled conjunction of bedroom, office, and chapel.<sup>173</sup>

Uriel House is a residence for persons with dual diagnosis, that is, both a psychiatric diagnosis and a substance abuse problem. The residents occupy a number of bedrooms on the upper floor of the house. In addition to Father Phil's room, the lower floor has a large kitchen, dining room, bathrooms, and living room. Father Phil is a tough Welshman with a white beard, who used to be a graphic artist, prior to devoting his life to service. He keeps track of the residents, their jobs, their educational programs, and their required visits with psychologists, social workers, parole officers, AA, and NA. He is

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<sup>172</sup> I have been told variations of this story many times, by members of the Liberal Catholic Church.

<sup>173</sup> For their hospitality and conversation in 1999, and on return visits, I owe many thanks to Patriarch Michael Whitney, Mother Maureen Dillman, Father Phil Willette, Rev. Carol Stone Anderson, and other past and present members of the Royal Order of Christ the King, and The American Temple. I also am thankful to the residents of Uriel House who graciously lent me their couch for a few nights. The American Temple maintains a website at <http://www.americantemple.org> (June 28, 2004). For background on the Holy Order of MANS, see Phillip Charles Lucas, The Odyssey of a New Religion: The Holy Order of MANS from New Age to Orthodoxy (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

also a very capable short order cook, and a willing listener. Phil is no one's fool, and it is immediately clear that the residents hold him in respect. Over the television in the living room, he has hung a sign which says, "Your actions speak so loud I can't hear a word you are saying."

The Royal Order of Christ the King is descended from the now defunct Holy Order of MANS. The original order combined esoteric Christian teaching with an emphasis on direct service, which the Royal Order continues today, with projects like Uriel House. (In the years since 1999, the Royal Order has become more widely known under its other name, the American Temple.) The members of the Order take life vows of poverty, humility, purity, obedience, and service. Father Phil and other clergy from the Order teach classes in meditation for the residents, but participation in these activities, or in the public services of the Order, are purely voluntary. Some of the residents are regulars at Sunday communion; others are not. Tonight, however, our gathering is composed only of Order members and invited guests. There are about eight to ten people present.

We are not gathered at midnight for an ordinary eucharist, but for the Mass of the Christos. In terms of the catholic/orthodox sacramental system, this rite occupies the place of confirmation/chrismation, being the Christian initiation following after baptism. As baptism has a purgative aspect, so the Mass of the Christos is intended to bring the candidate into conscious spiritual illumination. Bread and wine will not be consecrated this evening, but a brother of the Order will.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> The text of the Mass of the Christos, with accompanying illustrations, can be found in The Ritual Book from the Holy Order of MANS (San Francisco: Holy Order of MANS, n.d.), Section 8, provided to me by the Rt. Rev. Mariel Ray. A commentary on the rite can be found in Father Paul Blighton, The Philosophy

The altar table is against the wall, and is covered with a purple cloth. Seven candles are set across it, with a blue perpetual light behind them, and a painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the back. The painting is by the Catholic artist Bossoron Chambers. Before the altar, three candles on the floor form a triangle. Off to one side, near the door to the room, is an altar to Mary, with a small statue and a red presence lamp. Three clergy have vested for this rite. Father Phil and Mother Maureen, both priests, wear blue albs, with white stoles. They have matching black pectoral crosses, hanging from blue ribbons. Michael Whitney, the bishop and Director General of the order, wears a white alb with a golden stole. His pectoral cross is suspended by a purple ribbon. “Patriarch Michael” is a psychologist by profession, and deeply involved in the running of the house. He was a brother in the Holy Order of MANS, and continued his training after the dissolution of the order.<sup>175</sup> Phil and Maureen met him several years ago at a study group for A Course in Miracles.

A young man who is a brother in the order is blindfolded and brought into the room. He is placed in a chair by the Mary altar. Patriarch Michael instructs all present to enter into meditation, and to be especially mindful of the order’s spiritual ancestors, such as Father Paul Blighton (founder of the Holy Order of MANS), Murshid Samuel Lewis (a Sufi teacher who was the first spiritual director of the Holy Order), Joe Miller (a freelance Theosophical teacher who was a close friend of Paul and Sam), and Mar Hilarion (Harold Freeman, an independent bishop of the Church of the Hidden Christ,

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of Sacramental Initiation (San Francisco, CA: Holy Order of MANS, n.d.), 128-133, provided to me by the Rt. Rev. Matthew Martin.

<sup>175</sup> Michael did further study with a number of post-HOOM groups, including the Gnostic Order of Christ under Timothy Harris and Jessika Lucas, and the Brotherhood of Christ under Anthony (Raeson) Ruiz.



who imparted apostolic succession to many former members of the Holy Order), as well as “the Master Jesus and Mother Mary.”

After a period of silence, opening prayers follow, and the candidate is brought within the “Law Triangle” of candles, before the altar, and helped to kneel. Father Phil kneels beside the candidate, and places his hands before and behind the candidate’s solar plexus – roughly, on his belly and the small of his back. Mother Maureen, an attractive housewife and mother in her late 30s, stands on the other side, with her hands on the candidate’s head. Patriarch Michael sits in a chair beside the altar, and watches this procedure with prayerful interest.

Maureen and Phil spend some time in this work, probably fifteen minutes or more, although the intensity of the moment obscures the passage of time. They occasionally whisper to the candidate or to one another, to check on how they are doing, and what the candidate is experiencing. When the moment seems right, Father Phil roars through the silence with a commanding voice: “O Master, release the Light of the Christ to take over Thy temple and inhabit it. Let it come down now!”

The initiate appears transformed in ecstasy, and is both crying and laughing. He later reported an overwhelming experience of illumination, and radiance like an inner sun breaking through all boundaries. Most of those gathered also seem caught up in the experience, and bright smiles are seen all around. Patriarch Michael asks the initiate some questions to confirm the nature of the experience, and the initiate’s acceptance of it. He also asks those present to witness to what they have seen by spiritual “sight,” and several testify that they have truly seen the sun shining at midnight. The initiate is still

kneeling before the altar, with arms up in the orans position. Patriarch Michael instructs him to “just radiate” for awhile.

After some minutes, Michael rises, and lays his hands on the initiate’s head, praying that the Light of Christ be sealed in him. More prayers follow, concluding with:

O Glorious Father, we give unto Thee  
A newborn son, a son of God,  
A messenger of Light and strength supreme,  
To serve Thee and the Host by day and night,  
To use the Light to light Thy world,  
To see the cross in all lands unfurled.  
Glory unto the Father!  
Glory unto the Son!  
Glory unto the Holy Spirit!  
Amen! Amen! Amen!

A middle-aged female priest, Rev. Carol, who was not vested for the rite, steps forward. Rev. Carol is an LPN at a local hospital. With a strong, sure voice, she begins one of the order’s favorite hymns, “The Lord of Earth,” which is often sung at illuminations. The tune is Greensleeves, so even those of us who do not know the hymn pick it up quickly. The chorus echoes: “Hail, hail, the sun is come! The Christos shines on earth today! Look, look, the Light is given, the priceless gift of God!”<sup>176</sup>

After a few extra rounds of the hymn, the candidate is helped to his feet. He seems a bit unsteady, so he is taken to a chair, and someone disappears in search of water and a snack, while the clergy extinguish the candles and conclude the mass.

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<sup>176</sup> This hymn is found in The Hymnal of the Holy Order of MANS (San Francisco, CA: Holy Order of MANS, n.d.). I do not have the page number, as the text was provided to me via email by Michael Whitney.

## *VI. Seeking freedom in Christ...*

Since its beginnings, the independent sacramental movement has provided a home to those who questioned traditional doctrine and dogma, and sought a more free approach to Christianity. The Liberal Catholic Church, organized in 1915-1916, allows “the widest measure of intellectual liberty and respect for the individual conscience,” and erects “no barriers in the nature of standards of dogmatic belief.”<sup>177</sup> While the traditional creeds may be used in Liberal Catholic services, they are most often replaced with the Liberal Catholic Act of Faith:

We believe that God is love and power and truth and light; that perfect justice rules the world; that all his sons shall one day reach his feet, however far they stray. We hold the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man; we know that we do serve him best when best we serve our brother man. So shall his blessing rest on us and peace for evermore. Amen.<sup>178</sup>

While the LCC arose from within Theosophical circles, and was driven by the concerns of its members who wanted to be free to pursue their esoteric interests, similar approaches followed from the theological liberalism of the Roman Catholic “modernist” movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1920, a number of modernists, led by Karel Farsky, broke with Rome to form the Czechoslovak Church (now known as the Czechoslovak Hussite Church). The Czechoslovak Church repudiates the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ, rather holding that Jesus is “the Son of God in the moral and

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<sup>177</sup> The Liturgy according to the use of The Liberal Catholic Church, 7.

<sup>178</sup> The Liturgy according to the use of The Liberal Catholic Church, 195. I regularly visited St Michael’s Liberal Catholic Church in New York City during the years 1997-1999, and more occasionally from 1987 until its closure in 2003. I am thankful to Father Ed Abdill and Father Tim Trotman for their hospitality. I have also visited other LCC parishes in the United States, and have never experienced the use of any creed other than the LCC Act of Faith.

ethical sense.”<sup>179</sup> Farsky revised the Roman Catholic liturgy in accord with this new theology.<sup>180</sup>

To give only one more historic example, Ulric Vernon Herford was a Unitarian clergyman in England, of the “Liberal Christian” variety. In 1903, he was consecrated as an independent bishop.<sup>181</sup> Herford’s new status within the sacramental churches was not accompanied by a change in theology. His liturgy is devoid of any form of creed, and the doxologies of the prayers have been altered to accord with a Christian Unitarianism, e.g., “... through the Only-Begotten, Jesus Christ in holy spirit, through whom to Thee be glory and power....”<sup>182</sup> Herford is revered as a spiritual ancestor by many contemporary independent sacramental Christians who share his non-dogmatic approach.<sup>183</sup> We will now pause to give more extended attention to just such a church.

It is a hot summer night in 1996 in Vinton, Virginia, in the hills outside Roanoke. We are seated in two lines of chairs, facing one another across a darkened room in a small house, set high on a hill. The house belongs to Bishop Anthony Hash of Friends Catholic Community Church, and we are in the front room, which has been transformed

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<sup>179</sup> Frank M. Hnik, Frank Kovar, and Alois Spisar, The Czechoslovak Church (Prague: The Central Council of the Czechoslovak Church, 1937), 69. For contemporary information on the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, see <http://www.ccsch.cz> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>180</sup> The Liturgy of the Czechoslovak Church (Prague: The Central Council of the Czechoslovak Church, 1931). There were once communities of the Czechoslovak Church in North America, but they faded away into other groups, due to lack of communication with the mother church in Czechoslovakia during the Communist era.

<sup>181</sup> George Francis Tull, Vernon Herford: Apostle of Unity (Bradford: Bradford, 1958).

<sup>182</sup> Vernon Herford, Divine Service of the Lord’s Supper According to Saint Sarapion Scholasticus (Oxford: Blackwell, 1915). One might also note the Unitarian edition of the Anglican prayer book created in 1785 by King’s Chapel in Boston, Massachusetts. This prayer book has seen much use in the theologically liberal end of the independent movement. The Book of Common Prayer According to the Use in King’s Chapel, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston, MA: King’s Chapel, 1986).

<sup>183</sup> For example, Herford is often referenced by Bishop Bob Riordan and Bishop Margaret Denvil of the Companions of St Thomas: [http://www.geocities.com/thomas\\_christians](http://www.geocities.com/thomas_christians) (June 28, 2004). Bishop Don Stouder of The Thomas Christians, who is also a Unitarian Universalist minister, includes information on Herford in his new book, Along the Thomasine Path (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2004), esp. pp. 107-114. Herford is also regarded as a forebear by the Ecumenical Order of Charity: <http://www.orderofcharity.org> (June 26, 2004).

into a simple chapel. There are around a dozen people, clergy and lay, who have gathered from as far away as New Mexico and New York for a retreat.<sup>184</sup>

At the far end of the room, in front of the fireplace is a long wooden breakfast table which now serves as an altar. Upon it sit a simple earthenware chalice and paten, and a couple of candles. The room grows darker as the sun falls further behind the mountains, and the silence deepens. Our chairs are placed along the sides of the room, at right angles to the altar, vaguely recalling the typical arrangement of a monastic choir. I remember that Tony spent time in a Roman Catholic Benedictine monastery prior to finding his way to the independent sacramental movement.

This evening, no one is vested, jeans being the predominant habit of this makeshift choir of non-monks. All eyes turn to Bishop Catherine Adams as she speaks: “Light and peace in Jesus Christ.” We reply: “Thanks be to God.” Catherine reaches for a nearby Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. After a short reading and prayer, she begins to light candles on the altar, and in the rest of the chapel, until a soft glow permeates the room.<sup>185</sup>

Catherine is a tall, lanky woman in her late 40s, with long black hair, and an accent which still betrays her Texan origins, even after many years in New York. She wears a black tee-shirt and black jeans, with Birkenstock sandals. She is the Convening Bishop of FCCC, and the founding bishop of the church. A few years earlier, conflict

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<sup>184</sup> Here I am particularly grateful to Bishop Catherine Adams, Bishop Anthony Hash, Rev. Tatiana Beckett, and Ms. Sonya Beckett, all of FCCC at the time of this visit. Since that time, Tony has created another jurisdiction, the United American Catholic Church, and Catherine has converted to Reform Judaism. Along the way, Friends Catholic Community Church ceased to be a church, and became a communion of independent ministries, as Friends Catholic Communion, of which Tatiana Beckett is currently the Convening Bishop. Even after her conversion to Judaism, Catherine maintains a ministry in covenant with FCC. The FCC website is: <http://www.geocities.com/jccath/fcc.html> (June 28, 2004).

<sup>185</sup> This service was based loosely on “An Order of Worship for the Evening,” from The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 108-114.

broke out at the annual synod of the Free Catholic Church International, over the allegedly authoritarian behavior of some bishops. A number of clergy and lay members left the FCCI to seek another direction, and with the assistance of Bishop Martha Shultz of the New Order of Glastonbury, Catherine was consecrated as a bishop to serve the new community. Only a few months before this gathering, Catherine consecrated Tony Hash to assist her.

Judy Adams (not yet Bishop Catherine) grew up Methodist, but converted to Roman Catholicism while a teenager. After moving to New York as an adult, and finding a job in a research laboratory at a major university, she journeyed through Sufi schools, Unitarianism, Quaker meetings, and other stopping points on way of the contemporary seeker. She attended the New Seminary and was ordained by Rabbi Joseph Gelberman as an Interfaith Minister. Drawn back to Catholicism, she became involved in the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Malabar Rite, an independent jurisdiction led by Herman and Meri Spruit. The bishops with whom she was training (Michael Daigneault and Christian Umberger) left the Church of Antioch to form what became the Free Catholic Church International, and she followed them, not fully realizing the jurisdictional shift until it was done.

Catherine had been impressed by her time with the Society of Friends (Quakers), and their commitments to spiritual freedom and communal discernment. Some others in the early group which came together after the FCCI “Synod from Hell” also had experience in attending Friends meetings. The group decided to try to apply Quaker principles and spirituality to a sacramental community, thus the name *Friends Catholic Community Church*. Three promises characterized the church:

- (1) to teach the teachings of Christ, however that concept may be understood or interpreted;
- (2) to cooperate with the preservation of our apostolic succession and sacraments;
- (3) to guarantee to each individual and each ministry complete freedom for authentic, non-magisterial spiritual development and ministry.<sup>186</sup>

The church would make decisions after the “manner of Friends,” through communal discernment, seeking consensus in the Spirit. Moreover, “we do not suffer any magisterium, even from other free or independent or liberal catholics.”<sup>187</sup> FCCC liturgies have used creeds on occasion, or short affirmations of faith drawn from the text of scripture, but with complete freedom for each individual to interpret such creeds and affirmations, in accord with conscience.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> The three promises have been stated a number of different ways, in FCCC publications. This formulation is taken from Judy Carolyn Catherine Adams, Rationale, Proposals, and Selected Resources for Methods Curricula Designed for the Individualized Formation of Clergy for Friends Catholic Community Church, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lincolndale, NY: Heartleaf Publications, 2002), 2. This original edition of this text was Bishop Catherine’s D.Min. thesis, submitted to St Mary’s Seminary, Cortez, Colorado, in 1994. The FCCC By-Laws, adopted March 1996, give the promises as follows: “(1) to teach the teachings of Christ, (2) to cooperate with the preservation of our various lines of apostolic succession and the seven traditional sacraments (that is, to cooperate with the preservation of our catholicity), and (3) to leave individuals and ministries free in the Holy Spirit in every friendly way not breaking the two previous promises.”

<sup>187</sup> Adams, 2.

<sup>188</sup> One such affirmation which was very commonly used in FCCC liturgies in the mid-90s is the following “Affirmation of Mystery,” taken from J.C. Catherine Adams, Sacramentary of Christ’s Church at Heartleaf (Lincolndale, NY: Christ’s Church at Heartleaf, 1995), Rite V:

Certainly great is the mystery of Godliness:

Who was manifested in the flesh,  
 proven worthy by the spirit,  
 seen by angels, proclaimed among gentiles,  
 believed on in the world, taken up in glory.  
 Who, in his own time, will be revealed,  
 the blessed and only Sovereign,  
 the King of kings, and Lord of lords,  
 the only Immortal One,  
 dwelling in unapproachable Light.  
 Whom no one ever saw or can see,  
 to Whom be honor and power for ever.  
 Amen.

The liturgy we are now celebrating, known as “vespers after the manner of Friends,” is a favorite part of FCCC gatherings, and is usually the first service of any retreat. After Catherine finished lighting the candles, the community recited the ancient evening hymn, Phos Hilaron, and a couple of psalms, and settled deeper in the quiet. The next twenty minutes to half an hour were conducted as a silent meeting for worship. Those who felt moved by the Spirit could speak, and a couple of people did so, briefly. Mostly, we just rested in a sense of presence which renewed our travel-weary selves, and encompassed our coming days together.

When there was a felt sense of completion, Catherine rang a small bell to signal the end of the silence. From his seat across from Catherine, Tony read a closing prayer, and gave a blessing, his fingers tracing the sign of the cross through the flickering candlelight. He rose and began extinguishing the candles, as all of us slipped through the night to our quarters (sofas and sleeping bags, for the most part), trying to not lose the quiet of soul in which we shared.

### *VII. Praying to the Father in secret...*

Thus far, we have considered a variety of independent sacramental communities, but a large number of independent clerics in the United States are essentially alone in their priestly practice. They may attend occasional gatherings and retreats. They may celebrate mass or a wedding or a baptism at the request of family or friends. However, the majority of their worship occurs in private.

Some independent clergy reject private celebration of the eucharist, while others engage in it, but are embarrassed and apologetic about that fact. But a growing number of clergy are comfortable with private celebration, when a community is not available, or



if they have discerned that their vocation is largely a hidden one. Many point to monastic traditions of hermit priests (e.g. the Carthusians of the Roman communion) who often celebrate physically alone, but in mystical union with the entire church, interceding for the living and the dead.

Private celebration is often grounded in a deep conviction of the objective reality and efficacy of the sacraments. From such a perspective, even a mass said in one's living room, unknown to any other soul, is still a radiant gift to the world, and a powerful prayer for those held in mind and heart. On a less exalted level, private masses for those without a community enforce one's priestly identity, which may be outwardly expressed in less obvious ways. A priest who works as a nurse told me that she tries to bring sacramental grace to each interaction with her patients, even though the majority of them have no idea that she is ordained. Her daily communion at the small altar in her bedroom, in the wee hours of the morning, provide her with the spiritual focus and connection she needs to bring such a priestly sensibility to her work life.<sup>189</sup>

A bishop recounted a time when she was struggling with inner difficulties, and felt like she didn't know how to celebrate communion. In prayer reaching toward guidance, she felt directed to go through the prayers of the mass, but instead of offering the physical elements of bread and wine, she offered her body and blood for transmutation into the presence of Christ for the world, in her daily life. This approach to eucharistic transformation – offering herself as well as the elements (or instead of the elements, when they are not available) has become an important part of her spiritual

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<sup>189</sup> Anonymous respondent.

practice. Moreover, it is a practice that can be done anywhere, at any time, making it easy to blend into a busy work and family schedule.<sup>190</sup>

To give one last example of solitary practice, we go to a small studio apartment in Peekskill, New York, about forty miles north of New York City. This is the home of Bishop Timothy Cravens of the Independent Catholic Christian Church. Bishop Tim is a former Roman Catholic Franciscan, with a M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School. He is now in his late 30s, and works in an administrative capacity for a non-profit organization in New York City. He is also active in local politics, and a wide range of social causes. He is a member of the local parish of the Episcopal Church, which he attends on occasion. Unbeknownst to many in his life, he also maintains a full liturgical schedule in his apartment.

On weekdays, Bishop Tim rises early and celebrates an abbreviated form of the eucharist. He has a small table altar, with a tabernacle made from an aumbry discarded by his Episcopal parish. His extensive collection of relics of the saints rests in a nearby drawer. Later, while riding the Metro North train to his job in the city, he reads the full text of the Tridentine mass for the day, as well as the morning office of the liturgy of the hours. He believes that his priesthood is expressed in his tireless work for social change, particularly in promotion of same-sex marriage and opposition to abortion. His hidden sacramental life sustains him in these labors. He also provides pastoral oversight to a priest with a mission parish in Texas, and has an ongoing relationship with a number of persons who are inquiring into the independent movement.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> This story and practice come from the Rt. Rev. Mary Ray of Lawrence, Kansas, and were shared by her at a gathering in Wilmington, Delaware in May 25, 2002.

<sup>191</sup> Bishop Tim maintains a small website at <http://www.geocities.com/stmikeandstim/> (June 28, 2004).

### *VIII. Conclusion*

Much as with Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of The Golden Bough, we should be wary of wandering into the murky world of theory, rather than simply describing, and saying that these independent sacramental communities are "like that."<sup>192</sup> But with such caution duly taken, we can draw at least some small conclusions.

First, all these communities are composed of those who have felt themselves excluded from the mainstream liturgical churches due to gender, sexuality, race, culture, style of worship (e.g., making use of charismatic or evangelical forms), or theology (e.g., esotericism or unitarianism). One immediately notes a high degree of individual commitment and liturgical involvement in most of these groups. Members have often undertaken a difficult journey to find a community that shares their particular, unusual brand of Christianity. Moreover, ordination is often open to a much larger percentage of the membership than in mainstream churches. Thus, those who want to become priests can generally do so. In the case of women and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, there is a redemptive reversal in which those who were denied a public role in the church's sacramental life have assumed the previously forbidden place at the altar. Persons from ethnic or cultural minority groups who have been denied leadership positions, or who feel that their culture has been stifled, can work to more fully integrate their cultural identity and their faith. Evangelicals and charismatics are basking in the excitement of discovering aspects of the Christian tradition, from which they were excluded by the boundaries of their traditions. Independent sacramental Christians have often been accused of "playing church." Perhaps there is a grain of truth in that barb, as

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<sup>192</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough, trans. A.C. Miles, rev. and ed. Rush Rhees (Nottingham: Brynmill Press Ltd., 1979 [c.1931]), in Michael Lambek, ed. A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 86.

there is touch of a playful attitude, when all these unlikely folks process into the church's sanctuary.

One also cannot help but note the wild creativity of much of independent liturgical life. New elements are added, and old parts are moved around. Quaker silence, evangelical preaching, and speaking in tongues all find a place. Language changes, and we find ourselves addressing the "Beloved Lady" or the "Great Christos, the Lord of Earth." Even where a largely traditional liturgy has been maintained, it might be presided over by a transgendered female priest, or celebrated privately on a dining room table. Unlike the faithful of mainstream churches who have little power to influence liturgical practice, at least in the short term, these independent Christians boldly go where angels might at least think twice before treading. And if their group does not receive their efforts with approval, there is always room for yet another independent jurisdiction.

Finally, in my observation, there is also a particularly strong attachment to the liturgical aspect of being Christian, in these independent communities. Few of these churches have the luxury of providing other activities, so they attract those who ecclesial life is primarily ritually focused. Related to this is a generally strong conviction that the sacraments objectively do what they claim to do (and not just symbolize it), with an interest in spiritual experience as mediated by the rites of the church. One priest I interviewed displayed obvious emotion in recounting his first visit to the community in which he is now ordained, twenty years ago, recalling the powerfully transformative effect of receiving the eucharist in that liturgy. Such accounts are common, and underlie the commitment of many participants.

Thus, we have those who have been excluded from the church's sacramental life, for whatever reason, taking ownership of the liturgical traditions, and creatively innovating to form new communities. Perhaps this constitutes an attempt to compensate for oppression, or to shore up weak identities with titles and vestments. Perhaps among the conservative groups, it is reaching for the security of firm answers from an allegedly less troubled past, or, among liberal groups, it is scrambling the tradition to fit eccentric personal preferences. Perhaps it is all of the above, and yet also a glorious procession of beloved misfits into the divine kingdom. In this regard, the reader is left to her own judgment.

## Chapter 5

### Theology in the Independent Sacramental Movement

#### *I. Introduction*

The independent sacramental movement, to date, has not been a place of considerable theological reflection. There are several reasons for this situation. Very few independent clergy have received a formal theological education, and most are working full time at a secular job, with resulting limitation of the leisure conducive to academic pursuits. The immediate pressures of maintaining a liturgical, sacramental practice often overtake the potential for second level reflection.

Further, many independent clergy, perhaps a majority, at least theoretically subscribe to fairly standard Roman/Orthodox/Anglican theology, with few distinctives beyond, for instance, the rejection of papal infallibility. Most spent many years within those mainstream jurisdictions. The idea that the independent movement might have its own unique theological contribution strikes many of these clergy as strange, if not threatening. They have often expended great energy in appearing “real,” and “just like” the larger liturgical churches, with only one or two adjustments.

Nonetheless, when one looks and listens closely, there are a number of theological themes which arise from independent communities, which are worthy of consideration. None of these themes recur consistently throughout the movement, but they are all found with enough regularity to deserve notice, and serve to locate points of departure from the mainstream. There are an increasing number of stable independent communities in North America, surviving into the second and third generations. Such stability will

probably increase the likelihood of sustained theological reflection in the future, focused around some collection of the following points, as they mark out this particular path.

The first area of distinctive theological reflection relates to time, and marks an unusual interplay between primitivism, and radical newness. Many independent groups look to the early church, and claim to restore some aspects of it. This appears perhaps most dramatically in groups like the Evangelical Orthodox Church, which have adopted the liturgical and sacramental life, in imitation of the early church. But one also finds primitivist appeals behind the restoration of charismatic phenomena, Gnostic spirituality, and the ordination of women, among other areas. Other groups point to various points in the Christian past (the Tridentine liturgy, the development of Benedictine monasticism) as benchmarks for their current work. On the opposite end of the spectrum, one finds appeals to the Second Coming (already present or expected soon), the new age of the Holy Spirit, and/or a renewed Christianity for our time. These independents defend their work on the basis of the surprising novelty of what is coming to meet us from the future. Perhaps most intriguingly, both primitivist and futurist tendencies can sometimes be found within the same church or group, proclaiming the faith “ever ancient, ever new.”

A second area of theological experimentation relates to space, or the width of the embrace of the church. During the last century, the independent movement has seen a large number of clergy and churches espousing universalism, the salvation of all. This is even the case with some of the largest and best known jurisdictions, such as the Polish National Catholic Church. When one no longer relates to those who are different out of fear that they might be among the damned, it becomes more possible to seek out and incorporate their wisdom into one’s own journey. Thus, we see independent

communities reaching toward elements drawn from the ecumenical Christian tradition (e.g., the charismata of the Pentecostals, the silence of the Quakers), as well as the gifts of other religious traditions (e.g., Zen meditation, qabalistic practices). Finally, the church's embrace is often enlarged to provide a wider welcome to women and persons of different sexualities. A number of feminist and gay theologians have aligned themselves with the independent movement, after having determined they were no longer able to tolerate their marginalized position within the mainstream churches.

The third cosmological principle, following time and space, is event or energy or activity. Here again, we find distinctive, if sometimes tentative, contributions from independent sacramental Christians. We have located ourselves within time, and we have defined the space within which we live. Having made ourselves a home within the cosmos, what is it that we do there? First and foremost, in this movement, is the practice of the sacraments. The vast majority of the energy of independent sacramental Christians goes into the sacramental life. Given the extreme nature of this priority, what sense can be made of it? Further, if one scratches the surface a bit, not remaining satisfied with public pronouncements to the contrary, one quickly finds that some form of esotericism or interior work is found, or at least tolerated, in an easy majority of today's independent jurisdictions in North America. How is this spiritual activity understood? Finally, how are doctrines conveyed? Are creeds confessed or not? Even if not, are propositions prescribed for belief? If not, how, if at all, does the community transmit an identifiable teaching?

Having examined the realms of time, space, and event, we will find the seeds of an independent sacramental theology, which may grow with time, if planted in good



minds, and watered with helpful education. As the Rev. Deborah Beach Giordano remarked in a sermon given after her ordination to the diaconate, independent sacramental Christians would do well to move beyond reactivity to the traditions from which they derive, in order to find their own way forward.<sup>193</sup> Perhaps the identification of these glimmerings of a distinctive theology will help in that process.

## *II. Time*

Christians are always caught between the Incarnation and the Second Coming, the imagined purity of the first community to walk with Jesus, and the hope for the parousia. The uniqueness of the Incarnation, and the canonization of the New Testament accounts of the earliest Christian communities, have served to privilege the “early church” as the touchstone against which all later developments are measured.

A fine example of the search for the early church leading directly into the independent sacramental movement is the Evangelical Orthodox Church, whose earliest origins are in conversations among former Campus Crusade for Christ workers in the late 1960s, eventually resulting in the formation of the New Covenant Apostolic Order in 1975, which in turn became the Evangelical Orthodox Church in 1979. These former evangelicals began by affirming that they sought to be the New Testament church, but did not know where the New Testament church went after the first century. They identified a number of topic areas (doctrine, liturgy, etc) and set out to research the earliest patristic period.<sup>194</sup> The result was a gradual movement toward a liturgical, sacramental, creedal Christianity. At first, the group ordained apostles, and claimed to

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<sup>193</sup> Rev. Deborah Beach Giordano, of the Contemporary Catholic Church, homily delivered after her ordination to the diaconate, Earlham College retreat center, Richmond, Indiana, October 2002.

<sup>194</sup> This process is described at length in Peter E. Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith*, rev.ed. (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press), esp. 9-53.

express the same Apostolic College into which Jesus called his first followers. Later, in 1979, there was a shift to a more conventional episcopal structure.<sup>195</sup>

Besides the former Campus Crusade workers, primarily concentrated on the West Coast, there were a number of Midwestern pastors who became involved in the New Covenant Apostolic Order, most notably Kenneth Jensen (later known as Bishop Samuel of Indianapolis). Unlike their Californian colleagues, these men did not come from parachurch organizations like Campus Crusade or the Christian World Liberation Front, but from local Christian congregations descended from the Stone/Campbell tradition. Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell had emphasized a return to the New Testament church, in their 19<sup>th</sup> century revivals. Their latter-day descendents were asking the same questions, but coming up with different answers. Jensen notes that the Campus Crusade veterans were sure they were not the church, and were looking for it, while the former Stone/Campbell folks were sure they were the church, and were seeking to be more faithful. Jensen credits to this divide the fact that it was largely the Stone/Campbell contingent which chose not to enter to the Antiochian Archdiocese in 1987, rather continuing to the present as an independent church.<sup>196</sup>

The Holy Order of MANS also claimed to restore the Apostolic College, but in an even more literal way. Earl W. (Father Paul) Blighton, the founding teacher of the Order, was believed by many to be the reincarnation of the Apostle Paul. Many former

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<sup>195</sup> See Jack Sparks, "The Apostolic College," and other papers from the NCAO and EOC available at <http://www.contendingforthefaith.com/libel-litigations/mindbenders/documents/Apostolic.html> (August 7, 2004).

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Kenneth Jensen, Indianapolis, Indiana, June 12, 2004. Jensen is now a lay member of the Roman Catholic Church. I have also been much helped by many conversations with Christopher (Rob) Murray, EOC Bishop of Terre Haute, Indiana. Frederic Jones, a prominent independent bishop, is simultaneously a minister in good standing with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a denomination in the Stone/Campbell tradition. Jones serves with the Independent Catholic Churches International, <http://www.independentcatholics.org> (December 5, 2004).

members of the Order recall Father Paul speaking as if he was Paul, but it was not always clear whether he claimed identity with the ancient apostle, or was simply transmitting messages from him. Many of the early priests and master teachers (bishops) in the Order were told by Father Paul that they were reincarnations of early companions of Jesus, who had returned at this critical moment in history for the renewal of the ancient Christian mysteries. Rt. Rev. Erik Fuchs (Master Raul) was widely believed to be the Apostle John, Rt. Rev. Marian Linda Carter (Master M) was Mary Magdalene, Rt. Rev. D. W. Harris (Master Timothy) was Timothy, the young companion of the Apostle Paul, and so on.

Some of these priests and teachers have since converted to the Orthodox Church, or other mainstream spiritual paths, and have distanced themselves from their exalted past incarnations. Those who continue to follow the teachings of Father Paul tend to be quite reticent on these issues, although I have met more than one who will privately admit that they still believe the account of their past lives. In speaking with dozens of former members of the Order, and organizations descended from it, over the last decade, I have also found that many of the “rank and file” members still believe that Blighton was the Apostle Paul, and more than a few accept at least some of the other claimed identities. This situation lent (and lends) itself to a special sense of immediacy with the work of Jesus, as the original initiates of the Christian community have returned to prepare the earth for a new spiritual illumination.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> The best generally available account of Blighton and his Order remains Philip Charles Lucas, The Odyssey of a New Religion: The Holy Order of MANS from New Age to Orthodoxy (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), see esp. 46-47. A valuable personal account is Peter Reinhart, Bread Upon the Water: A Pilgrimage Toward Self-Discovery and Spiritual Truth (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2000). The issue of past lives in the Order is sensitive, and one on which persons generally do not wish to be quoted. Without implying any particular stance on this issue, I would like to particularly thank Michael Whitney, Josephine Shaffer, Marian Gray, Tom Gordon, Toni Petrinovich, Timothy Harris, Mary

The Holy Order of MANS tradition also claims to restore the lost depth of the sacraments, as mystery initiations. Father Paul taught that, after imperial recognition by Constantine, the authorities of the Christian Church purged it of much of its mystery teaching. “Today, the Holy Order of MANS is continuing to preserve the roots of this ancient tradition, and is also bringing it in accord with Christian revelation so that the future ages will have a form of teaching that is whole and entire, wholly the teaching of Christ.”<sup>198</sup> Further, “The whole world is now a mystery temple. The good tidings are to be revealed to all.”<sup>199</sup> Blighton, by the apostolic authority which was his as Paul, restored the sacraments of the church, transforming baptism, confirmation (the Mass of the Christos), and reconciliation (the Removal of the Veil) into deeply symbolic occult initiations.

The attempt to revive/restore a Gnostic variant of Christianity, held to be the true trajectory of the original teachings of Jesus, through which initiates come to share a transformative knowledge of the mysteries of the Divine, is not confined to the HOOM tradition. One of the earliest independent sacramental Gnostic revivals is L’Eglise Gnostique of Jules Doinel, resulting from visions of Jesus and Cathar bishops in 1890. Here we see both the origins of Christianity (Jesus) and one of the more recent Gnostic

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Ray, Will Cameron, Mary Anderson, and Jim Rule, for substantial contributions to my understanding. In 2000, I attended a private gathering of a group descended from the HOOM. In the course of a blessing given during a liturgy, the recipient was told that he was “one of those who walked with the Master Jesus.” Thus, at least in some quarters, the belief in the return of the early Christians appears quite alive, if not loudly proclaimed. The HOOM is not the only group within the independent sacramental movement to make such claims regarding past lives. One other fairly well-known example is Bishop John-Raphael Sharif of the Order of the Resurrection, Baltimore, Maryland, with whom I have shared many conversations from 1998 to the present.. Bishop Sharif and many of the other members of his Order have also been heavily involved in Moorish Orthodoxy (founded by Noble Drew Ali), within which context Bishop Sharif is often referenced as the reincarnation of John the Baptist. He is not infrequently called “the Forerunner,” at least half-seriously, for this reason.

<sup>198</sup> Paul Blighton, The Philosophy of Sacramental Initiation (San Francisco: Holy Order of MANS, n.d.), 156.

<sup>199</sup> Blighton, The Philosophy of Sacramental Initiation, 154.

flowerings (Catharism), blessing Doinel's endeavor. From this beginning flows an ever-growing number of self-defined Gnostic churches. The best known current exponent of a Gnostic sacramentalism, consciously rooted in ancient Gnosticism, is Bishop Stephan Hoeller of the Ecclesia Gnostica. Bishop Hoeller is a charming and engaging teacher, a native of Hungary who has long resided in Los Angeles.

Hoeller's theology is rooted in the Gnosticism of Valentinus, Mani, Marcion, and other ancient teachers, with much interpretive help from the psychology of C.G. Jung. While making use of concepts like the Demiurge and the aeons, and honoring a heritage that flows from communities like the Manichaeans and Cathars, Hoeller does not share the world-denying asceticism of some of his spiritual forebears. I met Hoeller when he came to New York City in 1999, to lecture at the invitation of the Theosophical Society. Over breakfast, he joked that the TS sent out warning messages about him: "Smokes cigarettes, drinks alcohol, eats meat! Should be considered extremely dangerous!"<sup>200</sup>

Something of the character of his present-day appropriation of the ancient Gnostic tradition can be seen in the following Act of Faith, taken from his liturgy:

We know one secret, Supreme and Ineffable Lord, the Father of us all, unchanging in essence, yet ever changing in appearance and manifestation.  
And the Logos, the Son, the Divine Manifestation of God, the only begotten of the Great Stillness, begotten by an act of consciousness alone, which comes to the flesh to destroy incarnate error: the creative thought and will of God.  
And the Holy Spirit, the giver of life and goodness, the principle of love and compassion, which remains here on earth to guide and care for those still groping in the darkness of matter, which with the Father and the Son, forms the wholeness upon which the manifested universe is erected.  
We honor the messengers, custodians of the essential wisdom of the race, who preach the great law, who live and labor unselfishly, dedicated to the advancement of all beings.

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<sup>200</sup> I owe thanks to Father Ed Abdill, then pastor of St Michael's Liberal Catholic Church in Manhattan, for arranging my meeting with Hoeller.

We acknowledge the doctrines of Causation and Rebirth, immutable laws that govern and sustain the universe. We look to the absorption of the self into the Universal Will, the ultimate of perfection, and thus liberation from the infinite chain of attainment.

Amen.<sup>201</sup>

In this Act of Faith, one can detect Hoeller's identification of the Holy Spirit with the Divine Sophia, who willingly joins herself with this suffering world until its redemption. Another exponent of the Gnostic revival who has placed even more emphasis on the Divine Feminine is Rosamonde Miller, who was consecrated as a Gnostic bishop by Hoeller. In addition to the restoration of the Gnostic mysteries, Tau Rosamonde is perhaps better known for her claim of a restoration of a long hidden female priesthood.

Many persons in liberal independent sacramental churches, much like their mainstream sisters and brothers, point to contemporary scholarship which suggests that women held ministerial/priestly positions in some places in early Christianity.<sup>202</sup> This is a reaching toward historical precedent for the contemporary ordination of women, although a precedent which (beyond the diaconate) is scantily documented, and long dormant. Rosamonde is, as far as I have been able to determine, unique in claiming a feminine priesthood which has been allegedly transmitted unbroken from Mary Magdalene, through many centuries of secrecy, to the present Holy Order of Mary

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<sup>201</sup> Stephan A. Hoeller, "The Gnostic Holy Eucharist," in Missal of the Church of Antioch (N.p.: Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, n.d.), 55-56. Hoeller was a friend of Herman Adrian Spruit, late Archbishop and Patriarch of the Church of Antioch, and allowed the publication of his liturgy in the latter's missal. Hoeller's views are elaborated at some length in his Gnosticism: New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2002). Many articles and recorded lectures can also be found on his website at <http://www.gnosis.org> (October 10, 2004).

<sup>202</sup> See, for example, Karen Torjesen, When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). On the female diaconate, see Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald, Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998).

Magdalene, with Rosamonde as its chief hierophant.<sup>203</sup> No historical documentation is offered for this claim. As a proper Gnostic, Rosamonde points the inquirer to interior experience, rather than an outer search for factual validation. Nonetheless, many continue to be fascinated by the possibility that a female priesthood, with a lineage back to the earliest days of the Christian mystery, has been preserved to the present day. If nothing else, this story points to a longing clearly present in many contemporary believers.

Beyond such dramatically different approaches, many more conventional independent sacramental communities also emphasize the church of the New Testament as a model. To give only one example, Father Rob Lyons of Indianapolis, Indiana, is the founder and superior of the Society of Saint Timothy, as well as the head chaplain at Wishard Hospital. Father Rob describes his approach as “Primitive Catholicism” and points toward the small home-based fellowships, led by volunteer clergy with bishops truly serving as local pastors, which probably characterized much of the earliest church.<sup>204</sup> David Bercot, editor of the acclaimed *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, was also an independent bishop of similar mind.<sup>205</sup>

In addition to a primitivist focus on early Christianity, however conceived, a significant number of independent sacramental communities make an attempt to return to

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<sup>203</sup> See Rosamonde’s website at <http://www.gnosticsanctuary.org> (October 10, 2004), especially the “Lineage and History” section. For a popular treatment of Rosamonde and her community, see Bill D’Agostino, “The Secret Gospel of Rosamonde Miller,” *Palo Alto Weekly*, (August 25, 2004), 16-20.

<sup>204</sup> I first met Rob Lyons at a retreat in November 1996, and have enjoyed conversations and visits with him since that time. He maintains several websites, most especially “The Society of Saint Timothy – A Primitive Catholic Community,” <http://members.aol.com/primcatholic/> (October 10, 2004).

<sup>205</sup> David Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998). My thanks go to an anonymous former member of Bercot’s community, for discussing his house church with me, and pointing me to this book. For more on Bercot, see his audio CDs, *My Testimony* (Amberson, PA: Scroll Publishing, 2004), and *My Continuing Pilgrimage* (Amberson, PA: Scroll Publishing, 2004). Bercot’s search for New Testament Christianity has recently led him to affiliate with an Anabaptist group. He no longer exercises his episcopal ministry.

some other point in Christian history. One sees this particularly in the liturgical conservatism of groups devoted to some version of the Tridentine mass,<sup>206</sup> the 1928 Prayer Book,<sup>207</sup> or Old Calendrist Orthodoxy.<sup>208</sup> A particular period is identified as exemplifying a pure Christian practice, to which the corrupted modern Church must return. The program of such traditionalist groups is often much more specific than the primitivism of those focused on the early church, if for no other reason than that the first century Christians had not yet produced codes of canon law, and voluminous liturgical works. Beyond such traditionalists proper, there are also many who look to a specific moment in church history, as a place of definition for their contemporary work. An example would be the Entheos Community of Atlanta, Georgia, which increasingly refers to early Benedictine monasticism for guidance, or the many jurisdictions which find inspiration in the early Celtic Church.<sup>209</sup>

The opposite relationship to sacred time, a looking toward the future coming of the Son of Man in radical newness, perhaps to be realized in our own day, is also prevalent within independent sacramental communities. Jiddu Krishnamurti was a protégé of Liberal Catholic bishop Charles Leadbeater, and the early LCC became associated with the claims that Krishnamurti was to be the new World Teacher, the vessel of the Maitreya Buddha and/or the Christ (who were generally viewed as identical).

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<sup>206</sup> The best treatment is Michael Cuneo, [The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism](#) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>207</sup> The best study thus far is Eric A. Badertscher, "The Measure of a Bishop: The *Episcopi Vagantes*, Apostolic Succession, and the Legitimacy of the Anglican 'Continuing Church' Movement," <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/pc/essays/badertscher/> (March 23, 2004).

<sup>208</sup> A variety of works promoting the Old Calendrist viewpoint can be found via the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, <http://users.sisqtel.net/sgpm/ctos/> (October 10, 2004). There has been considerable cross-fertilization between the Old Calendrist churches, many of them very tiny, and the wider independent sacramental movement.

<sup>209</sup> I had the good fortune to visit with Jim Rule, the senior teacher and bishop of the Entheos Community, at his home in Atlanta, for several days in July, 2004. For only one example of the many independent sacramental jurisdictions which look to the vision of the early Celtic Church, see the website of the Currach Celtic Community, <http://www.lyon.edu/webdata/users/jchiaromonte/ACCroots.htm> (October 10, 2004).



Krishnamurti's disavowal of his messianic role in 1929 was a set-back to Liberal Catholicism, resulting in loss of members.<sup>210</sup> The LCC has largely put this episode behind itself. James Ishmael Ford reported in 1992 that he had never "met a Liberal Catholic who told me they thought Krishnamurti was the Christ."<sup>211</sup> In over a decade of contact with the LCC, including subscribing for some time to both international and national journals, and worshipping semi-regularly at the Manhattan parish for three years, I also have never heard this assertion. Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine the energy which characterized the early Liberal Catholic movement, without this conviction.

Just as the LCC was concerned with the Second Coming (in the person of Krishnamurti), so the Christian Community, inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner, looked for the immanent return of Christ. But, in Steiner's vision, this was the coming of the Christ in the etheric body of the Earth, not in an individual incarnate human. Steiner prophesied that this etheric coming would occur in 1933, and many contemporary anthroposophists and members of the Christian Community earnestly believe that it did.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Hoeller, "Wandering Bishops." It was common at one time for LCC congregations to display a painting, allegedly depicting the Maitreya Buddha, upon the altar. This painting is still displayed in some parishes. The heated correspondence between Bishop Frank W. Pigott (LCC) and Dion Fortune over the place of Maitreya and Jesus in the LCC, from 1927, can be read in Gareth Knight, Dion Fortune and the Inner Light (Loughborough: Thoth Publications, 2000), 129-141.

<sup>211</sup> James Ishmael Ford, "Episcopi Vagantes and the Challenge to Catholic Ministry," 99. For a personal account of the LCC in 1924, including a visit from Krishnamurti, and Annie Besant giving the "First Ray Invocation" at the end of the liturgy, see Richard Power, Great Song: The Life and Teachings of Joe Miller (Athens, GA: Maypop, 1993), 154-157.

<sup>212</sup> The coming of Christ in the etheric realm is a major theme in Steiner's work. To give only one lecture cycle, see Rudolf Steiner, The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric, Hudson, NY: SteinerBooks, 2003. Discussions with members of the New York Branch of the Anthroposophical Society (1997-2003), the New York congregation of the Christian Community (1997-2003) and the Nashville Rudolf Steiner Group (1991-2004) indicates that many members of these communities have a deep-seated conviction that Christ did return in 1933, in the way described by Steiner. Most anthroposophists resist the use of the term "belief" (as opposed to the knowledge brought through "spiritual science") but clearly this conviction functions in a way very similar to what is conventionally called religious belief.

Another former Theosophist who broke ties over Krishnamurti was Violet Mary Firth (better known by her pen name of Dion Fortune). Fortune founded her own occult organization, the Society of the Inner Light, and around 1928 started an esoteric church known as the Guild of the Master Jesus (later renamed The Church of the Graal). The “Guild mass” continues to be used in various esoteric orders descended from the SIL. There was a graded structure of meditation, dedication, and training, with three degrees, and a special priestly consecration for ministrants.<sup>213</sup> Fortune was also less concerned than Leadbeater or Steiner about the technicalities of the Second Coming. She wrote: “We know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh. The Risen Christ, who is the Master of Mystics, comes to us whenever consciousness is exalted into realization....”<sup>214</sup>

An interesting combination is found in the Holy Order of MANS. We have already seen Blighton’s conviction that the early followers of Jesus were back on earth again, restoring the ancient mysteries of the church. However, this restoration was for the express purpose of opening a new spiritual age, in which the earth would be illuminated by the light of Christ. A revelation received by Blighton from Jesus, and recorded in The Book of Activity, reads in part: “For in the days to come, as I was with you once before, so I will be with you again. For as the new world forms, so will the

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<sup>213</sup> Basil Wilby of the Society of the Inner Light has shared with me extensive unpublished information on the Guild.

<sup>214</sup> Dion Fortune, Mystical Meditations on the Collects, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1991, 18. For more on the Guild, see Gareth Knight, Dion Fortune and the Three Fold Way (London: SIL Trading, 2002), and Dion Fortune, “Guild of the Master Jesus,” in Charles Fielding and Carr Collins, The Story of Dion Fortune (Loughborough, Leicestershire: Thoთ Publications, 1998), 238-239. The reader is warned that the version of the Guild mass published in this book has been significantly altered from the original. I am indebted to Basil Wilby of the Society of the Inner Light, for supplying an accurate copy from the SIL’s archives. For more on Firth/Fortune, see Gareth Knight, Dion Fortune and the Inner Light (Loughborough, Leicestershire: Thoთ Publications, 2000), which is by far the best biography, and was written with full access to the SIL archives.

activity of the Spirit increase. As man changes his way of life, so will the activity of the Spirit increase.”<sup>215</sup> A bit later in the same chapter we read that “those of you who are with Me, and who live in the Light of Christ and have seen God, shall see the change and the fulfillment of the Scripture.”<sup>216</sup> Blighton’s view, like Steiner’s, inclines to a non-physical coming. “I say unto you, that the Father-Son comes quickly. Be not deceived of the lack of human form.”<sup>217</sup> Blighton used evolutionary spiritual change as an explanation for his innovations, and new approaches, such as the ordination of women from 1967 forward.<sup>218</sup>

Another independent sacramental group with a truly novel position on the Second Coming is the International Community of Christ, also known as the Church of the Second Advent, led by the Rt. Rev. Gene Savoy, Sr.<sup>219</sup> The ICC understands itself as “a modern Gnostic church,” although (very much unlike Blighton) they believe that the teachings of St Paul are “not in accord with the original teachings of Jesus.”<sup>220</sup> Savoy is a bishop in apostolic succession, as well as representing another line of ecclesial authority in the Church of the Second Advent.<sup>221</sup> Savoy teaches that his son, Jamil, who died at the age of three in 1962, is/was the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>222</sup> “Now the Word of God has manifested again to mankind in the form of a little Child who has endowed us with the

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<sup>215</sup> The Book of Activity (San Francisco, CA: The Holy Order of MANS, n.d), 2:1-3. This is the best known and most available collection of Blighton’s revelations. At times it has been treated as essentially scriptural, in some parts of the HOOM tradition.

<sup>216</sup> The Book of Activity, 2:12.

<sup>217</sup> The Book of Activity, 4:14.

<sup>218</sup> Lucas, 41.

<sup>219</sup> For more on the International Community of Christ, see their website at <http://www.communityofchrist.org> (October 13, 2004). I am particularly indebted to the Rev. Gene Savoy, Jr., who answered numerous email inquiries from me, throughout June 2004.

<sup>220</sup> Email from Rev. Gene Savoy, Jr., June 2, 2004.

<sup>221</sup> Email from Rev. Gene Savoy, Jr., June 30, 2004. Information on Savoy, Sr.’s ordination for the Church of the Second Advent can be found in Gene Savoy, Jamil the Child Christ: The Sacred Teachings of Light (Reno, NV: International Community of Christ, 1976), 95.

<sup>222</sup> Gene Savoy, Jamil the Child Christ: The Sacred Teachings of Light (Reno, NV: International Community of Christ, 1976).

same Gospel from God as that brought by Jesus.”<sup>223</sup> While the idea that Savoy’s son was literally the Second Coming may initially seem quite odd, it has seemingly engendered a very genuine mysticism of the Child Christ. We may also do well to recall the messianic vision of Isaiah: “... and a little child shall lead them.”

Most independent bishops would not go quite so far as Leadbeater, Steiner, Blighton, and Savoy, in proclaiming the Second Advent of Christ, however conceived. Nonetheless, it is a common sentiment, especially in groups which ordain women and are open to gay & lesbian people, that God is doing a new thing in our day. While some may try to point to limited, contested historical precedents for such innovative approaches to the Christian tradition, most ascribe it to the contemporary guidance of the Spirit.<sup>224</sup> In traditionalist groups, there is less interest in such matters, although there is not infrequently an apocalyptic tone, and a sense that the Second Coming (more traditionally conceived) is at hand.<sup>225</sup>

Like all Christians, members of independent sacramental communities find themselves suspended between the Incarnation and the Parousia. However, the freedom accorded within this movement for alternative understandings and individual vision has led to unusual relationships with sacred time, quite at odds with more mainstream Christian views. While some groups lean strongly to a restorationist primitivism, and others to a fulfilled eschatology, most contain some combination of the two, in an ever shifting tension, balanced upon the pivot of the present moment.

### *III. Space*

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<sup>223</sup> Gene Savoy, *The Decoded New Testament* (Reno, NV: International Community of Christ, 1974), 117.

<sup>224</sup> There is even a church which explicitly points to Joachim of Fiore’s prophecies about a Third Age of the Spirit: The Holy Apostolic Church of the Third Age (Joachimite), under the Most Rev. William Behun of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

<sup>225</sup> See, for example, the discussion of the Apostles of Infinite Love in Michael Cuneo, 121-134.

In the twenty-first century, there are great struggles over the width of the embrace of the church, both in terms of the church's relationship to non-Christian traditions, and regarding who may belong to the church and serve in its ministry. What is the space within which the church lives? The independent sacramental movement has been the site of much experimentation in these areas.

Perhaps the most important widening of the church's space within the independent movement has been the embrace of universalism in many quarters, from very early days. Universalism, the teaching that God will ultimately save all people, has occasionally appeared in church history as a minority opinion, perhaps most famously in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century theologian, Origen of Alexandria.<sup>226</sup> After the incorporation of most Universalist churches in North America into the Unitarian Universalist Association, the presence of universalist teaching in Christian churches became much less common.

The return of a universalist theology, and its first serious appearance in the modern liturgical churches, began with the fascinating theologian, Francis Hodur, who was the founding priest and first bishop of the Polish National Catholic Church. In the PNCC's Confession of Faith, adopted in 1913, we read: "I believe in immortality and everlasting happiness in eternity, in the union with God of all people, races, and ages, because I believe in the Divine power of love, mercy, and justice and for nothing else do I yearn, but that it may be to me according to my faith."<sup>227</sup> Ten years later, in 1923, the universalist belief stated somewhat vaguely in this confession was elaborated at length in the Eleven Great Principles, most especially Principle VII: The Question of Eternal

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<sup>226</sup> A summary history of Christian universalism, with quotes from seminal figures, including Origen, is found in Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, *If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 211-224. Gulley and Mulholland are both Quaker pastors.

<sup>227</sup> The Confession of Faith in its entirety is printed in Wlodarski, 210-213. The quote is from Article 13.

Punishment. Hodur clearly affirms that God would not “destroy, bring to naught and erase His own work, the child of his mind, love, and power....”<sup>228</sup> Hodur further claims that sinners may suffer punishment after death, but not eternally, and selects a number of scriptures to support his belief in “the salvation of all humanity.”<sup>229</sup>

Only a couple of years after the Polish National Catholic Church began to confess God’s universal salvation of the whole human race, in 1915-1916, the theosophically inclined Liberal Catholic Church was organized. While very different from the PNCC in its esoteric leanings and involvement in claims that Jiddu Krishnamurti was the Second Coming, the LCC shared the confession of universalism. The LCC’s Act of Faith states that “all [God’s] sons shall one day reach his feet, however far they stray.”<sup>230</sup> Many Liberal Catholics have a background in Theosophy and accept reincarnation as a fact (although reincarnation is not taught dogmatically by the LCC). Universal salvation is thus often understood as a reference to the long chain of lives, through which the soul is slowly perfected by karmic action and reaction.

Through the PNCC and LCC, a belief in universal salvation has become a common conviction within the independent sacramental movement. Universalism is probably still a minority position within the independent movement, but it is increasingly common. The PNCC is the largest and most respected heir of the Old Catholic movement in North America, and its doctrine has influenced many other jurisdictions. Many clergy from jurisdictions which do not officially confess universalism have referred me to the PNCC position, and expressed their public or private sympathies with

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<sup>228</sup> The Eleven Great Principles can be found in Wlodarski, 214-226. The quote is from p. 221.

<sup>229</sup> Wlodarski, 223.

<sup>230</sup> The Liturgy according to the use of the Liberal Catholic Church, 195.

it.<sup>231</sup> The PNCC has never spawned other jurisdictions, but the LCC is the ancestor of a large number of other churches. Many of the descendents of the LCC, whether esoterically oriented or simply liberal, have continued to share the LCC's universalist convictions.<sup>232</sup>

Once one has moved beyond the idea that Christianity, or some particular version thereof, is the only way by which one may come to God, the door is open for considerable experimentation. Even for those who do not share universalist convictions, the flexibility of the independent movement provides opportunity for bringing aspects of other traditions, Christian or otherwise, into these smaller churches of the apostolic succession.

Many groups, such as the Evangelical Orthodox Church discussed above, have imported the hymns and preaching style of the evangelical churches. There are also a significant number of persons who have entered the independent movement with a background in charismatic and Pentecostal churches, or at least an interest in these traditions. One of the largest independent Anglican groups, the Charismatic Episcopal Church, is explicitly identified with these traditions, and claims one of its purposes it “to

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<sup>231</sup> For example, Bishop Timothy Cravens of the Independent Catholic Christian Church, who has expressed his universalist views to me numerous times. The ICCC does not officially hold a universalist position, but allows it. Bishop Cravens has also pointed me to a Universalist prayer book, which is essentially a revision of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer: [A Book of Prayer for the Church and the Home with Selections from the Psalms](#) (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1894). This book, authorized for use within the ICCC, is now available on line at <http://www.universalistchurch.net/worship/bookofprayer1894/> (October 16, 2004).

<sup>232</sup> One of the largest and most significant LCC-descended churches is the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Malabar Rite. For universalism in this church, see their most recent book of liturgical resources: Alan Kemp, ed. [A New Catholic Concise Liturgy & Other Useful Writings](#) (Tacoma, WA: Ascension Mission Desktop Press, 2003), especially the Creeds and Professions of Faith given on pages 76-79. Choice 5 is a revision of the LCC Act of Faith quoted above.

carry the power of Pentecost to our brothers and sisters in the historic churches.”<sup>233</sup> The very similar Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches also identifies itself as a place where “charismatic, evangelical, and liturgical/sacramental” converge and interweave.<sup>234</sup> Such crossover of evangelical and charismatic worship styles is also found within jurisdictions which do not universally embrace them. In 1999, I had the pleasure of attending the consecration of Bishop Richard Dickerson for the Federation of St. Thomas Christians, an extraordinarily broad group under the pastoral leadership of Patriarch Joseph Vredenburgh. As Dickerson and his primary consecrator, Jack Brownwell, share an extensive background in the charismatic movement, this was much in evidence at the consecration. We sang praise choruses reminiscent of Pentecostal worship services. There was quiet speaking in tongues at various points in the liturgy, with Dickerson himself breaking into a spiritual language of prayer when he was anointed with chrism.<sup>235</sup>

Recent years have also seen the expansion of the independent sacramental movement into small churches with Lutheran or Methodist heritages. On July 11, 2004, I attended the consecration of bishops in apostolic succession for three small Lutheran Communion: The Evangelical Community Church – Lutheran, The Athanasian Catholic

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<sup>233</sup> See the website of the International Communion of Charismatic Episcopal Churches at <http://www.iccec.org> (October 17, 2004). I have also had the opportunity to speak with Charismatic Episcopal parishioners in Nashville, TN, and Long Island, NY.

<sup>234</sup> The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches, <http://theceec.org> (October 17, 2004). The CEEC is very similar to the Charismatic Episcopal Church, but has a larger place for women in ministry.

<sup>235</sup> Dickerson maintains a website at: <http://www.answerhiscall.com/resume.html> (October 17, 2004). It is interesting that he does not reference his episcopal status within the Federation of St Thomas Christians. The Federation website appears to be unavailable at present, but information on “Papa Joe” Vredenburgh can be found at: [http://www.ind-movement.org/people\\_uv.html](http://www.ind-movement.org/people_uv.html) (October 17, 2004). Vredenburgh has ordained and consecrated an enormous variety of persons, male and female, gay and straight, conservative and liberal, evangelical and esoteric, most of whom seem to maintain a degree of personal loyalty to him. My understanding of Vredenburgh’s work has been much enhanced by many conversations with Bishops Michael Whitney, John-Noel Murray, and Rob Angus Jones. As an example of another group connected to the Federation, from the opposite end of the theological spectrum, see the explicitly esoteric Order of the Dove, at <http://www.orderofthedove.org/directors.htm> (October 17, 2004).



Church of the Augsburg Confession, and The Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church.<sup>236</sup>

On October 30, 2004, Pedro Bravo-Guzman was consecrated as bishop for the Association of Independent Evangelical Lutheran Churches.<sup>237</sup> Other independent clergy have also recently shown explicit influence from Lutheran theology and liturgy. To give only one example, Father Rob Lyons of the “Primitive Catholic” Society of St. Timothy has been experimenting with eucharistic liturgies on a Lutheran model, with the words of institution separated from the eucharistic prayer.<sup>238</sup> There have been connections of Lutherans with the independent movement dating back to at least 1927, when Paul William Adolph Schultz, a Missouri Synod Lutheran minister, was consecrated as a bishop in apostolic succession, for the intention of founding a church for Catholic-minded Lutherans.<sup>239</sup> But it is only in more recent years that Schultz’s dream is being realized, in any significant numbers.

There are also a number of increasing connections to the Methodist tradition within the independent sacramental world. During the past century, there have been a number of Methodist ministers who became independent bishops, most notably Herman Adrian Spruit (Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Malabar Rite), Perry Cedarholm (Apostolic Episcopal Church), and Kermit William Poling (Old Orthodox Catholic Patriarchate of America). Poling continued to serve as a Methodist minister in West

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<sup>236</sup> The Rt. Rev. Tan Binh Phan Nguyen, for the Evangelical Community Church – Lutheran, <http://www.ecclnet.org/> (October 30, 2004); the Rt. Rev. Raymond W. Copp, for the Athanasian Catholic Church of the Augsburg Confession <http://www.athanasian.org/> (October 30, 2004), and the Rt. Rev. Samuel Guido for the Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church, <http://www.angelfire.com/pa5/epconline/> (October 30, 2004). Bishop Guido has since joined in founding the Lutheran Orthodox Church, <http://www.orgsites.com/pa/lutheranorthodox/> (October 30, 2004).

<sup>237</sup> See the AIELC’s website at <http://www.associationofindependentevangelicallutheranchurches.org/> (October 17, 2004).

<sup>238</sup> Rob Lyons, Personal email, June 25, 2004.

<sup>239</sup> Ward, Persson, and Bain, 364-5.

Virginia until his retirement in 2004.<sup>240</sup> Until recent years, such Wesleyan connections have been past history, or a parallel but separate aspect of life for the independent clergy involved. In March 2001, Billy Corn, a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church with succession from John Wesley, consecrated William E. Conner for the independent Holy Cross Anglican Communion.<sup>241</sup> Conner ordained and consecrated various clergy, who are now found in multiple jurisdictions. These groups argue that they possess valid apostolic succession, as Wesley (a presbyter in the Church of England) acted under a canon of sacramental necessity in ordaining clergy for his missions in North America, upon the refusal of the Anglican bishops to do so. To varying degrees, these groups claim Wesley as an ancestor, and Methodist spirituality as part of their inheritance.<sup>242</sup> We may see more explicitly Methodist independent sacramental groups in the near future, as a recent conservative Methodist schism, The Ecumenical Methodist Church of America, is now in full communion with an independent sacramental church in apostolic succession.<sup>243</sup> On the other end of the theological spectrum, the New Methodist Conference is a liberal, inclusive jurisdiction, which preserves the historic episcopate.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ward, Persson, and Bain, 324-5, and 382-3. Also, personal letter from Kermit Poling, dated June 7, 2004. A recent issue of Poling's newsletter, The Excubitor (Summer 2004, Issue 182) is devoted to his retirement from Methodist ministry.

<sup>241</sup> For information on Conner, see [http://www.ind-movement.org/people\\_cl\\_cz.html](http://www.ind-movement.org/people_cl_cz.html) (October 17, 2004).

<sup>242</sup> See, for example, The Pilgrims Guardianship Ecclesia, at <http://www.pilgrimsguardianship.org/Home.htm> (October 17, 2004), and the Independent Catholic Union at <http://www.i-c-u.org/succession3.html> (October 17, 2004), where the Methodist ordination lineage is explicitly discussed. Some persons claim that Wesley was clandestinely consecrated as a bishop. See Persson, The Apostolic Successions of the Apostolic Episcopal Church, Appendix 2, for a claim that Wesley was consecrated by a Moravian bishop, David Nitschmann. For a competing claim that Wesley was consecrated by a Greek Orthodox bishop named Erasmus, see <http://www.pilgrimsguardianship.org/Succession4.htm> (November 18, 2004).

<sup>243</sup> The website of the Ecumenical Methodist Church of America, also known as the American Methodist Church, is found at <http://ammethch.org> (December 5, 2004). It is in full communion with the Celtic Anabaptist Communion, <http://www.celtic-anabaptist-ministries.com/intercommunion.html> (December 5, 2004).

<sup>244</sup> Rob Angus Jones, Personal email, January 20, 2005. The New Methodist Conference website is under construction at <http://www.newmethodist.org> (January 23, 2005).

The small groups and do-it-yourself attitude of early Methodism accord well with contemporary independent sacramental churches.<sup>245</sup>

To take only one further example, the tradition of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has proven inspirational to independent sacramental churches with an essentially non-dogmatic approach to Christianity. The Friends Catholic Community Church (later renamed Friends Catholic Communion) was founded by persons of widely varied backgrounds, including a few with experience in Friends meetings, in 1994. The FCCC adopted the Friends way of making decisions through waiting upon the Spirit, and seeking consensus. Some FCCC ministries have also been influenced by further aspects of Quaker spirituality, such as the incorporation of silence into worship, and an open opportunity for anyone to speak as moved by the Spirit.<sup>246</sup>

Reaching beyond the bounds of Christian tradition, independent sacramental communities have also incorporated elements from other religious traditions. There are many persons within the independent movement who simultaneously practice another tradition. For example, Bishop Dennis Delorme of the Home Temple Synod is a longtime practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism; Catherine Adams continues to function as a retired bishop of the Friends Catholic Communion, even after her conversion to Reform Judaism in 2003; and Father Harry Vedder is both a priest in the Old Catholic Church of America and a member of the Radical Faeries, a gay pagan group.<sup>247</sup> In other cases, there

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<sup>245</sup> The interest in Wesley extends beyond those jurisdictions which lineally descend from him. For example, see the references to Wesley in this article by a bishop of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches: Robert L. Wise, "Of Celtic Flames and the Holy Spirit's Fire," <http://www.theceec.org/celticflames.html> (October 19, 2004).

<sup>246</sup> See the Friends Catholic website at: <http://www.geocities.com/jccath/fcc.html> (October 19, 2004). I have also referred to the Friends Catholic Community Church By-Laws, adopted March 1996, and my own experience in a number of FCCC communities, 1996-2002.

<sup>247</sup> Personal conversations with Dennis Delorme (Peterborough, Ontario), J.C. Catherine Adams (Lincolndale, New York), and Harry Vedder (Cannon County, Tennessee).

is integration rather than parallel traditions. The Buddhist teacher Neville Werrick (often known as “Doctor Ajari”) later became an independent bishop in apostolic succession, and founded a group named St. John’s Order, which practices an interfaith synthesis of Christianity, Buddhism, Shamanism, as well as other aspects.<sup>248</sup> Another Buddhist-oriented group is the White Robed Monks of St Benedict, founded by Abbot-Bishop Robert Dittler, which attempts to bring a Zen approach to Benedictine spirituality.<sup>249</sup> George Burke is an independent bishop whose complex journey has included Old Catholicism, Autocephalous Orthodoxy, and Yoga, including a special devotion to Anandamayi Ma.<sup>250</sup>

There are independent sacramental jurisdictions which have connections with a wide range of other spiritual traditions, from Native American religions<sup>251</sup> to the New Age teachings of Alice A. Bailey<sup>252</sup> to the modern Druid revival.<sup>253</sup> “Christo-Pagan” groups such as Murray Johnston’s Ordo Arcanorum Gradalis have seen significant crossover, in liturgy and membership, with smaller churches of the apostolic

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<sup>248</sup> See the St John’s Order website at: [http://quietmountain.org/dharmacenters/st\\_johns/st\\_johns2.htm](http://quietmountain.org/dharmacenters/st_johns/st_johns2.htm) (October 19, 2004). A branch of the Order in Columbia, Missouri, headed by Bishop (Dorjiev) Green, consecrated by Ajari, maintains this website: <http://www.geocities.com/tgeer4/StSophiaSociety> (October 19, 2004). I am particularly thankful to Tara Geer and Scott Leiker of the Columbia branch for helpful conversations.

<sup>249</sup> <http://www.whiterobedmonks.org/zenrulea.html> (October 19, 2004).

<sup>250</sup> George Burke, *An Eagle’s Flight: Autobiography of a Gnostic Orthodox Christian*, (Geneva, NE: Saint George Press, 1994). Since the publication of this autobiography, Burke’s community has moved to California, and taken on a much more outwardly Hindu appearance, with Burke now known as Swami Nirmalananda Giri. Their current website is <http://www.atmajyoti.org/> (December 5, 2004).

<sup>251</sup> Western Federation Tribe & Keepers of Creation Church, <http://www.education-1.net/tribe.htm> (October 19, 2004).

<sup>252</sup> Order of the Dove, <http://www.orderofthedove.org/> (October 19, 2004). The New Order of Glastonbury’s Presiding Bishop, Martha Schultz, has also been significantly influenced by Bailey’s work. See her article, “New Age Discipleship,” on the NOG website: <http://neworderofglastonbury.bigstep.com/generic12.html> (October 19, 2004).

<sup>253</sup> The Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (<http://www.aoda.org>, October 19, 2004), John Micheal Greer is also a consecrated bishop of the Universal Gnostic Church, <http://universalgnostic.com/> (October 19, 2004). A report of Greer’s consecration, in September 2004 at a Druid gathering, can be found at <http://www.witchvox.com/festivals/elysium04.html> (October 19, 2004).

succession.<sup>254</sup> One OAG Grail Priest, Jon Ryner, is now the presiding bishop of the Avalonian Catholic Church, a jurisdiction explicitly open to Christo-Pagan integration.<sup>255</sup> Johnston and Ryner have both been influenced, liturgically and theologically, by the New Chaldean Gnostic Church of R.J. Cuneo.<sup>256</sup> Cuneo, a cradle Episcopalian and retired Fine Arts professor, is particularly fascinating in that his work cannot be described as Christian in any sense. It bears strong influence from the Western hermetic tradition, and Cuneo describes himself simply as “a Nature Religionist.”<sup>257</sup> Cuneo has never been ordained in apostolic succession but he was nonetheless given “ ‘irregular’ clergy status” by Patriarch Herman Spruit of the Church of Antioch.<sup>258</sup> Obviously, Cuneo is not antagonistic towards the Christian tradition, and acknowledges the lines of connection between his rites and the liturgies of the Christian church.

Rather remarkably, micro-churches claiming apostolic succession and valid sacraments extend beyond the bounds of any connection to Christianity. This is the very complex issue of the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica and other Thelemic churches.

Thelema is a religion founded by the occultist Aleister Crowley, who is alleged to have

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<sup>254</sup> Johnston is not ordained in apostolic succession. He is the Archpriest Emeritus of the Ordo Arcanorum Gradalis. The best source of information on the Order is his book, The Crafted Cup: Ritual Mysteries of the Goddess and the Grail (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1994). No discussion of Christo-Paganism would be complete without a mention of Marian Zimmer Bradley, well-known fantasy author who was both an independent catholic priest and a Wiccan high priestess. Bradley’s best known work, The Mists of Avalon (London: Sphere Books, 1982) is a Christo-Pagan manifesto disguised as a novel. My thanks to Rob Angus Jones and Katherine Kurtz for sharing their personal knowledge of Bradley’s independent priesthood. The founder of modern Wicca, Gerald Gardner, was also an Old Catholic bishop. See Morgan Davis, “From Man to Witch: Gerald Gardner, 1946-1949,” <http://www.geraldgardner.com/index/Gardner46-49.PDF> (October 31, 2004), 9-13.

<sup>255</sup> See the Avalonian Catholic Church website at <http://www.geocities.com/avalonianchurch/> (October 19, 2004). For an example of the integration, see Ryner’s hymn, “Jesus, Witch-King of Creation,” at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/2310/jesus-witch.html> (October 19, 2004). Bishop Ryner has graciously spent hours on the phone with me, discussing both the OAG and the Avalonian church.

<sup>256</sup> R.J. Cuneo (Frater Mercurius), Liturgy for a Graal Chapel: The Ritual of the New Chaldean Gnostic Church (New Haven, CT: Self-published, 1990). See also R.J. Cuneo (Frater Mercurius), Chalice Wicca: Book of Reflections (New Haven, CT: Self-published, 1991).

<sup>257</sup> Personal letter from R. J. Cuneo, August 23, 2004.

<sup>258</sup> Personal letter from R.J. Cuneo, August 23, 2004.

received the spiritual episcopal succession flowing from Jules Doinel, via Theodor Reuss, in 1912. It seems unlikely that apostolic succession was involved, as Reuss was allegedly consecrated by Gerard Encausse in 1909, prior to Encausse receiving apostolic succession. The lack of clear documentation, and competing claims makes it very difficult to sort out exactly what was transmitted from Encausse to Reuss to Crowley.<sup>259</sup>

Thelema is a very complex religion, and it is beyond our scope to explain it. A sufficient sense of its faith can probably be grasped through the creed from Crowley's Thelemic mass:

I believe in one secret and ineffable LORD; and in one Star in the company of Stars of whose fire we are created, and to which we shall return; and in one Father of Life, Mystery of Mystery, in His name CHAOS, the sole vice-regent of the Sun upon Earth; and in one Air the nourisher of all that breathes.

And I believe in one Earth, the Mother of us all, and in one Womb wherein all men are begotten, and wherein they shall rest, Mystery of Mystery, in Her name BABALON.

And I believe in the Serpent and the Lion, Mystery of Mystery, in His name BAPHOMET.

And I believe in one Gnostic and Catholic Church of Light, Life, Love, and Liberty, the Word of whose law is THELEMA.

And I believe in the communion of Saints.

And, forasmuch as meat and drink are transmuted in us daily into spiritual substance, I believe in the Miracle of the Mass.

And I confess one Baptism of Wisdom whereby we accomplish the Miracle of Incarnation.

And I confess my life one, individual, and eternal that was, and is, and is to come.

AUMGN, AUMGN, AUMGN.<sup>260</sup>

One can quickly see that we have ventured far from Christianity. Although Crowley's mass is structurally similar to the traditional liturgy, it is theologically far

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<sup>259</sup> For a discussion that raises all the problematic issues, with a relatively negative conclusion, see Stephan Hoeller, "Ecclesia Gnostica Position Paper: Concerning the Thelemite or Crowleyan Gnostic Churches," <http://user.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/hoeller.htm> (October 20, 2004).

<sup>260</sup> Scriven and Scriven, 55.

distant, with no mention of Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps due to a very difficult childhood among the Plymouth Brethren, Crowley was deeply antagonistic to Christianity.<sup>261</sup>

As Stephan Hoeller ably points out, in such a church, can a bishop or priest ever be said to possess a true intention to confect the Christian sacraments? If not, most sacramental churches would not regard its priesthood and sacraments as valid, at least within the Christian context.<sup>262</sup> Many Thelemites would readily agree. A current archbishop of the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica, reared as a Methodist, writes:

I have scorned and rejected the faith of my fathers. I invoke and worship strange and terrible gods. I summon devils, and hold congress with angels, spirits, and demons....<sup>263</sup>

Nonetheless, the waters are not always so clear. The only person allegedly appointed by Crowley to be patriarch of the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica was William Bernard Crow, who was also possessed of perfectly legitimate credentials as a Christian bishop in the independent movement.<sup>264</sup> Also, later Thelemic bishops have been consecrated by bishops with more orthodox credentials.<sup>265</sup> The issues of proper intention in such consecrations are murky in the extreme. Matters become even more convoluted in churches, such as the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica Hermetica, which do not preach a

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<sup>261</sup> See, for instance, Aleister Crowley, Crowley on Christ, Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed: Francis King, ed. (London: Neville Spearman, 1972). A broad introduction to Crowley can be found in Lon Milo DuQuette, The Magick of Thelema (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1993).

<sup>262</sup> Hoeller, "Ecclesia Gnostica Position Paper."

<sup>263</sup> Lon Milo DuQuette, My Life with the Spirits: The Adventures of a Modern Magician (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1999), 1999. This charming and very funny book is indispensable for anyone seeking to understand Thelema.

<sup>264</sup> The text of Crowley's August 1944 appointment of Crow can be found at: <http://user.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/crow.htm> (October 20, 2004). For more information on Crow, see Ward, 97-98. The Crowley document is unsigned, and has been contested.

<sup>265</sup> Peter Koenig makes particular reference to Jorge Rodriguez's consecration of EGC bishop David Scriven (aka Tau Apiryon) in 1996. See <http://user.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/minutes/minutes.htm> (October 20, 2004) for details, and Ward, 346, as well as <http://www.oldcatholicorthodoxchurch.org/Montebello/Jorge/Index.htm> (October 30, 2004) for more information on Bishop Rodriguez. I also had the pleasure of speaking with Bishop Rodriguez several times by phone, in 1998.

conflict between Christianity and Thelema, embracing both the Christian Scriptures, and Crowley's Book of the Law among their sacred texts.<sup>266</sup> Perhaps such groups are the true heirs of Crowley's playful rascality, in refusing to adopt a new orthodoxy, instead opting for a paradoxical position which defies cherished boundaries on all sides.

Beyond such theological/confessional pushing of the boundaries, independent sacramental churches have been well-known for embracing those excluded from full participation in the mainstream church, especially women and sexual minorities. Of course, many independent groups maintain very traditional positions on women's ordination and the theology of sexuality, and have left their parent churches precisely to preserve such. These communities continue to articulate traditional teaching, while communities who have broadened their welcome have, of necessity, engaged in new theological reflection. Communities which have moved toward the full inclusion of women at all levels of leadership have been able to draw upon the growing wealth of feminist theology, and inclusive liturgical language. Thus, thought and symbol reflect the same gender equality seen upon the altar.<sup>267</sup>

Sexual minorities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, have generally received less theological attention in the larger churches, and there are very few mainstream denominations in which such persons are fully included. In even fewer

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<sup>266</sup> <http://www.egch.org> (October 20, 2004). I have also been helped in my understanding of this church by many years of conversation with the Very Rev. Elaine Petersen of Chicago, Illinois, who is currently in charge of their clergy training program. Article III of their church constitution states: "The Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica Hermetica acknowledges a unique and harmonious relationship among five scriptures, which are recognized by the Church as its Holy Books, being: The Holy Bible, The Nag Hammadi texts, The Noble Qur'an, The Book of the Law (Liber AL vel Legis), and the Divine Pyramider of Hemes Trismegistus."

<sup>267</sup> A fine example is the Spiritus Christi community in Rochester, New York, which left the Roman Catholic Church in 1998-1999, for a number of issues, but perhaps most significantly the leadership role of Mary Ramerman, who is now an ordained priest in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (<http://www.catholiccommunion.org>, October 30, 2004), although Spiritus Christi retains a non-jurisdictional status. See <http://www.spirituschristi.org> (October 30, 2004).



churches are openly gay people given the opportunity for ordination and leadership. As a result, issues related to sexual orientation have driven many people into the independent movement. Two well-known GLBT theologians, Richard Cleaver and Elizabeth Stuart, are now independent clergy.<sup>268</sup> The flavor of theological reflection in these communities is well conveyed by the following excerpt from a pastoral letter by Tim Cravens, a bishop of the Independent Catholic Christian Church in Peekskill, New York:

When Our Savior Jesus Christ was crucified, the veil in the Temple was rent in two, opening the Holy of Holies to all. The Holy of Holies was open only to the high priest, the Holy Place and Court of Priests to the Zadokite priesthood, the Court of Levites to Levites, the Court of Israelites was open only to Jewish men (and all preceding places were likewise only open to males within their category), the small and cramped Court of Women was open to Jewish women, and finally, the Court of the Gentiles was open to all. Jesus came to abolish the separation and alienation that took place within this system, where people were classified according to their parentage and sex. Instead, ALL are freely invited to participate fully and equally in the life of the church.

We see this articulated beautifully in Galatians 3:28 -- "There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Now, early on, this began to break down due to human sinfulness, and we see far too many traces of this within the New Testament (sadly including those books bearing my name!). But the ICCA interpretation of this is that all Christians are to be treated equally as regards the sacraments -- all, regardless of sex or gender, may be considered for ordination on the basis of gifts and maturity, not economic status or sex or ethnicity -- and likewise, all marriages between two baptized persons entering into lifelong covenant are sacramental. There can be nothing disordered about lifelong, committed, covenanted love -- and to declare as "disordered" a marriage because the partners are not of the "right" sex or ethnic heritage, or to reject the validity of a gifted priest's ministry because she is female, is to repudiate one of the central messages of reconciliation in the Gospel. Ordination is the taking on of the special ministry of Jesus Christ in an iconic way (as servant, as priest, as pastor, depending on the order), and those who should be ordained are those able to

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<sup>268</sup> Richard Cleaver is the author of *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Lexington, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995). He is now a priest in the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, <http://www.orthodoxcatholicchurch.org/> (October 30, 2004). Elizabeth Stuart is the author of *Daring to Speak Love's Name: A Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book* (New York: Penguin, 1993), and is a bishop in the Open Episcopal Church, <http://www.openepiscopalchurch.fsnet.co.uk/> (October 30, 2004)

demonstrate these gifts in their lives -- and likewise, marriage is an iconic demonstration of the love of the persons of the blessed Trinity for one another.<sup>269</sup>

Through such re-visioning of the larger tradition, these small churches are making a way for themselves, as well as serving as an experimental proving ground for mainstreams churches struggling with these issues.<sup>270</sup>

#### *IV. Event*

We have now seen how independent sacramental communities find their place within the drama of sacred history, and the ways in which they define the breadth of their community's embrace, whether purified, narrowed boundaries, or the virtual absence of any boundaries. Within these boundaries, and at this point in time, these churches engage in activities which constitute their identity. In this light, we will consider the practice of the sacraments in these churches, the significant presence of esotericism, and the presence or absence of creeds.

The most critical factor for independent sacramental identity is the single-minded focus on sacramental activity. A former pastor of St Michael's Liberal Catholic Church in Manhattan used to remark, "I tell folks that if they want coffee hour, we're not the right place. I'm just not interested in that."<sup>271</sup> Very few independent communities offer coffee hour, Sunday School, and the array of other social programs which have come to characterize many mainstream churches. Rather, these are tiny communities (or solitary priests) with limited resources. They exist to offer the sacraments, most especially the

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<sup>269</sup> Pastoral letter emailed from Timothy W. Cravens, July 15, 2004.

<sup>270</sup> It is worthy of note that there are an increasing number of transgendered persons involved in independent sacramental communities. These communities may well provide the site for some of the first serious theological reflection on transgendered identity. I had the privilege of interviewing Mother Lynn Walker, transgendered activist and priest of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, via email on April 13, 2004, and then met her in person in New York City in July 2004.

<sup>271</sup> I heard Rev. Ed Abdill make this remark many times from 1997 to 2000.

eucharist, sometimes even on a daily basis.<sup>272</sup> Those who look to the church primarily as a community of friends, an outlet for social activity and business connections, will be quickly disappointed by the vast majority of independent sacramental churches.

In his account of the extremely eccentric and ever-changing spiritual journey of Bishop Mikhail Itkin (1936-1989), James Ishmael Ford notes:

...his only continuing spiritual practice seems to have been celebration of the eucharist. Unlike many Independent Catholics, who participate in the eucharist only at those irregular occasions when they can gather a congregation, Mikhail maintained the practice of nearly daily celebration throughout his life. While there are sound theological reasons against the celebration of private masses, the eucharist was Mikhail's only constant spiritual nourishment, and it provided him with all he had of that "regularity" which is a hallmark of spiritual discipline.<sup>273</sup>

One can certainly find examples of independent clergy who do not celebrate frequently, and who may have scruples about celebrating without a congregation. I am sure that Ford's comments are based on his extensive experience with the independent movement in California from the late 1970s onward. However, in my own contemporary experience, I have known far more clergy who regularly celebrate alone or with only a spouse or friend present. The vast majority of currently active clergy whom I interviewed for this dissertation celebrate the eucharist at least weekly. If alone, these clergy often conceive of the eucharist as an act of intercession for the world, with the church being spiritually present. This is not so different from the eucharistic theology of Roman Catholic hermit priests, such as the Carthusians.

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<sup>272</sup> I know many independent clergy who privately celebrate the eucharist daily. In some locations, public daily celebration is offered, such as the Center of Light, within the Order of Christ Sophia, in Atlanta, Georgia, pastored by Rev. Cynthia Clapp. The Center of Light has morning mass and vespers, daily. See <http://www.centersoflight.org/atlanta.html> (October 30, 2004).

<sup>273</sup> James Ishmael Ford, "Episcopi Vagantes and the Challenge to Catholic Ministry," 35.

While the eucharist and holy orders (to be discussed in the following chapter on leadership) form the core of the independent sacramental experience, the other sacraments are not forgotten. Even without a regular community, the independent priest is often called upon to marry, baptize, confirm, anoint, and confess those who are unable or unwilling to request the services of mainstream clergy. Following my priesthood ordination in 1996, I seriously doubted I would ever be asked to hear a confession. However, in the past eight years, I have heard many confessions, often in very unlikely places such as Chinese restaurants and parking lots. I have also been called upon to celebrate all of the other sacraments, often by persons living on the margins of the Christian community, and alienated from their church of birth. When such persons are not a regular part of a church, the sharing of the sacraments is an act of mission, and a display of freely given grace. Based on many conversations, I believe my experience in this regard to be typical of most independent clergy, at least among the progressive jurisdictions.

We have repeatedly seen the almost gleeful willingness to experiment which characterizes so much of the independent movement. Thus, it should come as no surprise that there has been experimentation with the sacraments as well. The first radical change in sacramental structure came from the Polish National Catholic Church. At synods between 1909 and 1919, the PNCC recognized the proclamation of the Word of God as a sacrament, but preserved the traditional number seven by teaching that baptism and confirmation formed “one Sacrament in dual form.”<sup>274</sup> While not widely adopted outside the PNCC, one wonders about the potential of this position to reclaim a larger place for the Word in communities primarily focused upon the Altar.

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<sup>274</sup> Wlodarski, 100, 108-109.

As noted above in the pastoral letter from Timothy Cravens, many liberal independent communities conduct sacramental marriages for same-sex couples, with some experimentation in the readings (e.g., the story of David & Jonathan for the marriage of two men) and the rite, to reflect the genders of the persons involved. Bishop Cravens has also been very active in organizations seeking legalized same-sex marriage, such as Marriage Equality and the New Paltz Equality Initiative, for which he has conducted weddings intended to challenge New York state law.<sup>275</sup> He also repeatedly, publicly makes the point that his church is committed to sacramental marriage for same-sex couples, with or without legal recognition. He then asks whether laws opposed to same-sex marriage constitute a governmental privileging of the position of certain other churches.<sup>276</sup> Other independent communities will conduct same-sex blessings or holy unions, while regarding such rites as theologically and liturgically distinct from heterosexual marriage.<sup>277</sup> I am also aware of at least one independent community which will bless “poly” marriages of more than two persons.<sup>278</sup>

Within independent sacramental communities, the sacrament of anointing of the sick has often been conjoined with various alternative healing methods. Therapeutic Touch was developed by a lifelong Theosophist, Dora Kunz, who first tested her technique on Liberal Catholic priests, as she believed they would be more sensitive to the movement of energies. Many Liberal Catholic priests combine sacramental anointing

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<sup>275</sup> <http://www.npei.org/interim/news.htm> (October 30, 2004).

<sup>276</sup> I am indebted to Tim Cravens, Peekskill, NY, for many years of conversation (by phone, email, and in person) on these issues.

<sup>277</sup> Examples include the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, and the Grace Catholic Church, <http://www.gracecatholic.com> (December 5, 2004).

<sup>278</sup> This church is the Apostolic Church of the Risen Christ, <http://www.risenchrist.org> (October 23, 2004). Father Cameron Mandrake, Father Chris McCoy, and Father Darin Baker, all priests of this jurisdiction in Phoenix, Arizona, are partners in a poly-marriage. My thanks to them, especially Father Cameron, for discussing their marriage with me.

with Therapeutic Touch treatments.<sup>279</sup> Other similar methods have also been incorporated into the church's healing ministry. For example, Bishop Catherine Adams of the Friends Catholic Community Church routinely trained her ordinands in the Reiki method of energy healing.<sup>280</sup> I have encountered other independent clergy using methods as diverse as attunement, flower essence therapy, and radionics, in connection with their healing ministry, and often in conjunction with the sacrament.

The final significant development relates to the sacrament of confession or reconciliation. As with many Episcopal congregations, the use of a general sacramental absolution at most masses has become common in many independent communities, although sometimes with unique twists. When worshipping with a Polish National Catholic Community in Manhattan on a summer Sunday afternoon in 1997, I was surprised when the priest gave a penance (a decade of the rosary, if I recall correctly) to the tiny congregation, following the prayer of confession, and prior to giving general absolution. Communities which use liturgies descended from that of the Holy Order of MANS give absolution to each person receiving communion, individually. After placing the host on the communicant's tongue, the priest lays his or her hand on the communicant's head and says, "Partake ye of the body of Jesus, and know that through the fruits of your labors, ye are absolved of all past error, and thus a partaker of the Life, through Christ Jesus."<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Father Ed Abdill was a member of Dora Kunz's original Therapeutic Touch group, and I am indebted to him for discussing this with me. I have often seen a combination of TT and anointing offered at LCC parishes, often immediately following mass.

<sup>280</sup> Most FCCC clergy are trained in Reiki, and Reiki treatments were given at numerous FCCC gatherings I attended from 1996-2002.

<sup>281</sup> The Ritual Book from the Holy Order of MANS (San Francisco, CA: Holy Order of MANS, n.d.)

The most radical change to the sacrament of reconciliation comes from Rudolf Steiner's Christengemeinschaft. In the Christengemeinschaft and churches and groups which descend from it or have been influenced by it, this sacrament is now known as Sacramental Consultation, and the purpose has been considerably broadened. Evelyn Capel writes:

The person who comes to the priest may have reached a difficult patch in his life; he may have an important decision to make; he may be in concern over something he has done; he may be in a situation beyond his control, where he has to act against his conscience; he may be threatened with some calamity, or he may have come to one of those high places on the journey through life, from which it is easy and good to look back over the way one has come and to try to see where it is leading.... There is no question in the Christian Community of a confession of sins. Those who wish to speak in such a Sacramental Consultation of things which are on their conscience are quite free to do so. Nonetheless, not only the shadow side of life, but every part of human destiny has its place in the sacrament.<sup>282</sup>

The vested priest consciously brings the presence of Christ to the conversation, whatever the content may be. She or he then concludes the sacrament with a blessing offered to the recipient. Sacramental consultation is a significant expansion of the traditional sacrament of reconciliation, but it is a beautiful context for pastoral counseling, and a model worthy of exploration by other churches.

As we have repeatedly observed, very many independent sacramental churches have a connection to the esoteric traditions. Esoteric (or more simply, Inner) Christianity is constituted by the living knowledge which comes from direct contact with the Christ, at the core of one's being. In contrast to mysticism, esotericism is marked by an interest

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<sup>282</sup> Evelyn Francis Capel, Seven Sacraments in the Christian Community (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1981), 55-56. See also Tom Ravetz, Sacramental Consultation (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1998). The text of the ritual may be found in Hischam A. Hapatsch, ed., Die Kultushandlungen der Christengemeinschaft und Die Kultushandlungen in Der Freien Waldorfschule (München: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen, 1996), 55. To the best of my knowledge, the English translation is only privately available. The Independent Church of Australia has a very similar practice, which they call the Sacrament of Grace. See <http://www.ica.org.au/1sacraments.html> (December 26, 2004) for details.

in the levels and stages of being, between our ordinary consciousness and the Divine. Those called mystics have usually preferred the direct path to God, without giving much attention to the intermediate realms. Richard Smoley writes, “The mystic wants to reach his destination as quickly as possible; the esotericist wants to learn something about the landscape on the way.”<sup>283</sup> Esotericism is the choice of the winding way, rather than the straight way of the mystic, as Rudolf Steiner writes, “...[I]n the spiritual world, the straight way presents such enormous difficulties that any of the winding ways is the shorter.”<sup>284</sup>

Esotericism has always been present in Christianity, but most often as an underground stream. In the last one hundred and fifty years, the inner traditions (Christian and otherwise) have left the hidden sanctum and burst upon the world scene. At least for Western Europe and the United States, the opening of the gates of the mysteries began in earnest with the founding of the Theosophical Society by Helena P. Blavatsky and her associates in 1875.<sup>285</sup> Even though Blavatsky could be sharply anti-Christian in her attitudes, many streams of Christian esotericism have some historic link to Theosophy.

Many Christian esotericists have operated outside the bounds of any formal church, or have kept their inner pursuits strictly separate from their exoteric church life. Others, such as Robin Amis in the Orthodox Church, or Cynthia Bourgeault and Anthony

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<sup>283</sup> Richard Smoley, Inner Christianity: A Guide to the Esoteric Tradition (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2002), 3. I use *inner*, *esoteric*, and *occult* as synonyms.

<sup>284</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Karmic Relationships: Esoteric Studies, Vol. VII (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1973), 70.

<sup>285</sup> For a history of the Theosophical Society, see Michael Gomes, The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1987).



Duncan in the Anglican Communion, have been able to practice and teach within the structures of a mainstream church, although sometimes with great difficulty.<sup>286</sup>

A very common idea in Christian esotericism is that of a hidden, inner, or secret church, often identified with the Church of St John, over against the exoteric Church of St. Peter.<sup>287</sup> This secret church is generally held to be invisible, constituted by the hidden initiates, the possessors of gnosis truly so called, wherever they may be located in time and space. It is not difficult to understand the genesis of this idea, especially considering the secrecy necessary for occultists to avoid persecution in prior centuries. Nonetheless, it is theologically suspect. Christians, as followers of a God who chooses to incarnate in human flesh, have always been worried by tendencies to disembody the realities of the faith. Orthodox teaching insists that the divinity of Jesus does not float at some remove from his humanity. Nor does the spiritual reality of the church hover at a distance from the actual women and men, the rites and practices, the structures and modes of life, which constitute the visible church on earth.

Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inner church of the initiates began to find a body. Slowly and through the tireless labors of many workers, public, visible esoteric churches came into being. It is largely within the independent sacramental movement that we find these embodiments of the esoteric Christian tradition in ecclesial expression. Within this setting, the ritual life of the sacramental churches becomes a sacred magic, mediating the energies of grace between the planes of being.

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<sup>286</sup> Robin Amis, *A Different Christianity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995); Cynthia Bourgeault, *A Wisdom Way of Knowing* (Indianapolis, IN: John Wiley & Sons, 2003); Anthony Duncan, *The Lord of the Dance* (Oceanside, CA: Sun Chalice Books, 1996).

<sup>287</sup> Smoley, 226-240. See also Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 135-146.

Nicholas Whitehead, an ordained subdeacon in the independent movement, stated in an interview with Martha Shultz, presiding bishop of the New Order of Glastonbury, of which he was a member at the time:

...every esoteric Christian should also have some kind of connection with a sacramental environment; they should be participating in the Eucharist, for instance, because it's an extension of the group consciousness.

You could have an esoteric Christianity that says nothing about the Eucharist, but I think that's falling short, because the Eucharist is so central a symbol. The Eucharist is a miniature recreation of the life of Christ, with the cup representing the tomb, and all the rest. By participating in the Eucharist you are archetypally participating in the *life* of Christ, and that involves everything in the initiations we were talking about. This gives a basic pattern to work on which can be expanded and extended.<sup>288</sup>

Many more traditionally-minded persons within the independent movement are deeply opposed to esotericism, and believe that an occult reading of the Christian tradition is fundamentally mistaken. Nonetheless, the inner tradition has such a pervasive presence within independent sacramentalism that it is impossible to accurately understand the movement without considering it. The lack of acceptance of an esoteric approach to faith within mainstream churches is a major reason why some persons affiliate with independent jurisdictions. It is also my experience that, even within outwardly quite traditional groups, it is not unusual to discover a quiet practitioner of the inner disciplines, or apostolic lineage derived primarily from esoteric jurisdictions.

Finally, we need to consider the place of creeds and confessions in the independent movement. There are many independent jurisdictions which accept the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds (with or without the filioque). Such communities often also

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<sup>288</sup> Martha J. Schultz, "Working on the Inner Side: The GNOSIS Interview with Nicholas Whitehead," *Gnosis* (Fall 1997), 36-40. For more on Whitehead's views on inner Christianity, see his book *Patterns in Magical Christianity* (Albuquerque, NM: Sun Chalice Books, 1995). The introduction to this book is particularly valuable in its discussion of the use of symbolism, in a way highly applicable to sacramental practice. Whitehead is no longer active in the independent sacramental movement.

accept the at least the first seven ecumenical councils, and have occasionally produced more detailed confessions expressing traditional orthodoxy.<sup>289</sup> However, the level of public and private theological orthodoxy can be quite at odds. A priest of an outwardly quite traditional group, the Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church, reports that “we are expected to abide by these [the creeds and councils] in public but can believe what we want in private.”<sup>290</sup> This priest, Rev. Alexandra Honigsberg, sees value in retaining the creeds:

Think of rote learning as front loading your psyche with information. I learned my scales by rote and still practice them, and am forever in search of new scales to add more dexterity and tonal vocabulary to my improvisations, as well as being able to more readily read printed music.... It's like knowing grammar so you can write and speak better.

The Credo, for those of us know say it, is our scale and grammar. From it, everything else grows. How can that be a bad thing? Sure, there will be a certain percentage of persons who say things mindlessly, but even then, say the elders, the action and the words have a positive effect on the person and help to transform them. It is a win-win situation. You can then, perhaps, get them to be more mindful and spontaneous about other aspects of worship with the security in their subconscious ringing, “We believe in One God...”<sup>291</sup>

An interesting compromise position is that of the Christengemeinschaft. This independent community does use a formal creed, which is Rudolf Steiner's adaptation of the Apostles' Creed:

An almighty divine being, spiritual-physical, is the ground of existence of the heavens and of the earth who goes before his creatures like a Father.

Christ, through whom human beings attain the re-enlivening of the dying earth-existence, is to this divine being as the Son born in eternity.

In Jesus the Christ entered as man into the earthly world.

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<sup>289</sup> A fine example is The Catholic Apostolic Church, *The Glastonbury Confession* (Glastonbury: The Metropolitan Press, 1983). At this time, the Catholic Apostolic Church, also known as the Orthodox Church of the British Isles, had congregations in the United States, and this confession was partly developed at a plenary episcopal council in Davis, California in 1982.

<sup>290</sup> Rev. Alexandra Honigsberg, New York, NY, interview conducted by email, February 29, 2004.

<sup>291</sup> Rev. Alexandra Honigsberg, personal email, January 30, 2004.

The birth of Jesus upon earth is a working of the Holy Spirit who, to heal spiritually the sickness of sin within the bodily nature of mankind, prepared the son of Mary to be the vehicle of the Christ.

The Christ Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate the death on the cross and was lowered into the grave of the earth.

In death he became the helper of the souls of the dead who had lost their divine nature.

Then he overcame death after three days.

Since that time he is the Lord of the heavenly forces upon earth and lives as the fulfiller of the fatherly deeds of the ground of the world.

He will in time unite for the advancement of the world with those whom, through their bearing, he can wrest from the death of matter.

Through him can the healing Spirit work.

Communities whose members feel the Christ within themselves may feel united in a Church to which all belong who are aware of the health-bringing power of the Christ.

They may hope for the overcoming of the sickness of sin; for the continuance of man's being; and for the preservation of their life destined for eternity.<sup>292</sup>

In the community's liturgy, the priest alone speaks the creed, after removing his or her stole, signifying that it is spoken only by an individual, and not on behalf of the community as a whole.<sup>293</sup> Community members are free to take their own perspective on these matters. While there is clearly a more serious doctrinal responsibility for the priest, who speaks the creed in every liturgy, "each priest has the freedom to teach anything which does not conflict the content of the sacraments, whose texts form the 'bedrock' of The Christian Community."<sup>294</sup> Of course, the text of the creed is part of this content.

A further loosening of credal allegiance can be seen in groups such as the Liberal Catholic Church and its various offspring. The LCC liturgy contains the traditional creeds as (rarely used) options, often replaced by an exceedingly vague Act of Faith. In

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<sup>292</sup> From the official website of the Christian Community, <http://www.thechristiancommunity.org/creed.htm> (October 28, 2004).

<sup>293</sup> Capel, 46.

<sup>294</sup> "About the Christian Community in North America," <http://www.thechristiancommunity.org/about.htm> (October 28, 2004).

any event, “the Liberal Catholic Church leaves to its members perfect freedom in the interpretation of scriptures, creeds, and liturgy.”<sup>295</sup> This freedom extends to LCC clergy, who are bound to the form of the prescribed liturgy, but entirely free to interpret it in any way they choose.

A yet further step can be seen, for example, in the Friends Catholic Community Church, where no creed or prescribed liturgy is required. The first Convening Bishop of the FCCC wrote:

Ours is a free catholicism, but unlike that referenced free catholicism, ours is not merely a philosophical freedom from Roman *magisterium* ("teaching authority"). In practice, we do not suffer any *magisterium*, even from other free or independent or liberal catholics. From neither clergy nor laity do we require any specific creed, nor do we hold that any particular belief system is necessary to preserve either apostolic succession or sacramental validity, other than an individual, authentic and vital relationship with the living Christ, however that may be interpreted.<sup>296</sup>

Other similar examples would include the Eglise Gnostique Apostolique, which accepts that “The principle of a Gnostic Church is to be adogmatic, because a Church of Gnosis, that is – of Wisdom, by its very nature, is one of constant evolution.”<sup>297</sup> John Gilbert, one of the archbishops of the Universal Gnostic Church, states, “The only doctrine of the church is the Doctrine of One, which says God is everything.”<sup>298</sup>

Thus, in some churches both clergy and laity are required to subscribe to creeds and/or authoritative liturgical texts. In other communities, only the clergy are so obligated. In yet other jurisdictions, there are no prescribed beliefs of any sort. It has been my observation that non-dogmatic churches suffer a high degree of fragmentation

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<sup>295</sup> The Liturgy according to the use of the Liberal Catholic Church, 196.

<sup>296</sup> Adams, 2. The reference is to Thomas Hickey, Free Catholicism and the God Within (Hartford, CT: Free Catholic Institute, 1990). This text is out of print, but the same arguments are advanced in Hickey’s more easily obtained Independent Catholicism for the Third Millennium, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Alan Kemp (Tacoma, WA: Ascension Desktop Press, 2002).

<sup>297</sup> Interview with Phillip Garver by email, February 28, 2004.

<sup>298</sup> Email from John Gilbert, March 7, 2004.

and shifting membership. With such churches, there is no easy way to adjudicate differences, and define boundaries. Thus, conflicts tend to rupture the community: “I’m free, and you can’t stop me from doing whatever I want!” This can be seen as failure, or anarchic freedom, or both. Churches with a higher degree of doctrinal and/or liturgical definition seem to have better chances of survival, but also risk squelching the very experimentation which is the strength of the independent movement. It will probably be many more years before we are able to speak authoritatively of the results of these different relationships to the historic (or new) creeds.

#### *V. Conclusion*

The independent sacramental movement has not yet seen much sustained theological reflection. However, it continues to be the site of considerable experimentation which, with time, may provide fuel for the development of distinctive theologies. The nature of the movement makes it virtually impossible for there to ever be a unified theology among these jurisdictions. Independent communities are engaged in experiments with the church’s relationship to sacred time, with the breadth of the space within which the church lives, and with the very activities (such as sacramental practice) that constitute the church’s identity. Beyond identifying the primary areas of experimentation, and representative examples of the same, it is very difficult to come to any generalizations. Rather, these are areas within the independent movement where distinctive developments with theological potential, quite different from the mainstream, are happening. If nothing else, I hope to have provided a guide to this varied landscape, with pointers to themes deserving attention as the independent sacramental movement continues to develop.

## Chapter 6

### Leadership in the Independent Sacramental Movement

#### *I. Introduction*

Even given its extreme experimentation in the fields of theology and liturgy, the independent sacramental movement makes some of its most notable departures from tradition in the field of leadership and/or priesthood.

It is often a sense of priestly vocation which draws persons to this movement. Women whose churches will not ordain them, gay and lesbian persons who want to be open about their sexuality without losing access to public leadership, persons of unconventional theological leanings, and those who cannot leave the responsibilities of their lives for conventional seminary are all drawn to the independent sacramental communities. Here, at last, such excluded ones can take their place around the altar of the Lord, even if in a small, hidden way. Thus, we have the unusual reality of churches whose membership is largely made up of clergy and those aspiring to become clergy. While some independent communities hold to a traditional pastoral model, the large majority of these churches have many more clergy than mainstream groups. In some groups, literally every member is ordained, and the door is open for a large number of these persons to progress to the episcopate. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has often stated that Quakers have abolished the laity, not the clergy. Many independent sacramental groups could say the same!

Given the size of independent sacramental communities, very few are able to financially support their clergy. Thus, most priests serve as volunteers, receiving only the

occasional donation. The presence of numerous ordained persons helps such small communities attend to pastoral and liturgical needs, without overburdening one or two volunteers. Liturgy is usually celebrated in living rooms and other provisional spaces, as only a small number of communities own property. The almost exclusive task of the clergy is to serve the sacramental needs of the community, without many of the other business and pastoral functions of a mainstream minister. These are not usually specialized professionals, but volunteers who hopefully know at least enough to celebrate the sacraments for themselves and those around them.

The difference from traditional clergy is seen most starkly in the common case of the solitary priest or bishop, who has no regular congregation, but celebrates the eucharist in hidden intercession for the world. Such solitaries may perform pastoral and sacramental tasks for others, as occasions arise, but many do not even seek such opportunities, preferring a cloistered priesthood. Bishop Timothy Cravens writes:

The idea that the Eucharist can only be offered if laity are present reinforces the false notion... that priests are ordained to do and perform a ministry. While this is certainly part of the reason, they are also ordained to be icons of Christ. The Carthusian vocation brochure states this: "The priesthood itself is envisaged in its monastic and contemplative dimension. Except for limited priestly service necessary to the community and vocational retreatants, there is no ministry attached to the Carthusian priesthood. It is rather a means of greater conformity to Jesus the High Priest, and unites him in a special and sacramental way to His life of prayer and sacrifice." Where I differ from the Carthusian and Roman-Papal understanding of the priesthood is that I do not believe that it is restricted to celibate males or that only those who leave the world can be true monks -- rather, I would say that the gift of the IC/OC movement is that ALL who feel so called are embraced and given the means to carry out this call through ordination.<sup>299</sup>

Many independent clergy, solitary or otherwise, also see their priesthood expressed in less obvious ways in their daily lives and work. A priest who works as a hairdresser

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<sup>299</sup> Pastoral letter from Timothy W. Cravens, by email, November 16, 2004.



remarked that she hears a lot of confessions at her secular job! Another anonymous priest said to me: “We walk around all day, reflecting God back and forth to one another. And what is priesthood beyond trying to do that a bit more consciously?”

Such radically different models of Christian priesthood raise the question of what sort of clergy training is needed, and offered within these communities. The challenge of clergy training in an independent sacramental movement was cited as the most important challenge facing the movement, by the majority of persons I interviewed. There are a significant number of independent clergy who have attended conventional seminary. In most cases, they are former clergy or seminarians from the larger churches. However, few lay persons interested in these jurisdictions have the financial and personal resources to attend a traditional seminary.

Communities have resorted to a number of different solutions to the problem of clergy training. Independent sacramental churches have founded a number of seminaries, primarily focused on distance learning, with considerable variation in quality. Other churches have created mentoring programs. Up to the present, such mentoring arrangements seem to have enjoyed the most success in training competent independent clergy. In both seminary and mentoring arrangements, the minor orders are often used to mark out progress. While the minor orders have all but disappeared from some of the larger churches, they are a critically important part of the formation process within many, if not most, independent communities. Often one will discover that even members of the community who are not interested in priesthood have received some of the minor orders. In some esoterically oriented churches, the various ordinations are understood as occult initiations, with related changes in spiritual energy and consciousness. Depending on the

community, these initiatic changes may be held to follow from the ordination, or may be required to precede it, with the ceremony being the seal of the pre-existing inner reality.

Finally, there is the very difficult question of untrained clergy. In the independent sacramental world, everyone has a story about a person taken from confirmation through priesthood in a day or a weekend, or an unbaptized non-Christian consecrated as a bishop. Many of these stories are true. I know a bishop who has been consecrated twice, but has never met any of his consecrators, having received certificates by mail.<sup>300</sup>

Independent priest Jay Kinney quotes poet Robert Kelly:

And a Unitarian I came into the world in Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts,  
and a Unitarian I shall leave it, notwithstanding my daily practice of certain Vedic  
sacrifices, my twenty-year long pursuit of ritual magic, the fact that I am  
technically a Moslem, and the more resplendent fact that I awoke from a teen-age  
binge one day to find myself a consecrated bishop of the Primitive Restored Old  
Catholic Church of North America, anointed by the hands of the Assyrian  
Nestorian Monothelite Bishop of West 125th Street, that excellent raconteur and  
union leader, De Forest Justice, D.D.<sup>301</sup>

It is very difficult to know what to do about such untrained clergy. Some provide themselves the training they did not receive from their bishop, and serve admirably well, perhaps better than some of their formally educated peers. Others are walking disasters, spiraling into psychological distortions that injure themselves and others, or ignoring their ordained status altogether. However, there can be no consideration of clerical leadership in the independent movement, without tackling this issue.

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<sup>300</sup> The bishop in question is Peter R. Koenig, who resides in Europe but was consecrated long-distance by bishops in North America. Email from P.R. Koenig, November 5, 2004. In a later email on the same day, Koenig recounted the origins of the "Caliphate" branch of the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica, when William Heidrick was consecrated in the backseat of a car in California, on the way to a government office to file church incorporation papers.

<sup>301</sup> Quoted in Jay Kinney, "Days of Future Past: Tenth Anniversary Reflections," <http://www.lumen.org/intros/intro37.html> (November 6, 2004), originally published in *Gnosis* (37: Fall 1995), 12-13.

Thus, in this chapter we will examine who is ordained in independent communities, the varied ways in which independent clergy practice their priesthood, and the training (or lack thereof) which they receive.

## *II. Eligibility for Ordination*

The independent sacramental movement has opened the doors of ordained ministry to many persons who would otherwise be excluded. It is important to note that there are many conservative independent groups who maintain traditional standards for ordination, and are horrified by some or all of the categories of ordained persons that we will consider. The conservative groups are less interesting for our purposes as they tend to simply replicate the theology of ordination of the Roman, Anglican, and/or Orthodox churches.

In preceding chapters, we have seen the prevalence of esotericism in the independent movement. In almost all mainstream churches, an esoteric theology, especially when espoused by a clergyperson, is going to be sidelined, if not excluded. Thus, individuals who are seeking an ecclesial expression of esoteric Christianity are generally drawn toward independent sacramentalism, as a milieu in which they can openly express their occult theologies.

There are a number of independent esoteric churches and orders which claim historically unverifiable origins, only emerging in public light in recent years.<sup>302</sup> The

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<sup>302</sup> The case of Rosamonde Miller, and the Holy Order of Mary Magdalene, which claims an unbroken succession from Mary Magdalene, has been discussed in detail above. Another example is Tau Malachi Eben Ha-Elijah (Brett Cagle), current leader of the Sophia Fellowship and the Ordo Sanctus Gnosis. Tau Malachi writes: “My teachers spoke of the origin of the tradition as taking place during the seventeenth century, inspired by the Rosicrucian Enlightenment of that era, and alluded to an origin in the more distant past.” Tau Malachi, *The Gnostic Gospel of St Thomas: Meditations on the Mystical Teachings* (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2004), xii. As with Tau Rosamonde, Tau Malachi offers no documentation to support this

earliest documented esoteric church in modern times, with a lineage surviving to the present day is L'Eglise Johannite des Chretiens Primitifs, which grew out of Templar connections in France, at the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its lineage, allegedly derived from the Roman Church via L'Eglise Constitutionelle, eventually became consolidated with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century L'Eglise Gnostique of Jules Doinel.<sup>303</sup> Other groups, such as Eugene Vintras' Oeuvre de la Misericorde, followed. With Doinel's Gnostic revival, and the Liberal Catholic Church of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of esotericism in the independent movement was firmly secured, and has grown substantially in the years since. In addition to groups historically descended from these organizations, new occult churches are continually arising. Many of these churches are sacramental in nature, perhaps because of the oft claimed affinity between sacramental liturgy and ritual magic.<sup>304</sup>

Ordination in many independent communities has also been opened for persons of different sexualities, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and polyamorous

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claim. The use of the title Tau suggests a possible link to the lineage of Jules Doinel, who is largely responsible for the modern use of this title by Gnostic bishops.

<sup>303</sup> Ward, Perrson, and Bain, 135; Foster, 1-5, 15. The claimed lineage is recounted in Persson, The Apostolic Succession of the Apostolic Episcopal Church: An outline at the prospect of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Solna, Sweden: St Ephrem's Institute, 2004), 27-30.

<sup>304</sup> Recent organizations with a sui generis priesthood include the Order of the Astral Star, founded by low church protestants in Kentucky in 1980. They have a highly organized ministry of deacons, priests, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, and worship according to a revision of the Anglican liturgy. Email interview with Michael W. Humphrey (Frater Pneuma Asteros), September 2, 2004. Another example is the Light of Christ Community Church, headquartered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, under the Rev. Carol Parrish-Harra. Parrish-Harra was ordained in 1971 by the Universal Church of the Master, a spiritualist church. While less "catholic" in ethos than many of the groups considered in this dissertation, the LCCC does practice a weekly eucharist, and its focus on the Divine Feminine draws an increasing number of independent clergy, mostly women, to its workshops and events. See Parrish-Harra's website at <http://www.sanctasophia.org> (November 7, 2004), as well as her autobiography, Messengers of Hope, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tahlequah, OK: Sparrow Hawk Press, 2001). I was alerted to Parrish-Harra's work by three independent bishops: Mary Ray and Jo Foy of the Gnostic Community Fellowship of Lawrence, Kansas, and Carol Anderson of the Gnostic Order of Christ in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Foy, Ray, and Anderson have all spent time with Parrish-Harra, and use some of her books, such as The Aquarian Rosary (Tahlequah, OK: Sparrow Hawk Press, 1988) in their teaching. I have also been assisted by many conversations with Marilyn Sutcliffe, a certified teacher (non-ordained) in the LCCC in Nashville, Tennessee.

persons. Of course, one can also find more traditional independent communities who are firmly opposed to this. Perhaps even more common is the outwardly traditionalist church, which quietly tolerates a largely gay clergy.<sup>305</sup> In the history chapter, we noted how a number of prominent early independent clergy (e.g., Willoughby, Wedgwood) were engaged in homosexual behavior, although it is difficult to know how their sexuality impacted their identity and priesthood.

A truly revolutionary step was taken by a young independent priest named George Augustine Hyde, on Christmas Eve, 1946. Hyde celebrated the vigil of Christmas in a gay bar in Atlanta, Georgia, known as the Cotton Blossom Room. As far as I have been able to determine, this mass of the Eucharistic Catholic Church marked the beginning of the very first Christian ministry (of any sort) openly directed toward the gay and lesbian community. Hyde began advertising in the publications of early gay organizations such as ONE, published by the Mattachine Society. Not long after Hyde's consecration as a bishop in 1957, he ordained the well-known gay activist, Mikhail Itkin, to the priesthood. Itkin eventually denounced Hyde as too conservative.<sup>306</sup>

A priest who worked with Hyde beginning in the late 1960s, Robert Clement, founded the Church of the Beloved Disciple in New York City in 1970. The primarily gay congregation grew to a large size, and served as a model for many other

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<sup>305</sup> I have spoken with many gay clergy, mostly male, in independent jurisdictions which do not advertise a liberal perspective on homosexuality. These churches are often quite traditional on other issues such as the creed and women's ordination. Out of respect for their requests for anonymity, I cannot name the clergy and jurisdictions in question, but this is an extremely widespread phenomenon.

<sup>306</sup> See Ward, Persson, and Bain, 197-200. For more on Itkin, see Ford. Further information on Hyde can be found on the website of the Eucharistic Catholic Church (Canadian Branch), which is affiliated with Hyde's current jurisdiction, the Autocephalous Orthodox Catholic Church of America, <http://www.netministries.org/see/churches/ch04614?frame=N> (November 7, 2004). Hyde is currently living in Belleair, Florida, and is still active in ministry, although quite elderly. I am indebted to Archbishop Al Lankenau of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America in Indianapolis, Indiana, Hyde's successor as head of the OCCA, for further information. Hyde left the OCCA to found the AOCCA in 1996, due to his opposition to women's ordination.

communities. However, it did not long survive Clement's retirement to California in 1986.<sup>307</sup> Following on from pioneers such as Hyde, Itkin, and Clement, many jurisdictions within the independent movement now offer not only a spiritual home, but the possibility of ordination and leadership to openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons. Many clergy who have left larger churches after "coming out" have also affiliated with independent churches, and continue their ministry there.

An increasingly well-known voice on issues of homosexuality and religion is Archbishop Bruce Simpson of the Order of St. John the Beloved. Simpson is a regular columnist in *The Advocate*, a major gay newsmagazine, as well as the author of a popular book on the subject.<sup>308</sup> As long as persons of different sexualities are not welcome in the ordained clergy of mainstream denominations, this segment of the independent sacramental movement seems destined to continue to grow.

Much as with gay and lesbian persons, the independent sacramental communities began ordaining women to all levels of ministry long before the larger liturgical churches. The first woman consecrated as a bishop in an independent community was Marie Chauvel de Chauvignie, as Tau Esclarmonde, Sophia (female bishop) of Varsovie. Chauvel was consecrated by Jules Doinel, for his L'Eglise Gnostique, in approximately 1892.<sup>309</sup> At this time, Doinel's church did not yet have apostolic succession, which was

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<sup>307</sup> Eucharistic Catholic Church (Canadian Branch) <http://www.netministries.org/see/churches/ch04614?frame=N> (November 7, 2004). In 1987 in New York, I encountered some of the remnants of Clement's church, who were in the process of re-affiliating with gay Roman Catholic groups such as Dignity, Episcopal parishes, and/or other independent communities.

<sup>308</sup> Bruce J. Simpson, *The Gay Face of God* (Tempe, AZ: Third Millennium Publishing, 2002). Information on Simpson's church can be found on his website at <http://www.osjtb.org/main.html> (November 7, 2004). Most of Simpson's articles for *The Advocate* are archived on the magazine's website: <http://www.advocate.com> (November 7, 2004).

<sup>309</sup> See Milko Bogaard's account at <http://www.gnostique.net/ecclesia/EG.htm> (November 7, 2004). A creed written by Tau Esclarmonde in 1913 can be found at: <http://user.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/bishops.htm> (November 7, 2004).

acquired in 1913 through Jean Bricaud. It is not clear whether Bricaud passed the historic episcopate to the female bishops. Women were ordained in Rudolf Steiner's Christengemeinschaft, from its beginning in 1922, but as with Doinel, this community did not possess traditional apostolic lineage.<sup>310</sup> The earliest certain consecration of a woman as a bishop in apostolic succession is that of Isabel Wilucka for the Mariavite Church, on March 29, 1929.<sup>311</sup>

The acceptance of the ordination of women in many of the larger churches within the past few decades has certainly impacted the attraction of women to the independent movement. However, available options for ordination, even within the Anglican or Lutheran communions, sometimes seem too different for women identified with the Roman Catholic or Orthodox traditions.<sup>312</sup> Mainstream denominations may be too theologically and liturgically conservative for some women who seek more revolutionary change in the church.<sup>313</sup> Other women who come to the independent movement may be drawn by issues other than those directly linked to gender, e.g. gay and lesbian concerns, creedal issues, or alternative models of ministry.

A final, smaller group of persons drawn to independent sacramental Christianity is composed of those whose commitments in life prevent them from moving into conventional seminary or full time ministry, or whose convictions do not allow them to do so. Many independent clergy feel drawn to a vocation which is not separate from their

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<sup>310</sup> Capel, 102.

<sup>311</sup> Ward, Persson, and Bain, 223.

<sup>312</sup> An example among my interviewees is Rev. Alexandra Honigsberg of the Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church. Rev. Honigsberg certainly has the educational background (an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary) and skills to seek Episcopal or Methodist ordination. But such options seemed too alien to her Italian Catholic heritage.

<sup>313</sup> Examples among my interviewees include Rev. Linda Lewis of the Catholic Church of the Americas, as well as retired Bishops Evelyn Hill and Marilyn Seig. Seig and Hill are veterans of the WomanChurch movement in the Roman Catholic Church, who were no longer willing to wait for change from within the Roman Church..

secular jobs, and life in the world. Rev. Deborah Beach Giordano of the Contemporary Catholic Church is a middle-aged woman from California, with extensive theological education, and years of experience as a lay minister in Methodist congregations. She explored the possibility of Methodist ordination, but was not willing to uproot her family and other established connections, in order to be able to do so. As Rev. Deborah was open to different modes of ordained ministry, including unpaid work, she turned toward the independent movement.<sup>314</sup>

While Rev. Giordano was not deterred by the logistics of ministry within the independent world, other clergy are positively drawn by these factors. A voluntary, part-time, highly flexible, largely unpaid ministry, exercised by priests who are also housewives, business executives, school teachers, and nurses, is inherently attractive to some persons. It can hearken back to romantic images of the early church, and provide exciting visions of a post-modern church no longer hostage to property, retirement accounts, and job security. Whether such visions are prophetic, or flights of fancy, is for the reader to decide. Michael Cardinal Humphrey of the Order of the Astral Star writes:

The first time I felt called to service as a Priest was... a very significant event in my life. I took my real ordination while in college, and pledged myself to the "Paulinian" Rule. I chose NOT to make my living as a minister, but to work in another field to pay my own way. The Apostle Paul made his living as a tent maker, and did not accept living expenses from any religious group. He did accept food and lodging and travel expenses from brother and sister believers, but he did not accept money as a wage to do the work he was called to do.<sup>315</sup>

Humphrey, a former state trooper, currently makes his living as a detention officer in Kentucky, while taking an active ministerial role in his order, locally and nationally.

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<sup>314</sup> Conversations with Rev. Deborah Beach Giordano, in person in Richmond, Indiana, in October 2002, and since that time by email.

<sup>315</sup> Email interview with Michael W. Humphrey, September 2, 2004.



Thus, the independent movement attracts a broad range of persons drawn to the movement by a variety of issues – esotericism, sexuality, gender, convenience, and vision of ministry. Of course, one can also find those drawn to independent ministry for unhealthy reasons, but such unfortunate cases are not exclusive to these churches. In my observation, the vast majority of persons who join independent sacramental groups are sincerely seeking a way to participate in the church’s ministry, which was heretofore closed to them.

The challenge for the future is the second generation. At present, I only know one currently serving independent clergyperson who was at least partially raised within the movement.<sup>316</sup> With the growth of these jurisdictions, more children are growing up as independent sacramental Christians. What will these children make of a church mostly composed of clergy? Will they have any desire to participate? There is precedent in denominations such as the New Apostolic Church, which has a non-professional priesthood shared by most (male) members of the church. Some such model seems necessary, if the independent movement is to build its own future, rather than simply continuing to siphon off discontented members of larger churches.

### *III. Modes of Ministry*

The independent sacramental movement has fostered a wide range of modes of ministry, many of which are quite different from those found in larger churches. There are certainly independent congregations which resemble mainstream churches, in having a small number of paid clergy, and a larger lay population. Spiritus Christi in Rochester,

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<sup>316</sup> This is the Most Rev. Alexis Tancibok of the Grace Catholic Church, whose family worshipped in both Roman and Old Catholic parishes. I interviewed Bishop Alexis by phone on March 27, 2004.

New York, has a weekend attendance of over 1,000, and three paid clergy.<sup>317</sup> However, these parishes are a miniscule minority, despite occasional attempts to present an image to the contrary. Most traditionally structured parishes belong to the conservative end of the movement, and even many of these communities contain a much higher percentage of ordained persons than is usual in larger denominations. There is also a stronger likelihood of volunteer clergy, or clergy who receive only a small amount of compensation, in exchange for their work.

A fine example of this kind of parish is All Saints Cathedral of the Southern Episcopal Church in Nashville, Tennessee. The cathedral is a small, charming gothic structure in the rather trendy Sylvan Park neighborhood of Nashville. However, unlike their unconventional neighbors, the congregation at All Saints is deeply committed to a traditionalist version of Anglicanism. They use the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, and clearly state their opposition to women's ordination and any degree of acceptance of homosexuality. The parish was organized in 1962, and is the mother church of the Southern Episcopal jurisdiction.

I have visited All Saints Cathedral multiple times from 1991 to 2004. The congregation is small, perhaps around twenty or fewer on a Sunday. When I visited, there were usually at least two bishops present, including Bishop Huron Manning, the presiding bishop of the SEC, along with a number of priests and deacons, both vested and non-vested. All of the clergy appear to have secular jobs, or in some cases, are retired. The members are active in the church, and deeply committed to their faith. While very

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<sup>317</sup> Spiritus Christi is a former Roman Catholic parish, which left the Roman Church en masse, over support for women's ordination and other controversial issues. It maintains a website at <http://www.spirituschristi.org> (November 13, 2004).

traditional in some ways, the high percentage of ordained membership and the volunteer nature of the clergy are clear differences from most mainstream congregations.<sup>318</sup>

Far more common are freelance ministries that meet with a small number of participants in condominium clubhouses, retreat center chapels, and living rooms. If the community has existed for any length of time, there will likely be several ordained persons. The availability of several priests is practically helpful when one is dealing with volunteer clergy, with varying work and family schedules. In 1997, I attended several liturgies with the now-defunct Friends Catholic parish of Christ Pantocrator, which met on an irregular basis in homes in the New York City area. The community tried to gather at least once a month on a Saturday or Sunday. On a given weekend, attendance would be ten or less, with about half that number in major orders. An additional number were in minor orders. The eucharist was usually celebrated by the pastor, Bishop Catherine Adams, most often around the dining room table, followed by a community potluck. Visiting another Friends Catholic community in the Los Angeles area in 2002, I shared in another dining room table eucharist. The gathered community, of approximately ten, included two bishops, three priests, and an abbot. The vast majority of independent communities I have visited correspond to this model, at least to some significant degree.

Persons who participate in such small communities generally gather with others from their diocese or ecclesiastical jurisdiction on a regular basis, at least once a year. Such retreats and gatherings provide critical opportunities for larger fellowship. Even in churches which maintain geographic dioceses, one may live far from one's bishop and

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<sup>318</sup> All Saints Cathedral maintains a small website at: <http://www.angelfire.com/biz/Southern/ALLSAINT.html> (November 13, 2004).

fellow clergy.<sup>319</sup> Ordinations are often scheduled for these occasions, in order to have the visible support of more of the community. A retreat is also an ideal setting for in-person mentoring of potential ordinands. It is a well-known fact that independent sacramental churches go through frequent changes and splits. Clergy and laity also switch from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, due to changes in theology, personal conflicts, or other reasons. Well over three fourths of my interviewees have belonged to at least two jurisdictions. In a form of Christianity which emphasizes freedom, in communities created to preserve a way that is somehow different from the mainstream, such anarchic movement is, perhaps, to be expected. For many, overall loyalty seems to be to their own independent priesthood, and to the movement as a whole, rather than to any particular jurisdictional expression of it. It is a promising sign for the future that an increasing number of trans-jurisdictional events are being held.<sup>320</sup> While it would be foolish to think that there will ever be a unified “independent sacramental” denomination, there are definite possibilities for more cooperation among groups.

Even more common than small, ad hoc communities are independent sacramental clergy who primarily celebrate the eucharist alone, or perhaps with the occasional friend or spouse. In November 2001, I visited Sharon Hart, presiding bishop of the Contemporary Catholic Church, at her home in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Bishop Sharon does not have a local community, and does not feel called to form one, focusing instead on spiritual direction and pastoral oversight for her widely scattered clergy. She showed

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<sup>319</sup> Many independent jurisdictions have geographic dioceses, but these are often more flexible than in the larger churches. After all, most clergy are volunteers, and their secular jobs may require them to move. In such a case, must they change bishops? Or what happens if a bishop moves into the territory of one of her fellow bishops? Out of these concerns, a number of jurisdictions have adopted non-territorial dioceses, as more accurate reflections of reality.

<sup>320</sup> I have attended several trans-jurisdictional gatherings in New York City. Beginning in 1999, the American Catholic Union has hosted a number of such events, on a national basis, under the name “Sursum Corda.”

me her altar, formed from a card table in her office, where she celebrates the eucharist daily. Sometimes she is alone. Other times, her husband or one of her children may attend. In Las Cruces, few people know of her sacramental work, which is not advertised. Her service is a hidden one.<sup>321</sup>

Such private celebration of the eucharist is often denounced, both within the independent movement, and by mainstream critics. These critics claim that solo celebration destroys the symbolism of the eucharist as a community meal, and places too heavy an emphasis on a priesthood that does not appear to be actively serving others. Despite sometimes publicly agreeing with this critique, a very large number of independent clergy often say mass alone, even if they also have a small community. Viable independent communities are not always easily created, and these clergy would deprive themselves of the benefits of communion, and of the joining of themselves to Christ in his sacrifice, if they waited for the presence of others in order to approach the altar. Bishop Timothy Cravens of the Independent Catholic Christian Church writes in a pastoral letter:

The idea that the priesthood must be contained to a very few, who are so deserving that they even deserve to be given a living, is perfectly expressed in the idea that the eucharist must be celebrated with several present, laity and clergy. It's almost an expression of the idea that a paid priest must have paying laity. In our tradition, where anyone can potentially become a priest, the eucharist is not the sole possession of a few chosen select, but of the many....

It is a huge mistake to overlook the fact that religious symbols are always polyvalent, and that error is particularly rampant in most modern post-Vatican II-style theologies. (In fact, I would argue that Christian orthodoxy always involves holding two opposite and yet equally true truths in creative tension -- taking one and rejecting the other is the very essence of heresy -- God is One AND Three, Jesus Christ is fully God AND fully Human.) Because the communal meal aspect

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<sup>321</sup> Bishop Sharon's jurisdiction maintains a website at <http://www.thecontemporarycatholicchurch.org> (November 13, 2004).

of the eucharist has been overlooked in the past, we must now abolish all other understandings and have that as the sole reality, they seem to say. In fact, the eucharist is a communal meal, but it is also a sacrifice, and it is a way for the community to feel unity, but it is also an identification with Christ who is both Priest and Victim. I think it would be a mistake to participate only in solitary eucharists, but the fact is that the identification with Christ the Eternal High Priest is perhaps more clearly shown in the solitary eucharist, whereas the communal meal aspect is shown more in community celebrations. I find both very meaningful, and they complement each other.<sup>322</sup>

Also, some independent priests have an almost monastic vocation of hidden intercession for the world, before the small altars found in their bedrooms and closets. R.J. Cuneo, founder of the New Chaldean Gnostic Church, refers to his liturgy and church as “entirely personal creations and not an organized movement.”<sup>323</sup> Subdeacon Nicholas Whitehead points out the importance of inner patterns and the use of imagination in improvising liturgical space, as well as substituting imaginal realities for unavailable physical ones.<sup>324</sup> The tradition of which Whitehead is a part, descending from the work of Dion Fortune, has long recommended sharing in the mass through visual meditation, when outer ritual is not possible.<sup>325</sup> This is not so different from the Roman Catholic devotion of the “Mass of St. John.”<sup>326</sup> The transformative grace of the sacrament is then lived out in ways which are not always explicit. One independent bishop remarked to me that “living the life of a spiritual being in this world” constitutes a large part of his ministry to others.<sup>327</sup> Some independent sacramental Christians who have a largely private priestly vocation also take part in the communal life of a mainstream parish, while others are sustained wholly by their hidden liturgical life.

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<sup>322</sup> Pastoral Letter from Timothy W. Cravens, distributed by email, November 16, 2004.

<sup>323</sup> Letter from R.J. Cuneo, dated August 23, 2004.

<sup>324</sup> Whitehead, 101-104.

<sup>325</sup> Many conversations with Nicholas Whitehead, and his teacher, Basil Wilby, from 1995 to present.

<sup>326</sup> The Mass of St John is an expanded form of “spiritual communion” in which one who is physically absent from the mass is joined to the eucharistic liturgy through private prayer and meditation.

<sup>327</sup> Email interview with Bishop Lawrence C. Terry of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, March 15, 2004.

In communities with an esoteric focus, ministry is often conceived as the facilitation of a process of initiation. Whitehead picks up on teachings from Pseudo-Dionysius which suggest that the orders of deacon, priest, and bishop are “grades or degrees of initiation in the Christian Mysteries.”<sup>328</sup> Father Phil Willette of the Royal Order of Christ the King discussed priesthood with me in 1999. He asked how well a priest could mediate the presence of Christ without a conscious interior realization of the same. Father Phil also shared how he strives to lift his consciousness into the realm of the Holy Spirit, prior to invoking the Spirit upon the eucharistic elements. In the tradition of which Father Phil is a part, this level of realization (consciousness of the indwelling Light of Christ, and the Divine Presence at the core of one’s being) is a prerequisite for ordination to the priesthood, very much in line with Whitehead’s initiatic grade structure.<sup>329</sup>

Tau Malachi (Brett Cagle) of the Ordo Sanctus Gnosis writes: “There is as yet the resurrection of the world to be accomplished and the Spirit of Truth in the apostolic succession labors to this end-which-is-naught.”<sup>330</sup> And further, “Living and moving among us are individuals who embody something of this Light-force, and they transmit this holy Light to those who are ready and willing to receive it. This is the nature of the succession of apostles in the lineage of Yeshua and Magdalene, the divine labor of the great work.”<sup>331</sup> While the OSG does have a tactile succession, Tau Malachi eschews focus on ecclesiastical structure, preferring to emphasize interior illumination, and the

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<sup>328</sup> Whitehead, 169-170.

<sup>329</sup> Conversations with Father Phil Willette, Royal Order of Christ the King, at Uriel House, San Jose, California, February 1999. Father Phil’s tradition derives from the work of Father Paul Blighton and the Holy Order of MANS.

<sup>330</sup> Tau Malachi, 60.

<sup>331</sup> Tau Malachi, 64.

ability to initiate the same experience in others. Whether in local groups, or in long distance communication, the intensely personal relationship of spiritual student to the teacher/initiator/bishop is characteristic of esoteric churches with a focus on initiation.

There are an almost infinite variety of ministries exercised by independent clergy.<sup>332</sup> Due to the constraints of space, we will consider only one more very common form: the independent religious order. There are rare examples of independent religious orders which resemble their Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox counterparts. Pope John Gregory XVII and his Apostles of Infinite Love maintain a large monastic complex in Quebec.<sup>333</sup> The Immaculate Hearts Sisters of Mary, and the Brown Brothers of the Holy Light, both suborders of the Holy Order of MANS, maintained a life similar to Catholic religious orders until their dissolution in the 1980s.<sup>334</sup> In May 1996, I visited a monastic foundation of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, in Denver, Colorado. A small number of monastics lived together, and provided hospitality to men in need.<sup>335</sup> A similar community is beginning in a former farmhouse in Auburn, Indiana, under the sponsorship of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America.<sup>336</sup>

Most independent religious orders are less traditional in structure and life. Candidates, whether clergy or lay, take vows related to the particular charism of the

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<sup>332</sup> One might note, for example, the martial arts ministry of “warrior nun” Trimelda C. McDaniels, “episcopal pastor” of Christ Charismatic Liturgical Church, <http://pastor-t.tripod.com/cclc/id3.html> (November 14, 2004). Also, Mildred Gulbenk of Nashville, Tennessee, is a priest of the Catholic Church of Antioch, Malabar Rite, whose ministry consists primarily in cleansing haunted houses and psychically disturbed locations. The rite most often used by Rev. Mildred is found in Kemp, 186-188.

<sup>333</sup> Michael W. Cuneo, 121-134.

<sup>334</sup> Lucas, 124-128.

<sup>335</sup> The jurisdiction maintains a website at: <http://www.rocia.org> (November 14, 2004). I am not aware of the current fate of the monastery, although one of its clergy, Schema Bishop Symeon Holdridge, appears to still be serving a parish in Denver, as of November 2004.

<sup>336</sup> This is the Skete at Crosswood Centre. More information can be found at <http://www.orthodoxcatholicchurch.org> (November 14, 2004). Archbishop Skip Carsten, who is overseeing the project, graciously discussed it with me by phone, several times in September and October, 2004.



order, and then share in ongoing communication and periodic retreats to strengthen their spiritual life. The members live out their charism in the world, and may not be immediately identifiable as part of a religious order. However, much as is the case with clerical ordination, the ordered vocation often forms a very significant aspect of personal spirituality, with potent friendships knitting the members together.

Some orders are primarily or exclusively founded for the members of one ecclesiastical jurisdiction, such as the Order of St Benedict within the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America.<sup>337</sup> Others seem to constitute a jurisdiction within themselves, such as Archbishop Bruce Simpson's Order of St John the Beloved.<sup>338</sup> There are also a growing number of orders with membership across multiple jurisdictions, sometimes including vowed regulars from larger, mainstream churches. One of the most prominent of such groups has been the Order of St. Michael, under Abbess-Bishop Katherine Kurtz, who was consecrated for the order in 1990. The OSM includes many independent sacramental Christians, but also Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and others. There are currently around 60 members. The order hosts an annual retreat, as well as other gatherings of its widely scattered membership. Abbess Katherine is a well-known author of fantasy novels, and she often celebrates a public eucharist at conventions of science fiction and fantasy fans. Members of the OSM take the Benedictine vows of stability (on the spiritual quest), conversion of life, and obedience (to God). They are joined in a common commitment to a life of prayer, the recitation of the Divine Office, and a monthly joint meditation, as well as communication through an email list and a quarterly newsletter. The order has become a non-threatening place for mainstream Christians to

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<sup>337</sup> See [http://www.cacina.org/OSB\\_Constitution.htm](http://www.cacina.org/OSB_Constitution.htm) (November 14, 2004) for more information. My thanks also to Bishop Carl Purvenas-Smith, OSB, for discussions of his church and order over the years.

<sup>338</sup> <http://www.osjtb.org> (November 14, 2004)

explore a connection to the independent movement (and, to some extent, to esotericism), and for persons who have rejected the Christian tradition to find a way back.<sup>339</sup> If nothing else, the OSM continues to foster fascinating conversations.

Another, smaller order which is similar to the OSM in many ways is the Ecumenical Order of Charity. Its membership, less than twenty at my most recent inquiry, is devoted to a liberal Christian vision, and a Gospel-inspired ideal of service. Founded in 1994, the Charitists trace their spiritual ancestry to Bishop Ulric Herford's attempts to build a monastic community in Britain in the early twentieth century. Much as with the OSM, the membership of the Charitists comes from a wide variety of churches, mostly independent, but also mainstream. All members take vows of simplicity of life, purity of heart, obedience, nonviolence, and universal citizenship. They strive to embody these commitments in their lives in the world, while maintaining fellowship via email and a newsletter, and meeting regularly for retreats.<sup>340</sup> As with the Michaelines, the Charitists provide a wonderful place where independent and mainstream Christians can meet and share their spiritual gifts. Such communities will likely play a critical role in the future relationship of the independent sacramental movement with the larger churches.

Independent sacramental Christians continue to evolve different forms of ministry, alone or together, in solitary vocations, traditional communities, ad hoc

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<sup>339</sup> I first encountered the Order of St. Michael in 1996, through a Roman Catholic member, Hannah Shapero. I am indebted to many Michaelines in the years since, but most especially Hannah Shapero, Katherine Kurtz, Frank Kautz, Alexandra Honigsberg, Abby Murphy, and the late Priscilla Armstrong. The OSM maintains a small website at <http://www.michaelines.org> (November 14, 2004).

<sup>340</sup> For more information, see the EOC website: <http://www.orderofcharity.org> (November 14, 2004). Some years ago, the former Director General of the Order, Brother Dale Robert, provided me with information on the order, including a copy of *The Founding Document* (N.p.: The Ecumenical Order of Charity, 1999), which includes the order's rule and profession ceremonies. For the vows, see VI.2, on page 9.

gatherings, and religious orders of various kinds. In almost all of these settings, access to ordination has been significantly expanded, so that most persons who want to have a role in sacramental celebration can eventually be ordained. Also, ordination has largely been de-professionalized, with very few deacons, priests, or bishops serving in full-time (or even part-time) paid ministry. These clergy have secular jobs and “ordinary” lives, which they often struggle to integrate with their priestly vocations and volunteer ministries. While these modes of ministry are quite different from those common in larger churches, they embody a flexible, easily portable version of Christianity, which holds promise for a future when the church is likely to be culturally disestablished and smaller.<sup>341</sup> Increased encounter between independent sacramental Christians and their sisters and brothers in the larger churches could lead to important exchange of ideas and experience.

#### *IV. Clergy Training*

With an alternative, volunteer priesthood, engaged in experimental ministries, how do independent sacramental churches approach the difficult issues around clergy training? In mainstream denominations, seminary training leads to a reasonably well-assured career path, and may be paid for by the church. An independent priest has no one to pay educational bills, and no expectation that ordination will lead to a paycheck. Thus, it is very difficult for an independent jurisdiction to require a traditional seminary education of its clergy. Of course, there are occasional seminary graduates who find their way to these alternative churches, but such persons often had, or were hoping to have, a

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<sup>341</sup> I owe the notion of the “portability” of the independent movement to Bishop Catherine Adams, retired, of Friends Catholic Communion. In most communities, there is no building, and often not even a bank account or corporation. One can simply take one’s chalice wherever it is needed. Or, as Rev. Michelle Davis of Terrell, Texas, is fond of saying, all you really need is a paper cup.

vocation in one of the larger churches, prior to seeking out independent sacramentalism. These persons are the exceptions.

Critics of the independent movement are usually quick to point to some unfortunate, eccentric, untrained priest whom they have met. There are undoubtedly such persons. I interviewed a deacon who had successfully sought ordination, with very little training, in order to continue his practice of New Age hands-on healing. He learned that his state government was considering restricting touch to certain professions, including the clergy, and sought ordination on this basis alone. I have spoken to three priests, and know of others, who were taken from confirmation through priesthood ordination in the course of a few days. Some received no advance preparation, and admit that they did not really understand what they were doing.<sup>342</sup> Clearly, problems can erupt from clergy who grasp neither their spiritual commitments nor their role.

Nonetheless, some clergy with very limited formal training are quite successful. One of the most capable priests I have met, who was pastorally active in a local community for over thirty years until his recent retirement, never received any substantive training. After beginning to attend a local independent parish, he noticed his name listed on the church schedule with the notation: “ordination as cleric”. He didn’t object, and he was indeed made a cleric on the noted day. He reports that every following ordination through priesthood happened in the same way – he simply noticed the event listed on the schedule, and it followed in due course. He learned his skills by carefully observing other clergy, and self-study.<sup>343</sup> This priest is not alone. Rev. Brian Robertson of Austin, Texas, is a very capable pastor who runs the Christ Path Ministry,

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<sup>342</sup> All clergy who discussed such matters with me requested anonymity.

<sup>343</sup> Out of concern for his jurisdiction’s reputation, this priest also requested anonymity.

which is analogous to independent sacramental groups, although less focused on the eucharist. Rev. Robertson was ordained through the infamous Universal Life Church, which offers instant ordination over the internet. He has publicly defended this choice in words which might easily be borrowed by independent priests with ordinations which are almost as “instant”:

If one believes that the ordination practices of ULC are some kind of joke or can have no real meaning, I invite you to consider a few names of those who progressed through more traditional channels of ordination: Jim Bakker, Billie James Hargis, Jimmy Swaggart, an unknown percentage of Roman Catholic priests, and on and on. Add to those the sellers of snake-oil and prayer cloths and splinters from the cross, toss in a little Inquisition, mix in a dash of Protestant burnings and beatings of Quakers and the occasional Jim Jones.

In short, it's naive to assume that the "normal" way of ordination -- school, testing and such -- is always superior and always produces, automatically, the highest caliber of ordained Ministers.<sup>344</sup>

Of course, there are larger, mostly traditionalist groups, who have the resources to run their own conventional seminaries. And there are rare jurisdictions which require their would-be clergy to enroll in such a course of study in one of the large, ecumenical seminaries. For example, the Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church requires a Masters in Divinity from an accredited seminary, as well as Clinical Pastoral Education.<sup>345</sup> An ACOC priest whom I interviewed, Rev. Alexandra Honigsberg, has a mostly private liturgical life, although she occasionally worships at nearby Roman and Episcopal parishes. Her primary public ministerial activity is conducting the occasional interfaith wedding with her husband, who is a rabbi. While one may admire Rev. Alexandra's dedication in earning her M.Div. at Union Theological Seminary, there are not many who

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<sup>344</sup> Rev. Brian Paul Robertson, “Why Universal Life Church?” <http://www.christpath.org/whyulc.shtml> (December 31, 2003).

<sup>345</sup> Email interview with Rev. Alexandra Honigsberg, February 29, 2004.

would be willing to go to such lengths, and incur such debt, with no prospect of paid ministry.

There are a number of alternative seminaries which have been created within the independent movement, of widely varying quality. All of these seminaries are primarily focused on distance learning, due to the widely scattered populations they serve. Some have occasional retreats, or special convocations with classes. Some of the seminaries, such the Liberal Catholic Institute of Studies, exist to serve only a particular jurisdiction.<sup>346</sup> Others may be sponsored by a particular church, but are open to persons from various groups. Good examples include the conservative St. Andrew's Theological College & Seminary, affiliated with the Episcopal Orthodox Church,<sup>347</sup> the somewhat more liberal St. Paul's College & Seminary (now including Sanctus Theological Institute), affiliated with the International Free Catholic Communion,<sup>348</sup> and the esoterically oriented Sophia Divinity School, sponsored by the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch.<sup>349</sup> Most such seminaries have reasonable fees, and are run by sincere persons. Few have any meaningful accreditation, and most do not seek such, as requirements are often unreasonable or unattainable for a distance-learning program in religion. For persons seeking a structured, lightly mentored approach to self-education, these institutions can be ideal. Of course, the wise student will carefully review the course descriptions, requirements, and faculty, to insure an appropriate level of serious

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<sup>346</sup> To the best of my knowledge, LCIS does not have a current website. Rev. Ed Abdill provided information on the institute.

<sup>347</sup> <http://www.divinityschool.org/> (November 14, 2004).

<sup>348</sup> <http://www.stpaulscollegeonline.org> (November 14, 2004).

<sup>349</sup> <http://www.churchofantioch.org/sophia.html> (November 16, 2004).

study and academic rigor.<sup>350</sup> Quality varies, and different programs will meet different students' needs.

By far the most common method of training clergy in the independent movement is personal mentorship with a bishop. Rarely, a senior priest or archpriest may take this role. However, the plentiful nature of bishops in the movement usually insures that one will be working directly with one's future ordaining prelate. Such work may take place in person, or long distance, perhaps with occasional visits or meetings at retreats.

Depending on the jurisdiction and the bishop, the training may be more or less structured and demanding. One anonymous respondent reported that his well-known bishop put him through very extensive training, for eight years, prior to ordaining him to the priesthood. The same bishop ordained another person, who was not even a formal candidate, literally "over lunch, as she felt she was spiritually ready."

Perhaps to avoid such disparate treatment and shifting standards, most jurisdictions have adopted some guidelines for training for ordination, in order to give reasonable expectations to both ordinands and mentors/bishops. A good example of such an approach is the training program of the Free Episcopal Church, prepared by Bishop Rob Angus Jones.<sup>351</sup> The formation process is set up to be individualized by the mentor working with each student, and the introductory material makes it clear that "no

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<sup>350</sup> There are diploma mills. I opened my mailbox one day to discover a Doctor of Divinity degree mailed to me from one such independent catholic institution, unasked for and unearned. Inquiry revealed that this was a common experience! Careful review of degree requirements and course syllabi, as well as conversation with faculty and students, will quickly reveal who is running an actual school, and who is simply issuing degrees – in my case, without even a check!

<sup>351</sup> Rob Angus Jones, "Pastoral Formation for Ordained Ministry: Free Episcopal Church," privately circulated paper, 2003. Bishop Jones retired from the FEC in 2004, and currently serves as a bishop in the New Methodist Conference. His successor in the FEC, Bishop Sherrie Albrecht, now administers the formation program.

degree or license is conferred for successful completion of the program.”<sup>352</sup> The mentors donate their time, and the students pay only for textbooks and expenses such as postage. While the program is individualized for each student, Bishop Jones sets out a number of areas (e.g., biblical studies, liturgical studies, etc) that must be addressed, either by past training or present study. A suggested list of readings and projects is provided for each area, as a guide to mentors and students. To date, the program appears to be working admirably well. While some of the less rigorous independent seminaries grant degrees which might be legitimately questioned, Jones’ course of study does not pretend to be other than it is. Such honesty is commendable, and helpful to the potential student.

The most extensive plan I have encountered for a mentoring program is found in a D.Min. thesis submitted in 1994 to St. Mary’s Seminary, an independent catholic seminary run by the New Order of Glastonbury.<sup>353</sup> In this thesis, Bishop Catherine Adams of the Friends Catholic Community Church provides a very broad ranging, flexible training program, designed to be administered by mentors. It is focused on six areas: Scripture, Theology & Ethics, History, Liturgical Ministry, Pastoral Ministry, and Spirituality. Adams also includes helpful tools such as a candidacy statement for prospective clergy, and detailed workbooks and projects for each of the areas of study. The Adams thesis continues to be used in Friends Catholic Communion (the primary successor body to Friends Catholic Community Church), although their polity does not bind any particular bishop to any requirements for clergy training. It has also been

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<sup>352</sup> Jones, “Pastoral Formation for Ordained Ministry,” 1.

<sup>353</sup> Adams, Rationale, Proposals, and Selected Resources for Methods Curricula Designed for Individualized Formation of Clergy for Friends Catholic Community Church.



widely shared in the liberal end of the movement, and has influenced training in a number of jurisdictions.<sup>354</sup>

One tool which Bishop Adams (now retired) once used, although she does not discuss it in detail in her thesis, is the traditional minor orders as a plan for clergy training. The minor orders (cleric, doorkeeper, reader, healer/exorcist, acolyte, and subdeacon) have fallen into disuse in most of the larger churches, but are still quite common in the independent movement. Esoteric churches often correlate them with an inner developmental sequence – e.g., cleric with the physical body, doorkeeper with the emotions, reader with the mind, and so on.<sup>355</sup> Charles Leadbeater, one of the founding bishops of the Liberal Catholic Church writes:

It will be seen that with us the minor Orders represent a series of definite opportunities for spiritual progress. A common custom in later centuries has been to confer them all on the same day; but one can see that they might effectively be separated by periods of some months, during which the candidate might make a determined effort towards the unfoldment of the characteristics required by each stage, and might be assisted therein by selected meditations, by special advice, or by a course of classes or lectures. The admission into one of these Orders cannot of course confer the qualities assigned to it; but the Bishop, as he lays his hand on the head of the ordinand, pours into him a current of force calculated to stimulate their growth, and to provide a reservoir of energy upon which the recipient can draw for that purpose.<sup>356</sup>

Other churches use the minor ordinations to mark the completion of stages of priesthood training. For example, one would complete required Scripture study prior to

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<sup>354</sup> I have personally made use of it, and know that it has been read (and used, to some extent) by a large number of others, including, for example, bishops Sharon Hart, Rob Jones, Johnny Wesch, and Tony Hash.

<sup>355</sup> See, for instance, the version of the minor orders used in The Liberal Catholic Church. The Liturgy according to the Use of the Liberal Catholic Church, 358-380. The LCC version of the minor orders has been extremely influential within the independent movement.

<sup>356</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments. (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1988), 340-241.

the reader/lector ordination, and psychological study prior to healer/exorcist.<sup>357</sup> The minor ordinations provide points of community affirmation and blessing, as the candidate gains competence in different facets of priestly service. It is common for many persons who are not potential candidates for the priesthood to receive some or all of the minor ordinations, thus sharing to some degree in the mystery of holy orders.

Mentoring will likely continue to be the primary means of clergy training in the independent sacramental movement, due in part to the extremely flexible, anarchic nature of the movement, which works against the creation of formalized seminary programs. Of course the quality of such training will vary radically, according to the capability of the mentor. Many independent sacramental seminary programs might be more accurately described as mentoring programs, although often more structured, and with a degree granted upon completion.

The future of clergy training in this movement, at least in North America, almost certainly will rest with such mentoring programs and alternative seminaries. We considered above the many modes of ministry within the independent movement, which are often quite different from the work of mainstream clergy. For example, a priest with a vocation to solitary, intercessory celebration of the eucharist will never have to

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<sup>357</sup> I have observed this use of the minor orders in the Friends Catholic Community Church, United American Catholic Church, Contemporary Catholic Church, New Order of Glastonbury, and numerous other jurisdictions. The Contemporary Catholic Church has an extensive training program, organized according to the minor orders, on the website of the Beloved Disciple Seminary: <http://www.beloved-disciple.org/> (December 31, 2004). The orders listed above are those most commonly used in “western” jurisdictions. Churches with a more eastern liturgical orientation may use a slightly different set of minor ordinations, but frequently practice a similar system. Other groups, such as the Universal Gnostic Church, have experimented with yet other versions of the minor orders. See <http://universalignostic.com/orders/candidate.htm> (December 16, 2004) for the UGC usage of Keeper, Bearer, Reader, Speaker, and Server. An interesting example of the use of the minor orders is found in the story of Maxine Hanks, a feminist Mormon theologian excommunicated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who currently serves in the minor order of exorcist in the Ecclesia Gnostica of Stephan Hoeller. Hanks sees the office of exorcist as “my spiritual work now.” Maxine Hanks, “Exile and Return: From Gnostic Mormon to Mormon Gnostic,” *Sunstone*, Issue 130 (December 2003), 21-24.

administer parish finances, preach regular sermons, and so on. Thus, many jurisdictions adjust training requirements according to individual vocation. I also know of many bishops who give faculties to their clergy only for those ministries for which they are trained. Thus, a priest with little training in psychology or pastoral care would not be given faculties to hear confessions or counsel others. Such a situation, with different clergy given different levels of responsibility, can be confusing and pastorally difficult to manage. Nonetheless, a substantial expansion of ordination all but necessitates these distinctions.

#### *V. Conclusion*

Leadership in the independent sacramental movement is almost exclusively exercised by the clergy, but the ranks of the clergy have been radically opened to include virtually anyone who discerns a calling to ordination. The priesthood, and even the episcopate, are no longer for the few. Many jurisdictions have also extended ordination to persons who have been traditionally excluded, for a variety of reasons. Most independent clergy are non-professional volunteers who exercise a wide variety of ministries, ranging from traditional parishes to private, hidden celebration of the eucharist. Given the freelance nature of much independent sacramental ministry, and the significant differences from the duties of most mainstream clergy, very few independent clergy are likely to seek training in a traditional seminary. While there are a number of clergy who have been ordained with essentially no training, most clergy do receive reasonable preparation through alternative seminary programs, or personal mentoring. The further development of such training is an important challenge for independent sacramental Christians in North America today.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

The difficulty of coming to broad, generalizing conclusions regarding independent sacramental Christianity should be apparent by now. The movement resists easy definition and slips from under tidy boundaries. When I asked interviewees about their definitions of this form of church, the answers often boiled down to “you know it when you see it.”

Independent sacramentalism arose from many disparate currents. There were small schisms, and missions that lost touch with the mother church, originating in both Eastern and Western liturgical churches. There were also new priesthoods which looked very similar to the old one, but without an historical connection. Thrown together onto the sidelines of the larger churches, and questing for some sort of spiritual and/or historical validity, these groups began to intermingle. The crossbreeding of ecclesiastical lineage has reached such a point today that most independent clergy share most or all of their heritage in common. However, this common lineage has not led to any sort of jurisdictional unity. The freedom to continually create new forms of sacramental Christianity, in small groups and solitary practice, is as close to an essential characteristic of the movement as one can find. While there has been increased collegial cooperation in recent years, the chance of any sizeable denomination emerging seems remote, and to many, undesirable.

Independent churches, orders, and groups are often home to those who have felt themselves excluded from the church, or at least from ordained leadership in the church. Examples include women, persons of different sexualities, and person with theologies

(e.g., esotericism, feminism) that are not accepted by the leadership of their original denominations. Such persons often take a high degree of ownership of their new ecclesial home, and frequently seek ordination. The entire existence of the church is centered around providing the sacraments, especially the eucharist. As most communities are tiny, they often do not have the resources or inclination to engage in many of the social programs and other activities found in larger churches. One comes to an independent church, or seeks ordination as a solitary priest, in order to deepen one's spiritual life through sharing in the eucharist.

Liturgy reflects the tremendous diversity of the movement, from extreme traditionalism (even when conjoined with a liberal theology), to radical experimentation. The only constant is the eucharist celebrated by a mediatory priesthood. Theology in these communities is likewise varied, from those who simply accept a standard Roman Catholic or Anglican theological perspective, with a few adjustments, to those who charge happily across the boundaries of anything that might be defined as Christianity. Theological reflection is not usually well-developed in the independent movement, although that is slowly changing. As independent clergy are most often volunteers with secular jobs, and little formal theological training, they lack both the time and the tools helpful to the development of a fully imagined theology.

The large majority of participants in the independent movement are ordained to some level of ministry, in minor or major orders. Ordination policies are as varied as theology and liturgy, but an interested and dedicated person is almost certain to find an independent church which will ordain him or her. Gender, marital status, sexuality, and an array of other circumstances in life no longer bar the way. With such opening,

training for ordination has become a difficult issue. Conventional seminary education is often too expensive and impractical for persons who cannot leave their secular jobs and uproot their lives, for a degree which will not lead them towards paid employment. Some independent groups have created alternative seminaries, often based on distance learning. However, the majority rely upon some time of mentoring process in which the bishop directly trains the ordinand. There are also persons who are ordained with little or no training, raising further difficult questions about the nature of ministry in some of these groups. One independent bishop joked that the logical conclusion of such lack of training would be to administer episcopal consecration to infants, immediately following baptism! Nonetheless, some untrained clergy have become gifted pastors.

The independent sacramental movement in the United States is a vast and varied phenomenon. Despite all their differences, these groups definitely form a family, even if a squabbling one. The movement at its best is boiling pot of creative ideas, eccentric notions, inspired experiment, and personal idiosyncrasies. People are boldly trying out modes of church life, which are unavailable, disapproved, or simply not imagined in the mainstream. Some of these experiments will surely fade away with their originators. But others hold promise for new, flexible, portable varieties of sacramental Christianity, suitable to a rapidly changing culture and a shrinking, disestablished church. With patience and attention, some of these tiny seeds may grow into a mustard bush or two.

## Author's Appendix

I cannot write about the independent sacramental movement without revealing some of my own history and involvement, which inevitably colors my perspective. With this information in hand, the reader is better equipped to identify my biases, and understand the context from within which I write.

I grew up in southern Kentucky and middle Tennessee in a white, middle-class, religious Southern Baptist family. To my parents' dismay, I was never baptized, although I was fascinated with religion. From an early age, I had an interest in the liturgical, sacramental churches, although I had very little exposure to these traditions. While in high school in the early to mid-1980s, I discovered some independent jurisdictions through the various editions of The Handbook of Denominations in our local library.<sup>358</sup> I wrote letters to several of them, and duly received packages of propaganda in the mail. I struck up an especially intense correspondence with Archbishop Robert Zaborowski of the Mariavite Old Catholic Church in Wyandotte, Michigan, outside Detroit. Archbishop Zaborowski has often been criticized, understandably, due to questions about his ordination lineage, and rather fantastic claims about the membership of his church.<sup>359</sup> Nonetheless, he was a true pastor to me at a difficult time in my life. I was interested in joining his church, but I had no access to any local clergy or parish. To this day, the archbishop and I have never met in person.

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<sup>358</sup> Frank Spencer Mead, The Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985).

<sup>359</sup> For more on questions around Zaborowski, see Gary Ward, Bertil Persson, and Alan Bain, eds. Independent Bishops: An International Directory, (Detroit, MI: Apogee Books, 1990), 443-444.

Beginning in 1987, I attended a Roman Catholic college, Fordham University in the Bronx, New York. While there, I was baptized and confirmed in the Roman Church, and began the formal study of theology, with some idea of pursuing a priestly or monastic vocation. Despite my eager convert's enthusiasm about the Roman Church, I quickly acquired more contact with the independent movement. The student paper ran a photograph of the sign for St. Michael's Liberal Catholic Church in Manhattan, with a somewhat amazed comment about the conjunction of the words "liberal" and "catholic". I had to see this for myself, so I took the D train into the city on a cold February morning in the late 1980s. At the time, St. Michael's had a small chapel on the second floor of the Theosophical Society building on East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. It was Candlemas. There were a number of priests in purple cassocks (which the LCC uses for all clergy) and rich gold and white vestments, with incense, and chanting, and a procession with the sacrament displayed in a radiant monstrance. On Candlemas, the LCC celebrates the eucharist before the exposed sacrament. I was awed by the quirky beauty and genuine reverence, and happily received communion, blithely disobeying Roman canon law. It was the first of many visits.

In New York, I also discovered other, similar communities. On the West Side, a small brownstone housed the New York congregation of the Christian Community, inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner. The small chapel, centered upon a luminous painting of the Risen Christ, reverberated with the firm, German-accented intonation of the priest. Further south was the remnant of the old Catholic Apostolic (Irvingite) congregation, long without clergy. Aging underdeacons celebrated morning prayer for a dwindling congregation, until the building was finally sold to the Lutherans for one



dollar. A fellow student introduced me to some former clergy and members of the Church of the Beloved Disciple, a primarily gay independent parish in Greenwich Village, which had recently disbanded. I also met a number of other priests from several jurisdictions. I found it all very curious, but kept my connection to an arm's remove.

In 1991, I returned to Nashville, Tennessee to begin graduate studies in the history of Christian thought at Vanderbilt University. At the time, I was still exploring the possibility of a religious vocation within the Roman Church. Nonetheless, I was increasingly convinced that I would finally be unable to reconcile some of my convictions (e.g., regarding women's ordination, homosexuality, and papal infallibility) with the official teaching of the Roman magisterium. I began to ponder the possibility of affiliating with an independent jurisdiction. I visited several independent communities in middle Tennessee. Many were warm and pleasant, but all were very conservative. I wrote to Lawrence Smith, the Regionary Bishop of the United States for the Liberal Catholic Church. He replied that he would be unable to help me, unless I lived near an LCC parish, in which I could regularly participate. The nearest parish was hundreds of miles away.

Through research in Vanderbilt's library, I found addresses for some independent churches, and began to write to them. I corresponded with, and spoke to quite a number of clergy. Around the same time, I discovered the internet, which had quickly become a very important factor in communication among independent sacramental Christians. The Fellowship of Independent Catholic and Orthodox Bishops (FICOB), sponsored by the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Malabar Rite, maintained a particularly helpful website (now defunct), with contact information for a wide range of bishops. Through

these conversations, I began to feel a real kinship with the independent communities. These were my people, even if more than a bit eccentric!

Around 1995, through FICOB, I came into contact with Friends Catholic Community Church, a relatively new jurisdiction which was attempting to combine a Quaker style of governance through communal discernment with Catholic sacramental life. I was fascinated, and began an extended correspondence with the founding bishop, Catherine Adams, as well as the vocation director, Deacon Gerry O’Sullivan. FCCC had a local community in Roanoke, Virginia, several hours away, and I began to make regular visits. I undertook a program of mentored study with Bishop Catherine, in addition to my graduate studies at Vanderbilt. I was eventually ordained to the minor orders, and then to the transitional diaconate. In November 1996, in Roanoke, I was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Catherine, assisted by Bishop Tony Hash. Back in Nashville, I took part in some joint community-building efforts with Rev. Linda Lewis, a priest of the Catholic Church of the Americas.

These efforts in Nashville did not last long, as I signed up for a year of voluntary service work which took me back to New York City in early 1997. I have been continuously active in the independent movement, since joining Friends Catholic Community Church in 1995. I have served in community and in solitude. I have been a member of three jurisdictions – FCCC (later known as Friends Catholic Communion), the American Catholic Community Church (later known as Grace Catholic Church), and the Independent Catholic Christian Church. I was consecrated in 1998 by Bishops Catherine Adams, Grace Franco, Lawrence Terry, and John-Noel Murray, for my own episcopate, with no larger jurisdiction. Like most independent bishops, I have also been

subconditionally consecrated a number of times since. I presently serve within the Independent Catholic Christian Church, with pastoral responsibility for a small number of clergy and lay members spread over five states, as well as for an irregular local community in Nashville.

In the independent movement today, there are three great debates: women's ordination; the full participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons in the church; and the place of interfaith and esoteric spiritualities. The use or disuse of traditional creeds is also hotly argued. I have been a vocal advocate for the ordination of women and persons of different sexual identities, and for same-sex marriage. I support interfaith and esoteric pursuits, as long as such spiritual interests remain within the bounds of the ancient creeds, to which I am committed. I have many friends within the movement who vehemently disagree with me on one or more of these points. In this dissertation, as in life, I strive to be fair and respectful to all parties in these debates. However, it seems less than honest to fail to acknowledge where I stand in these arguments.

While my personal involvement of almost twenty years colors my presentation of the independent sacramental movement, it has also made possible a level of access that would be rare, if not impossible, for an outsider. Most participants in these communities are accustomed to being mocked, or at least dismissed as "not real" or "playing church." Some of the unfortunate, exaggerated claims of independent bishops, and even the oft derided inordinate fondness for the trappings of liturgy, may be nothing more than attempts to compensate, in the face of relentless criticism. Someone who is tarred with the same brush will always find a less defensive welcome in these circles.

No author ever writes without context, without a location from which she or he views the landscape. I both tell the story of this odd tribe of Christians, and belong to it. It remains for the reader to judge to what extent my history and connections have both enabled and distorted an accurate portrayal of the independent sacramental movement.

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## Abstract

### The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement: A National Study of its Liturgy, Doctrine, and Leadership

John Paul Plummer

This study examines the growing independent sacramental movement in the contemporary United States. This movement consists in a broad range of communities which share a number of characteristics in common: small communities and/or solitary clergy; experimentation in theology and liturgy; mostly unpaid clergy; ordination available to a large percentage of the membership; a sacramental and eucharistic spirituality, with a mediatory priesthood, in most cases preserving the historic episcopate. These groups, orders, and churches have a close relationship, and some common ancestry, with small traditionalist bodies, which seek to return to an earlier era of ecclesiastical life. Some consideration is given to these traditionalist churches, primarily in regard to their relationship to the more experimental groups which are not the focus of the dissertation. Reference is made to the very limited academic literature, but the study relies primarily on literature and ephemera produced by the groups, orders, and churches, as well as interviews and site visits of representative communities.

Examination of the historical background of the independent movement indicates a wide range of sources, from both western and eastern liturgical churches, as well as a number of sui generis priesthods with significant structural similarities. These streams of ecclesial life have intermingled in the movement, with most groups sharing a complex

heritage, from which they choose the aspects that will influence their contemporary practice. Liturgical life forms the heart of these churches, which often sponsor no activity beyond eucharistic celebration. While the historical shape of the liturgy has largely been preserved, a great degree of experimentation within this form can be found, including liturgies with a feminist, gay, and/or esoteric focus, and those which incorporate material from other christian and non-christian traditions. The same experimental freedom is found in the realm of theology, although theological reflection is generally less developed than liturgy in these communities. Key theological issues include the placement of independent communities within sacred time, the breath of the church's inclusivity, and the uniquely intense focus on sacramental and priestly matters. This focus comes to a point over issues of leadership and ordination, which are handled in a manner radically distinct from the larger churches. Ordination is often open to a very high percentage of persons involved in these groups, and the desire for ordination often draws persons who have been excluded from public ministry in mainstream churches. These clergy are most often trained through some kind of mentorship program, although a small number pursue a traditional seminary education, and others have no preparation for ordination. Independent clergy often serve in unconventional ministries and very small settings. A significant number primarily celebrate the eucharist in solitude.

Despite challenges, questions, and unhealthy behavior on the part of some clergy, the independent sacramental movement continues to provide an arena for experimentation and cross-pollination which would be much more difficult within the larger churches. There is currently an anarchic diversity of independent groups in the United States. Some of these experiments hold promise for new, flexible, portable

version of sacramental Christianity, suitable to a rapidly changing culture, and a shrinking, disestablished church. Out of this wide array of possibilities, some will likely survive, and share their gifts with the larger Christian tradition.

## Vita Auctoris

### John Paul Plummer

John Plummer was born in Bowling Green, Kentucky on December 25, 1968. He attended Fordham University (B.A., philosophy and theology, 1991), and Vanderbilt University (M.A., historical theology, 1996). He left a Ph.D. program in historical theology at Vanderbilt in 1997, all but dissertation, for a year in Mennonite Voluntary Service, followed by several years of working with persons seeking political asylum. He returned to graduate school through the All-But-Dissertation Degree Completion Program at the Graduate Theological Foundation in 2003. His publications include “The Fellowship of the Mystery: The Category of Faith in Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in James O. Duke and Anthony L. Dunnivant, eds., Christian Faith Seeking Historical Understanding (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), and “The Philosopher and the Psychiatrist: Ken Wilber Meets Viktor Frankl,” International Forum of Logotherapy (Spring 2005).

He is ordained in the Independent Catholic Christian Church, and is a vowed regular of the Order of Saint Michael. In addition to unpaid ministerial service, he works as a contracts analyst at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He lives with his family in Nashville, Tennessee.