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Clerical Marriage and Territorial Reformation in Ernestine Saxony and the Diocese of Merseburg in 1522–1524*

By Marjorie Elisabeth Plummer

On December 10, 1524, Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony wrote his brother Duke John that he had received yet another letter from Adolf, bishop of Merseburg, concerning the excommunication and banishment of five married priests. Adolf had reminded Frederick that imperial policy mandated that territorial princes help bishops enforce religious conformity, which he now requested of Frederick because the priests' parishes were located near Grimma in Ernestine Saxony and the priests steadfastly refused to recognize his authority.¹ Frederick warned his brother that this, the most recent of many similar requests, should be treated as a carefully constructed trap, noting that "he [Adolf] would like us to give an inappropriate answer so that he has reason to show this to the emperor, imperial council [*Reichsregiment*], and so on, which we have avoided diligently until now." Frederick outlined their options: either to remain by their previous response that the cases needed further investigation or to give some other unified statement.² In the end they did neither, choosing silence instead. This final document in the complex, often duplicitous, negotiations between the bishop of Merseburg and the elector of Saxony over the punishment of married clergy illustrates that clerical marriage, even in rural parishes and small territorial towns, proved to be of interest not only to bishops and dukes, but also ultimately to emperor and pope. It

* Abbreviations: LHASA, MD: Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt Magdeburg – ThHStAW: Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, Ernestinisches Gesamtarchiv – SächHStA Dresden: Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden – StadtAK: Stadtarchiv Konstanz – StAA: Staatsarchiv Augsburg – StAB: Staatsarchiv Bamberg – Gess: Felician Gess, *Akten und Briefe zur Kirchenpolitik Herzog Georgs von Sachsen. Nachdruck der Ausgabe 1905 edition*, vol. I, 1517–1524, Cologne 1985 – Planitz: Hans von der Planitz, *Bericht aus dem Reichsregiment in Nürnberg, 1521–1523*, Hildesheim 1979 – Walch: Johann Georg Walch (ed.): *Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften*, St. Louis 1880–1910. I would like to thank the Herzog August Bibliothek for generous financial and institutional support to complete the research for this article during 2002–2003.

1. Karlheinz Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Gütersloh 1970, pp. 13–33; and Karlheinz Blaschke, Walther Haupt, und Heinz Wiessner, *Die Kirchenorganisation in den Bistümern Meissen, Merseburg und Naumburg um 1500*, Weimar 1969, pp. 33–36.

2. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 106^{r-v}, Frederick to John, December 10, 1524.

also shows that parish clergy in those very same towns were able to push clerical marriage, a key sign of evangelical allegiance, into the dialogue of their ecclesiastical and territorial leaders, forcing them to confront the reform movement. The developing Reformation movement thus began to take shape in the intricate interaction between imperial officials, bishops, territorial princes and local clergy played out in rural and urban communities.

Until the late 1520s, most evangelical authorities – territorial princes, city councils, and Lutheran theologians – were not completely comfortable advocating marriage as a norm for evangelical clergy, although they defended clergy who took this step.³ Nonetheless, clerical marriage, as advocated by the parish clergy themselves, emerged by 1525 as an unequivocal sign of clerical adherence to the Lutheran reform movement. The richly documented cases of Johann Stumpf, pastor of the village of Schönbach near Colditz, and Franz Klotzsch, pastor of the village of Grossbuch near Grimma, show how this reform “from below,” initiated by a community comprised of rural, seemingly unimportant, clergy and their parishioners, could succeed despite official opposition. It also demonstrates how an organically emerging strategy led to the creation of a cohesive stance on clerical marriage that was eventually adopted by the evangelical leaders. The experiences of Stumpf and Klotzsch provide us with a wonderful case study of the Reformation process, emerging simultaneously “from above” and “from below,” illustrating how those processes could alternately exhibit independent actions at odds, or at least not in collaboration, with one another; and at others, cooperating fully, intertwined and indistinguishable in their mutual influence. Reformation, at least on the issue of priestly marriage, was not a unilateral process.

Johann Stumpf and Franz Klotzsch were not the first priests to marry during the Reformation or even the most celebrated cases. In fact, it is because they were not that they are interesting. Unlike previous marriages of individual priests closely associated with Martin Luther and Andreas Karlstadt, these marriages occurred away from Wittenberg, and, while Stumpf was a former student, Klotzsch was not. These two men appear isolated from the centers of the reform movement, and their published testimony seemingly of little historical or theological value.⁴ Yet their marriages occupied the atten-

3. Marjorie Plummer, “Reforming the Family: Marriage, Gender and the Lutheran Household in Early Modern Germany, 1500–1620” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996), pp. 30–100.

4. Karlheinz Blaschke, *Historisches Ortsverzeichnis von Sachsen*, part 2, *Nordwestsachsen*, Leipzig 1957, pp. 53–54, 58 and 69.

tion of the dukes of Saxony and the bishop of Merseburg for well over two years, generating a huge cache of documents.⁵ These exchanges, when viewed against the backdrop of developing imperial and papal policy, demonstrate how difficult it proved to enforce such policies as each side cultivated a public position on jurisdiction over clerical discipline. In this struggle for authority, a theological debate spilled over into the practical world of episcopal and secular efforts to maintain social order and clerical moral discipline. Priestly marriage became a convenient forum for debating larger issues of jurisdictional conflicts and religious reform. At the same time, this densely documented case allows for a study of how individual confessional stances, personal preferences, political expediency, and communal concerns intertwined to produce what became the official evangelical position on clerical marriage. Parish clergy proved to be as significant, if not more so, than either political leaders or Wittenberg theologians in pushing the issue of clerical marriage into public discourse and in shaping that very discourse.

Priestly marriage first became a pressing concern for episcopal and territorial leaders in Saxony by the marriages of former Wittenberg students Bartholomäus Bernhardi, Jacob Seidler, and Balthasar Zeiger in early 1521.⁶ Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz stated from the outset that Bernhardi, a provost in Kemberg, near Wittenberg, and later the other two priests, fell under his jurisdiction, that he would not tolerate clerical marriage, and that he intended to hinder future marriages by swift, decisive action.⁷ Bernhardi, Seidler, and Zeiger faced arrest and imprisonment, considerable pressure to set aside their

5. Gottfried Immanuel Grundig and Johann Friedrich Klotzsch (eds.): *Sammlung vermischter Nachrichten zur sächsischen Geschichte*, vol. 2., Chemnitz 1768, pp. 280–353; and vol. 4, 1770, pp. 282–352; Carl Eduard Förstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirchen-Reformation*, Hamburg 1842; reprinted Hildesheim 1976, pp. 83–113; Alfred Fraustadt, *Die Einführung der Reformation in Hochstift Merseburg*, Leipzig 1843, pp. 31–61; Karl Pallas, “Die Versuche des Bischofs Adolf von Merseburg, den kirchlichen Neuerungen innerhalb seiner Diözese entgegenzutreten, und das Verhalten des Kurfürsten Friedrichs d. W. und seines Bruders Herzogs Johann dazu, 1522–1525,” in: *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Kirchengeschichte der Provinz Sachsen* 23 (1927), pp. 1–54. Since then any mention of the events from 1522 to 1524 – and there has been little – can be traced back to these works, none of which focused on clerical marriage.

6. Ulrich Bubenheimer, “Streit um das Bischofsamt in der Wittenberger Reformation 1521/22: Von der Auseinandersetzung mit den Bischöfen um Priesterehen und den Ablass in Halle zum Modell des evangelischen Gemeindebischofs,” in: *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 104 (1987), pp. 155–198.

7. LHASA, MD, Rep. A1, Nr. 492, fol. 2^r–3^v.

wives, loss of their positions, banishment, and even execution. Why then did Albrecht fail to punish these three men and stop further marriages? A significant part of the answer is found in the married priests' recalcitrance and willingness to defy authority. Bernhardi made this unflinching determination evident when he argued that his conscience allowed no other option than marriage; if necessary, he would rather suffer temporal hardship than eternal damnation.⁸ Even where Seidler and Zeiger wavered in their resolve by separating from their wives briefly,⁹ none of the three returned to a celibate life.¹⁰ Only Bernhardi managed to retain his position. This outcome had a great deal to do with how local, secular and ecclesiastical, rather than imperial or papal, officials reacted.¹¹ Unlike his colleagues, Bernhardi was well defended against Albrecht's legal proceedings because of his close association with the Wittenberg circle, the nominal protection of Frederick the Wise,¹² and the consent of his congregation.¹³ These complex interactions between priest and village, priest and bishop, and bishop and territorial ruler use recognizable arguments, patterns, and policies that characterized how clerical marriage later played out in other areas. Nonetheless, Zeiger, Bernhardi, and Seidler faced authorities individually as each struggled to defend his marriage and retain his position. No cohesive pattern of action prevails until the marriages in the diocese of Merseburg.

The cases of Stumpf and Klotzsch, by contrast, display the evolution from individual acts of defiance in Wittenberg in 1521 to a widespread clerical movement of open resistance to imperial and papal law. Here we can begin to talk about a Reformation movement emerging organically without clear leadership "from above" in the way that Merseburg clergy developed a cohesive model of behavior based on their "conscience" outside of official channels. These events exemplify how personal conviction more than external organization helped drive the reform process in Merseburg. Franz Lau's thesis of "wild growth" (*Wildwuchs*) is here a more appropriate assessment than Bernd

8. Planitz, Anhang #2, Albrecht to Frederick, August 23, 1521, p. 595, n. 1.

9. SächHStA Dresden, Geheimer Rat, Loc. 10300/1, fol. 110^v; and LHASA, MD, Rep. A13, Nr. 837, fol. 7^r-8^v.

10. LHASA, MD, Rep. A13, Nr. 837, fol. 4^v, Albrecht to Hoyer, February 19, 1522; and SächHStA Dresden, Geheimer Rat, Loc. 10300/1, fol. 95^r-96^v.

11. Bubenheimer, "Streit" (n. 6), pp. 165-166, 172 and 191.

12. LHASA, MD Rep. A1, Nr. 492, fol. 4^r-6^v, Frederick to Albrecht, August 9, 1521.

13. Bubenheimer, "Streit" (n. 6), pp. 170-190.

Moeller's presentation of a unified reform process.¹⁴ Even more intriguing for understanding multiple courses of reform, these rural priests published one of the earliest popular pamphlets on clerical marriage in 1523, outlining their testimony before Adolf. In so doing, they pushed interest in their case beyond the borders of their parishes or even the diocese.¹⁵ The personal examples of Stumpf and Klotzsch motivated nearby priests to marry and helped secure communal support of married clergy. By 1524, Adolf discovered all the priests unified in their unwillingness to comply with his repeated demands to leave their wives and to recognize his authority.

When analyzed as a distinctive instance of reform, the cases of Stumpf and Klotzsch exhibit how an emerging local strategy developed by a community comprised of clergy and their parishioners, rather than by either political leaders or theologians, led to the creation of a collective set of reform ideas. The highly personal decision of the priests to marry, and the subsequent support of their parishioners, forced the bishop of Merseburg and the elector of Saxony to act, even when they did not wish to do so. These rural priests do not fit the traditional model of an urban Reformation, yet they created a regional clerical community with surprisingly strong interconnectedness.¹⁶ Stumpf and

14. Susan Karant-Nunn, "What Was Preached in German Cities in the Early Years of the Reformation? *Wildwuchs* versus Lutheran Unity," in Philip Bebb and Sherrin Marshall (eds.): *The Process of Change in Early Modern Europe*, Athens, OH, 1988, pp. 81–82.

15. Johann Stumpf, *Handlung des Bischoffs von Merßburg, mit den zweyen Pfarhern von Schonbach vnnd Büch, geschehen am Dingstag nach Bartholomei. Anno. M. D. Xxiiij* published in Erfurt, Zwickau and, most notably, Nuremberg in 1523. Stephen Buckwalter incorrectly claims that these marriages did not lead to a publication, thereby missing an important connection in how propaganda and advocacy of priestly marriage became connected. Buckwalter, *Die Priesterehe in Flugschriften der frühen Reformation*, Gütersloh 1998, p. 97, n. 102.

16. Peter Blickle, "Eidgenossenschaften in reformatorischer Absicht. Oder: Wie begründet ist die Kritik an der 'Gemeindereformation'?" in Hans R. Guggisberg and Gottfried G. Krodel (ed.): *Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa: Interpretationen und Debatten*, Gütersloh 1993, pp. 171–172. Despite the beginnings of the Reformation in territorial Saxony, few historians have focused on how this movement developed and gained popularity in largely rural territories and towns. Some exceptions include C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1528–1603*, Cambridge 1996; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernestine Countryside*, Philadelphia 1979; and Thomas Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge 1989.

Klotzsch used interactions with episcopal and territorial authorities following their marriages to establish a concrete pattern of simultaneous efforts of communal engagement and of public defiance of secular and ecclesiastical policies within their region. This process was repeated throughout the Holy Roman Empire in the mid-1520s, as a means of publicizing the reform movement.¹⁷

I.

If we look at the cases of Stumpf and Klotzsch from the perspective of a Reformation “from above,” certainly a number of authorities – bishops, territorial princes, imperial councils, papal legates, city councils – were involved from the outset in shaping how the spread of clerical marriage was halted or, conversely, how it was institutionalized into local policy.¹⁸ Clerical marriages in 1521 prompted calls for promulgation of a protocol to be followed to deter further marriages, even as new clerical marriages kept the issue alive. Significantly, the first push for a unified imperial and ecclesiastical policy came not from Archbishop Albrecht, but from George, duke of Albertine Saxony, in January 1522. Appearing before the imperial council, George denounced the chaos resulting from “great heresy” in the diocese of Meissen, located in his territory, listing among the problems, monks and priests who “were bold enough to take wives ... contrary to old customs.”¹⁹ George hinted that those, like his cousin Frederick, who blocked episcopal efforts to confront clerical disobedience contributed to the escalation of clerical marriage. Soon, the imperial council issued a provisional policy requesting bishops to deal swiftly with all clergy guilty of “abuses,” including marriage, while it had only infected “relatively few places” and involved “few people.”²⁰ The mandate stated that this could be “easily” done using a two-fold policy according to which pastors read this document to their congregations from the pulpit and

17. Berndt Hamm, “Reformation ‘From Below’ and Reformation ‘From Above’.” On the Problem of the Historical Classifications of the Reformation,” in Robert J. Bast (ed.): *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety. Essays by Berndt Hamm*, Leiden 2004, pp. 217–223.

18. Strasbourg between 1523 and 1525 is an excellent case study of this process in an urban setting. See, for instance, Miriam Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change*, New Haven 1967, pp. 132–138.

19. Planitz, Nr. 29, pp. 67–69.

20. SächsHStA Dresden, Geheimer Rat, Loc. 10300/1, Ferdinand to George, January 20, 1522, fol. 148–151.

ecclesiastical leaders "severely punished" all transgressors. He implied that this was solely a discipline issue for ecclesiastical authorities.²¹

This topic potentially reopened long-standing conflicts over ecclesiastical jurisdiction and clerical immunity. Marriage, even more than clerical sexual misconduct, crossed jurisdictional lines by involving the laity.²² In early 1523, the imperial council (*Reichsregiment*) solicited advice from various factions regarding formulation of a comprehensive imperial position on religious questions, including punishment of married priests. Responses from the imperial estates (*Reichsstände*) indicated that papal representatives considered clerical marriage as irresolvable by civil law because "secular law contains no punishment" for such a transgression. The imperial estates, in contrast, endorsed punishments found in canon law but advised that existing temporal laws be accepted as well.²³ Francesco Chierigati, papal nuncio, disagreed, arguing that although the breach of celibacy might occur in the physical territory of secular rulers, this fact did not convey legal authority over a priest.²⁴ The imperial mandate issued on March 6, 1523, resolved this dispute along the lines outlined by Chierigati, stating that all priests who married forfeited their clerical rights, privileges, benefices, and goods, as instructed in "ecclesiastical law," and that their ecclesiastical superiors were to carry out this punishment.²⁵ Anyone failing to assist ecclesiastical authorities in upholding the mandate now stood in direct violation of ecclesiastical and imperial law.²⁶ Thus, imperial authorities declared priestly marriage to be an ecclesiastical matter.

What remained unclear was how various secular leaders, congregations, and communities would react to this mandate. Subtle shifts within attitudes of secular leaders towards reformed teachings complicated the matter as renewed discussions of clerical misconduct found in the publications and sermons of reformers focused these same unresolved conflicts over jurisdiction. Many felt that marriage matters in general, and growing disputes over clerical marriage specifically, necessitated a statement considering secular concerns.²⁷

21. Gess, p. 252.

22. Paul Kirn, *Friedrich der Weise und die Kirche. Seine Kirchenpolitik vor und nach Luthers Hervortreten im Jahre 1517*, Leipzig 1926, pp. 36–71.

23. StAA, Rst. Nördlingen, Bd. 35, Fasc. 28b, fol. 85.

24. Walch, XV, Nr. 723, pp. 2183–2187.

25. See, for instance, StadtAK, RefA 1, fol. 9 and StAA, Rst. Nördlingen, Bd. 35, fol. 11.

26. RTA JR III, p. 452.

27. StAA, Rst. Nördlingen, Bd. 35, Nr. 18, n.d., folios unnumbered.

The mandate issued after the third Diet of Nuremberg certainly reinforced the status quo of ecclesiastical authority. By 1524, the resistance of many secular leaders was evident and, as many acknowledged previous edicts had not been effectively executed.²⁸ Numerous secular representatives at Nuremberg called for a national conference to resolve lingering religious disputes. Thus arose an even greater potential for jurisdictional conflict, as it seemed that the imperial estates claimed the right to decide religious questions.²⁹

At this point, ecclesiastical authorities took the initiative to claim full jurisdiction over clergy and assert their right to punish clerical marriage. In his 1524 papal bull, Clement VII commanded swift punishment of clergy engaging in evangelical activity and affirmed ecclesiastical authority to maintain order even over the objections of local authorities.³⁰ A group of mostly clerical imperial leaders from the southern Holy Roman Empire accepted this papal recommendation at a July meeting held in Regensburg.³¹ Representatives resolved among other things "that we will not tolerate or suffer in our lands, runaway monastics, whether male or female, or priests, deacons and subdeacons who marry," promising to "carry out necessary punishments" found in canon law.³² Papal legate Lorenzo Campeggio threatened priests who "live impurely with women," but he also warned married clergy of more severe penalties because in addition to their breach of celibacy, they had committed "heresy."³³ Campeggio was succinct: "Priests who take wives are to be sent to their bishops and punished."³⁴ Campeggio advised bishops to establish sterner measures, including imprisonment if necessary, when dealing with "transgressors."³⁵ Thus, at least at the imperial level, a uniform policy outlining the punishment of married clergy upheld ecclesiastical authority.

28. Birgitta Mogge, "Studien zum Nürnberger Reichstag von 1524," in: *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 62 (1975), p. 86.

29. Mogge, "Nürnberger Reichstag" (n. 28), pp. 89–90.

30. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 90^r–95^r dated June 10, 1524.

31. [Ferdinand II], *Entschliesung der hierin benannten Fürsten, vnd Fürsten Botschofften uff Sant Johannis Baptisten Tag. Anno rc. xxiiii. zu Regenspurg versamlet, zu handthabung Christenlichs glaubens, vnd Euangelischer leere*. Augsburg 1524, fol. Ai^v.

32. *Entschliesung*, fol. Aiii^r.

33. Lorenzo Campeggio, *Ordnung und Reformation zu abstellung der Mißbreuch, vñ auffrichtung aines erberen wesens, vnd wandels in der gaistlichait*, 1524, fol. Bii^r.

34. Lorenzo Campeggio, *Eyn kurtzer außzug, einer Reformation, wie es hynfürter die Priester halten solle[n], zu Regenspurg, nechster versamlu[n]g betracht berathschlagt, vnnnd beschlossen*, Nuremberg 1524, fol. Aiii^r.

35. Campeggio, *Ordnung*, fol. Ci^v–Cii^r.

II.

Imperial and ecclesiastical mandates put the burden of executing their commands on bishops, depending on the episcopal willingness to confront and, if necessary, to coerce compliance from local political leaders and clergy. The bishop in the diocese of Merseburg where Stumpf and Klotzsch resided, Adolf, prince of Anhalt, proves an interesting example of how this was to work.³⁶ Like many reformed-minded bishops of the late Middle Ages, Adolf directed considerable attention to maintaining clerical discipline and emphasized episcopal authority.³⁷ His noble lineage and education marked him as a significant force when he undertook reforms within his diocese. His inability to execute the imperial edicts or to effect clerical discipline in the case of Johann Stumpf and Franz Klotzsch thus becomes all the more notable.

Whether Adolf accomplished any changes in pre-Reformation clerical discipline depends on the observer. Among mid-sixteenth century commentators, Adolf enjoyed an overall good reputation for his diocesan administration despite his early and persistent opposition to Luther.³⁸ Heinrich Munderus called Adolf an "honorable, sincere" man.³⁹ Ernst Brotlauff, described him as "a good preacher and theologian" and as "living chastely," particularly praised him for punishing "adultery and fornication" and governing strictly "according to the law" thereby bringing "great peace and unity" to his region, which had suffered under his predecessors.⁴⁰ Stumpf and Klotzsch, however, noted that clerical sexual misconduct remained rampant as was evident "by the number of loose women here in Merseburg as a result of the canons – who live in public sin, which has all grown out of the evil vow of chastity."⁴¹ Adolf himself was aware that despite his best efforts at clerical discipline, sexual misconduct continued. As his nephew Georg, the first Lutheran bishop of Merseburg, explained, Adolf came to the conclusion that abuses emerging from the "unmarried lives of clergy" demonstrated the need for a "Christian

36. Fraustadt, *Einführung* (see n. 5), p. 31.

37. Peter Gabriel, *Fürst Georg III. von Anhalt als evangelischer Bischof von Merseburg und Thüringen 1544–1548/50*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 97.

38. Fraustadt, *Einführung* (see n. 5), pp. 34–35.

39. Georg Major, *Oratio*, in [Georg III. Fürst von Anhalt], *Predigten vnd andere Schrifften, darinn die Suma Christlicher Lehr trüwlich vnd rein gefasset vnd erklärt ist*, Frankfurt am Main 1561, fol. 380^r.

40. Ernst Brotlauff, *Cronica und Antiquitates des alten Keiserlichen Stiffts, der Römischen Burg, Colonia vnd stadt Marsburg, an der Salah in Obern Sachssen*. Leipzig 1557, fol. Riv^v.

41. Stumpf, *Handlung* (see n. 15), fol. Aiii^r.

Reformation.” Adolf supported the introduction of priestly marriage as the best method to combat rampant clerical sexual misconduct since he found all “strictness and punishment” useless,⁴² but only when “authorized by a Christian council.”⁴³

Since that had not yet happened, Adolf sought to prevent such unsanctioned marriages in his diocese, expending far more effort than most others. Adolf took his cues from the imperial councils and ultimately from the papacy. This becomes evident in the timing of his attempts to discipline Stumpf, Klotzsch, and the other married clergy. Adolf acted most forcefully after the imperial councils in Nuremberg and then Regensburg issued edicts against married priests. His active phases of clerical discipline, therefore, can be seen as falling into four distinct phases that match the establishments of imperial and ecclesiastical policies between 1522 and 1524. The first phase begins shortly after the 1522 edict, when Adolf informed Frederick of his intention to carry out investigations of evangelical activity in his diocese.⁴⁴ This led to the citation of Stumpf and Klotzsch in September. The second phase begins soon after the 1523 mandate, when Adolf cited married priests to appear before him. He completed the last interrogation, that of Stumpf and Klotzsch, on August 25, 1523. The third phase begins just after the Second Diet of Nuremberg, when Adolf announced his intention to visit trouble-spots in his diocese. This visitation resulted in his summoning married clergy, including Stumpf and Klotzsch, to Merseburg for further questioning. The fourth phase begins abruptly on August 25, 1524, when Adolf excommunicated Stumpf and Klotzsch and four other clerics shortly after he received the 1524 papal bull and the Regensburg edict.

Adolf's presents a different view of reform-era bishops. Most are often portrayed as either ignoring the growing reform movement or being overwhelmed by circumstances. Adolf did neither. He understood the danger represented by the growing reform movement and intended to confront it. Despite his consistency of position and his adherence to protocols outlined in imperial and ecclesiastical councils, Adolf proved unsuccessful in discouraging evangelical activity in his diocese, and especially in those areas under Frederick the Wise. Adolf's whole-hearted insistence on episcopal authority over clergy and his position that religious matters be decided exclusively with-

42. [Georg III. Fürst von Anhalt] *Predigten*, fol. 274. See also Gabriel, *Fürst Georg III.* (n. 37), pp. 73–74; and Fraustadt, *Einführung* (n. 5), p. 32.

43. [Georg III. Fürst von Anhalt], *Predigten*, fol. 196.

44. Pallas, “Die Versuche” (see n. 5), p. 4.

in the church organization put him on a collision course with Frederick, evangelical clergy, and reform-minded congregations in his diocese.

III.

The continued presence of married clerics in Wittenberg and throughout Ernestine Saxony forced Frederick the Wise and his brother John into a two-tiered policy as pressure increased to support imperial and ecclesiastical authority. They protected married clergy, even hindering episcopal attempts to discipline such men, while simultaneously complying with imperial policy. Scholars have characterized such strategies by territorial princes and city councils as "Realpolitik,"⁴⁵ "pragmatic toleration,"⁴⁶ and "neutral non-intervention."⁴⁷ Frederick and John certainly put nothing incriminating on paper, even using vague language in their personal letters. Nonetheless they should be considered far more active in the reform process at the parish level from its earliest stages than an initial assessment might indicate. At every stage, Frederick permitted Adolf to interrogate married priests but steadfastly refused to help in crucial measures of clerical discipline that he argued were unsupported by Scripture or were otherwise without merit. Frederick used his rights as a territorial lord to insert his own officials into episcopal proceedings. Thus, we have letters from ducal officials such as Gregor Brück, Michael von der Strasse, Hans von Minckwitz, Benedict Sporer, and George Spalatin who observed and to some degree impeded Adolf's ability to employ full episcopal authority. Brück and Spalatin, particularly, actively mediated interactions between the bishop and married clergy.⁴⁸ Clerical marriage thus forced Frederick to confront the Reformation in a more active way than was his original intention and shows at least in one way how territorial leaders were pushed by circumstances beyond their control.

Initially Frederick sought to downplay his interest in clerical marriage. Frederick feigned indifference in the 1522 discussions in Nuremberg concerning priests taking wives, declaring, "We have nothing to do with such matters.

45. Carl Christensen, "John of Saxony's Diplomacy, 1529-1530: Reformation or Realpolitik," in: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), pp. 419-430.

46. R. Po-chia Hsia, "People's, City and Princes' Reformation: Rivals or Phases?" in Guggisberg and Krodel (eds.): *Die Reformation* (see n. 16), p. 298.

47. Eike Wolgast, "Einführung der Reformation als politische Entscheidung," in Guggisberg, *Die Reformation* (see n. 16), pp. 474-475, 479. See also, Hamm, "From Below" (see n. 17), p. 224.

48. Hamm, "From Below" (n. 17), pp. 224-231.

They are not entrusted to us as laity, but rather belong to the prelates and superiors of the clergy.”⁴⁹ His correspondence and actions, however, belie this seeming concession to ecclesiastical authority. When Adolf began investigating clerical evangelical activity, Frederick instructed his magistrates in Borna and Grimma to receive episcopal representatives as “ordered by the imperial council.” He insisted that ducal officials be present and that all misconduct be defined according to the Gospel.⁵⁰ Frederick’s chancellor Gregor Brück and his secretary Hieronymus Rudloff reported that Adolf reacted to their challenges by claiming authority granted to him by the imperial council; to little effect.⁵¹ Thus, even from the outset, ducal officials acted as mediators in the process by preventing Adolf from acting autonomously. They set the stage for later confrontations.

The situation changed dramatically when Stumpf and Klotzsch married, or as Adolf later wrote, “had taken in marriage ‘wives’ as they call them,” sometime during the summer of 1522. Frederick and John seized on this opportunity to protect clergy by subtly asserting legal jurisdiction over them, a move in opposition to what was being proposed in Nuremberg. When Stumpf and Klotzsch did not respond to his attempts to question them, Adolf turned to Frederick, as the imperial council had advised, to ask for assistance.⁵² Frederick reacted, not by arresting the two men as requested, but by sending Benedict Spörner, the Colditz magistrate, to meet them, take their testimony, and then send it to Adolf.⁵³ Adolf appealed again to Frederick as the priests’ lay patron to instruct them to abandon their misconduct for the sake of “their own souls” and those of their congregations; their marriages could be punished by excommunication and their congregations placed under interdict as required by “canon law.”⁵⁴ Frederick answered Adolf that he had already asked Brück and Rudloff to investigate, declaring that he and John saw nothing other “than what was Christian.” He asked Adolf to cease his inquiries.⁵⁵

49. Planitz, Nr. 45, p. 104.

50. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 6^v, Adolf to Frederick, March 13, 1522, ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 10^{r-v}, Frederick to Grimma Magistrates and the Escort (*Geleitsmann*) of Borna, March 16, 1522; and ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 17^{r-v}, Frederick to Adolf, March 17, 1522.

51. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 50^{r-v}, Brück and Rudloff to Frederick, April 1522.

52. Grundig, *Sammlung* (see n. 5), 2, pp. 311–312.

53. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 23^r, Spörner to Adolf, October 18, 1522.

54. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 21^v, Adolf to Frederick, November 4, 1522.

55. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 59^{r-v}, Frederick to Adolf, November 16, 1522.

Frederick adroitly deployed evangelical rhetoric to further his jurisdictional authority. He stopped short, however, of endorsing clerical marriage.

These multiple levels of authority in supporting and protecting married clergy surfaced again in the months after the 1523 mandate, as did the bishop's growing concern about secular involvement. Adolf approached Frederick after his initial efforts to deal directly with the new group of married clergy in and around Grimma met with organized local lay opposition. The bishop requested the elector to review the complaint of the priest in Polenz, Caspar Otten, that the local noble, Wilhelm von Lindenau, had replaced him with an evangelical and married priest, Johann Kress. Adolf asked that Frederick remind von Lindenau, as his secular lord, that clerical discipline should "be left to clerical judges or bishops."⁵⁶ In an attempt to show how Frederick's previous inaction in the Stumpf case had created this situation, Adolf pointed out that Stumpf responded to his citations "shamefully" by disregarding them and by showing continual "disobedience."⁵⁷ Frederick's response is interesting. Beginning in summer 1523, Brück, and later other ducal officials, began accompanying priests to their meetings with Adolf.⁵⁸ These omnipresent ducal officials provided information, interpreted episcopal purpose, and mediated interactions between bishop and priests. After Adolf notified the Saxon dukes of his intent to hold a visitation,⁵⁹ Frederick wrote to John asking him to obtain an opinion from Brück.⁶⁰ Frederick arranged for ducal escorts⁶¹ and then directed his secretary George Spalatin to send instructions to the Grimma city council informing them of impending visitation.⁶² Spalatin

56. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 69^{r-v}, Adolf to Frederick, June 9, 1523.

57. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 27^v-28^r, Adolf to Frederick, April 18, 1523; ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 27^{r-v}, Frederick to Adolf, April 25, 1523; and ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 68^r, Frederick to Adolf, June 12, 1523.

58. Förstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch* (see n. 5), pp. 91-93.

59. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 75^{r-v}, Adolf to Frederick, April 12, 1524; and Gess, pp. 652-653, Adolf to Georg, April 12, 1524. While the letters are identical, the reactions are notably different, with George acquiescing quickly to the visitation.

60. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 9^r, Frederick to John, March 23, 1524. See also ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 77^r, Frederick to John, April 14, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 77^v, John to Frederick, April 18, 1524.

61. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 78^r, Frederick to Adolf, April 15, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 1-5, undated; Förstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch* (see n. 7), p. 93, Frederick to von Minckwitz, April 24, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 82^{r-v}.

62. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 96^r, Frederick to Grimma City Council, 22 April 1524; ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 86^r-90^v; and ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 83^r.

advised them to aid Adolf as far as their "conscience" and Scripture dictated, thus expanding the ducal policy of outward compliance but oblique resistance.⁶³ The presence of ducal officials never hindered Adolf from closely questioning clergy, but it certainly prevented him from taking immediate action to punish them. Thus, Frederick systematically eroded Adolf's authority without having to defy imperial codes publicly.

Adolf recognized that his ability to effect punishment was being undermined and acted to reassert his authority over married clergy by evoking imperial and ecclesiastical mandates. Following the 1524 visitation, Adolf changed his tactics, working to force the dukes either into compliance or overt defiance. Adolf demanded that intractable priests, including those "who had taken wives," be sent immediately to his court and not given sanctuary in ducal territory. After extended consideration, Frederick and John sent a verbal report that they had questioned the clergy and found no problems, thus continuing their policy of outward compliance while asserting their jurisdictional rights.⁶⁴ In a bold move, Adolf specifically demanded a written statement of explanation if Frederick and John did not intend to assist him in "achieving obedience and unity" and punishing "evil preachers and pastors and incompetent clerics."⁶⁵ Instead, Frederick and John sent Gregor Brück and Benedict Pauli to meet with Adolf in Halberstadt in mid-July.⁶⁶ Although Frederick instructed Brück and Pauli to reiterate his compliance with imperial mandates, they also received a list of topics to challenge, including how Adolf intended to handle matters of clerical and lay misconduct in spiritual matters and church ceremonies.⁶⁷

Clerical marriage proved a central point of conflict and focus for discussion of jurisdictional issues in this meeting. Adolf strongly asserted the superiority

63. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 97^r, Instructions to the Grimma City Council, April 22, 1524. See also, ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 85^r, Frederick to John, April 22, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 6^r, Frederick to Adolf, April 23, 1524.

64. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 46^r, Frederick to John, May 25, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, 47^{r-v}, John to Frederick, June 1, 1524.

65. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, 53^r, Adolf to Frederick, July 10 1524.

66. The events of this meeting are described in three different reports to the dukes of Saxony: ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 58^r-61^v, Report from Gregor Brück and Benedict Pauli, undated July 1524, hereafter as Brück Report; ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 67^r-70^v, Report from Brück and Pauli, July 20 1524, hereafter as Brück Report II; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 63^r-66^v, Brück to Frederick, undated July 1524, hereafter as Brück Letter.

67. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 54^r, Frederick to Adolf, July 12, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 55^r-56^v, Frederick to Adolf, July 12, 1524.

of episcopal authority, noting that he had shown great patience with the dukes in two years of dealing with Klotzsch and Stumpf.⁶⁸ Stating his refusal to tolerate married priests or ducal interference in church matters any longer, Adolf argued that the temporal sword defended "external peace" including "the punishment of bad people such as thieves, murderers, and adulterers," but he warned of the danger when state authorities used force in matters of conscience. The spiritual sword, in contrast, protected the "heart of belief." The bishop dedicated himself wholly to the service of Scripture, which necessitated punishment of married priests who went against ecclesiastical customs and religious beliefs "set in place by Gregory himself" in the eleventh century.⁶⁹ In contrast, Brück and Pauli presented the ducal position, supporting punishments of clergy only for those transgressions condemned in Scripture, of which they claimed Adolf "used not one single word." They argued that tradition did not supersede God's word and that temporal rulers had a responsibility to protect the conscience of a priest.⁷⁰ They then asked that the matter be postponed until imperial authorities came to a definitive theological conclusion, at the long awaited imperial council.

Until this point, ducal policy on clerical marriage remained unstated and deliberately unclear. John and Frederick did not move to legalize marriage for clergy, nor did they act proactively on behalf of married clergy in their territory. Rather they reacted to the circumstances presented to them by utilizing the secular authority they possessed to delay or deter any major pronouncements. Thus, they could support the reform process and use it to further their quest for increased secular authority without having to commit to the increasingly separatist, confrontational tendency of the reform movement. This worked only as long as Adolf considered their authority of concern. The papal bull, however, absolved him of any further consideration of secular objections. The implication of this document for the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical jurisdiction ultimately forced territorial leaders such as Frederick and John to make a decision about the reform movement as they dealt with clerical marriage. One month later, Adolf finally excommunicated the clergy and stripped them of their benefices.⁷¹ After consulting

68. Brück Report, fol. 58^v-60^r.

69. Brück Letter, fol. 64^r-65^r; Brück Report, fol. 60^v-61^r; and Brück Report II, fol. 67^r-68^v.

70. Brück Report II, fol. 68^r-69^r.

71. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 97^{r-v}, Von Wegen der Bullen, September 4, 1524. See also ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 99^r, Frederick to Adolf, September 8, 1524. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 100^r, Frederick to John, September 10, 1524.

with Spalatin, John and Frederick concluded that Adolf's actions were not supported "by God's word" and that they intended to hold to "godly, holy and Christian love without human intervention."⁷² Recognizing the consequences of open defiance, Frederick and John repeated their complaint, first voiced to Adolf by Brück and Pauli, that the legal proceedings against the clergy were flawed because they had done nothing against Scripture.⁷³ They stopped short of advocating clerical marriage or issuing a specific statement supporting married priests. Instead they attacked the process, thereby avoiding the thornier issue.

Ultimately, Frederick and John appeared more politically pragmatic than religiously convinced. In essence, they maintained this position of outward compliance and oblique resistance throughout the remainder of their interactions with Adolf. While we cannot talk yet of a reformation "from above," Frederick and John's protection was vital for creating conditions in which clergy themselves could create their own reformation.

IV.

When the imperial council worried in 1522 that clerics "had no hesitation to take wives," they expressed a fear more than reality.⁷⁴ Clerical marriage was hardly common and remained dangerous. Wittenberg was one of the few safe havens for married priests. Those who married outside Wittenberg in 1521–1522 often found themselves forced to seek refuge in Wittenberg. For example, Johannes Grau, pastor of Cronach, whose marriage the old bishop of Bamberg initially tolerated,⁷⁵ soon found it necessary to flee to Wittenberg to escape arrest. In another case, Nicholas, chaplain at the Stift Neuwerk near Halle, reported the marriage of the chaplain of St. George to Archbishop Albrecht on August 28, 1522, claiming that the chaplain had quickly "removed himself from Halle and moved to Wittenberg" to escape punishment.⁷⁶ But, the imperial council certainly had cause to worry, for clerical marriage opened the door for contention and resistance. By 1522, the act was no longer

72. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 97^v–98^v, Frederick to John, September 4, 1524.

73. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, 100^r–101^v, Frederick to John, September 10, 1524; ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 102^r, Frederick to John, September 29, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 101^r, Frederick and John to Adolf, undated.

74. Gess, p. 251.

75. StAB, Rep. B86I, Receßbuch, Bd. 3, fol. 112^v, May 30, 1522.

76. LHASA, MD, Rep. A2, Nr. 500, fol. 3^r–^v, Nicholaus to Albrecht, August 28, 1522.

limited to Wittenberg, and individual priests without direct ties to Wittenberg married. Clerical marriage was a irrefutable form of public defiance – unlike communion in both kinds, breaking the fast, or preaching the Gospel – showing the degree to which individual clergy were willing to express their commitment to the reform movement. Punishments being advocated in Nuremberg and Regensburg elevated clerical marriage to a “heresy” and slowly eliminated the possibility to recant for those who chose to marry. Despite these inauspicious beginnings, the number of clergy marrying by 1525 climbed dramatically, and married priests rarely were driven from their parishes.⁷⁷ The question that emerges is how this happened when no concrete official policy supporting marriage “from above” had yet been formulated.

Conflicts between secular and ecclesiastical leaders and theological tracts created conditions in which debates over celibacy and clerical marriage proliferated. Ultimately, however, the clergy themselves spearheaded its spread. Thus, an understanding of how the average parish priest justified marriage demonstrates how the reform process spread. Nowhere is that better exemplified than in the Merseburg diocese, where an upstart action gradually blossomed into a cohesive clerical movement. By early 1524, at least four priests and two monks had married in and around Grimma and Borna, and many others were on the verge of marriage, creating one of the largest concentrations of clerical marriages in the Holy Roman Empire outside of Wittenberg and Zurich.⁷⁸ The first two marriages, those of Stumpf and Klotzsch, proved particularly controversial because of the men’s unwillingness to back down in the face of considerable pressure from Adolf and their ability to develop cohesive support from their congregations and colleagues. Stumpf and Klotzsch were too far removed from Wittenberg to benefit from the outpouring of personal and legal support from that quarter, but their experience differed from others in similar circumstances. Neither man was arrested, forced to flee, or lost his position. Instead they maintained a sustained campaign of public resistance to episcopal authority, thus demonstrating the power of what Andrew Pettegree has called the “culture of persuasion” at the communal and regional level.⁷⁹

77. Plummer, “Reforming the Family” (see n. 3), pp. 37–38.

78. Johann Stumpf; Franz Klotzsch; Conrad Klug, pastor of Machern; Johann Kress, preacher in Polenz; Johann Schreiner (Kalbfleisch), Augustinian monk and “preacher” in Grimma; and Wolfgang von Zeschau, Augustinian monk in Grimma.

79. Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, Cambridge 2005, p. 8.

Unfortunately, Stumpf and Klotzsch leave no testimony of how they first learned of priestly marriage. Like many other clergy, Stumpf and Klotzsch had probably heard about events in Wittenberg the previous year, and perhaps they had access to pamphlets published by the Wittenberg circle.⁸⁰ There is, however, an extensive record of how they presented their marriages to an increasingly public audience. Local concerns alone did not drive their actions. Their methods of defense quickly evolved to address an audience far beyond their tiny parishes in Schönbach and Großbuch. While their decisions to marry appear to be very personal, their subsequent actions demonstrate the emergence of a collective consciousness. They ultimately become part of a regional movement in which clergy banded together with local and territorial leaders to defend their actions despite Adolf's efforts to suppress clerical marriage. They used episcopal interrogations and investigations following the 1522 mandate as occasions for defending their positions, thus galvanizing clerical resistance to episcopal authority. Indeed, clerical marriage became the most public of core reform conflicts. While Adolf attempted to enforce emerging imperial and papal policy of zero tolerance by aggressively investigating cases of clerical misconduct, he unintentionally helped clergy spread their message. Compliance proved elusive not just because of Frederick's delaying tactic. The clergy themselves were remarkably unafraid of the consequences of their resistance.

Stumpf and Klotzsch differed from the first married clergy in Wittenberg. They more aggressively defended their marriages, and their example led to a spread of clerical marriages locally. These priests gradually linked clerical discipline, spiritual authority, and communal relations in a unique way that formed the core of later pamphlets and public actions. They did so at a time when little pamphlet literature on the topic existed and when theological arguments were still in flux; Luther and Karlstadt still debated whether to push clerical marriage into the public arena. From the outset, Stumpf refused episcopal efforts to halt his evangelical activity, defiantly marrying shortly after his first meeting with Adolf. Such overt disobedience revealed an unexpected weakness in the 1522 mandate when tested against the strength of the personal courage of convinced clergy.⁸¹ Adolf's repeated attempts to cite the priests

80. Andreas Karlstadt, *Von gelubden vnterrichtung Andrea Bo: von Carolstad ... Das Pfaffen, Monche, vñ Nonnen, mit gutem gewissem, vnd Gottlichem Willen, sich mogen vnd sollen vermelen, vnd yn eelichen stand begeben*, Wittenberg 1521.

81. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 51^v-52^r, 56^v, Brück and Rudloff to Frederick, dated April 1522.

met with silence.⁸² When forced to respond, Stumpf and Klotzsch unabashedly challenged Adolf's episcopal authority, personal integrity, and doctrinal orthodoxy. After claiming that they had already sufficiently defended the scriptural validity of their marriages, they cautioned Adolf that his title of "bishop [*Episcopus*] in Latin was to be translated as a visitor [*Visitor*], not a summoner [*Citator*] or tyrant [*Dominator*]." They also claimed that in a previous meeting, Adolf had made the following statements: "It was better that a priest keep a whore than a married wife," "God created fornication," and "Married wives are not commanded by God, but by mankind." Such arguments went beyond "all shame and Christian discipline," and they accused Adolf of "tyranny" for continuing to press them to "act against God's words, laws, and their own consciences" and accept heretical "Merseburg counsel and teachings." This bold response disputed the very basis of episcopal authority.⁸³

Already in the interrogations of 1523, common patterns begin to emerge, although some individual variations are still evident. In the first arguments on the necessity or validity of priestly marriage, Schreiner and Klug, for instance, at least feigned willingness to repudiate their wives if "it was not a sin," to which Adolf "consolingly" said not to worry: "No marriage could exist between the women and priests."⁸⁴ Stumpf aggressively confronted Adolf, stating that because "he found celibacy impossible, despite all his prayers," he had married in accordance with Matthew 19.⁸⁵ He later asked, "Was it not better for the congregation for a 'weak' priest to marry than for him to sin with a poor prostitute?"⁸⁶ Kress sought to convince Adolf that "according to Paul, he should marry because 'a bishop should be husband to one wife.'"⁸⁷ Adolf responded to these arguments by asking if Stumpf understood that church councils had determined that clergy needed to be "chaste and pure" for the efficacy of the mass and that Matthew 19 addressed laity not clergy.⁸⁸

82. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 50^{r-v}, Brück and Rudloff to Frederick, April 1522; Grundig, *Sammlung* (see n. 5), 2, pp. 311-312.

83. ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 24^v-25^v, Stumpf and Klotzsch to Adolf, October 18, 1522 and ThHStAW Reg. N28a, fol. 63^r-64^v, Stumpf to Frederick, June 11, 1523.

84. Förstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch* (see n. 5), p. 92.

85. Matthew 19 became a standard beginning point for a defense of clerical marriage, underscoring the lack of distinction between the moral expectations of clergy and laity. See, for instance, Karlstadt, *Priester Eeweyber*, fol. Aii^r.

86. Stumpf, *Handlung* (see n. 15), fol. Aiii^{r-v}.

87. Förstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch* (see n. 5), p. 92.

88. Stumpf, *Handlung* (n. 15), fol. Aii^{r-v}.

Like Klug, Stumpf responded that not only "did Scripture not differentiate between laity and clergy" but that 1 Timothy 3 specifically stated that clergy, especially bishops, should marry. Klotzsch boiled their defense down to its essential components: first, that he did not have the gift of chastity; second, that according to Paul, priests are not forbidden to marry; and finally, that it was his responsibility as a priest to avoid sin. Where Stumpf and Klotzsch differed from Schreiner, Klug, and Kress, was in their clear attack on episcopal authority. When interrogating Stumpf, for instance, Adolf pointed out that the priests had taken a vow of celibacy at their ordination and were in their majority when they did so. Stumpf responded that in his ignorance "he had been seduced by the bishop" into taking an evil vow he could not uphold.⁸⁹ In conclusion, Stumpf and Klotzsch thank Adolf for his mercy and promised obedience as long as "we do not do anything knowingly against Scripture and God's word."⁹⁰ Thus, they reminded Adolf and the reading audience of the very spiritual nature of the contrast between the moral position of the priests in marrying and the immoral demand of Adolf to give up their wives.

Between the two meetings in the summers of 1523 and 1524, a common pattern slowly emerged as the growing consistency in the defense of the married Merseburg clergy culminated in a unified argument that began to spread through the diocese. Adolf's attempts to confront clergy in 1523 only provided them with forums for defending their marriages. To some degree, it helped them to formulate and rehearse a clearer unified argument. Kress's use of 1 Timothy 3, for instance, can be seen in Stumpf and Klotzsch's published pamphlet, and in a subsequent meeting between Adolf and Schreiner, Klug, and Kress in 1524. A common discourse of defense now existed. Klug and Schreiner returned, like Kress, Stumpf, and Klotzsch, to their wives and congregations unmoved by episcopal directives to leave their wives. By 1524, their stance was unified and resolute with Kress declaring, "Before he would leave his wife, he would give up everything he had," echoing Bernhardt's earlier comment.⁹¹ What led to this growing consistency in the clergy's defense of their marriages before the bishop? Part of the answer is untraceable since no records exist of conversations and meetings between the Merseburg clergy. We do know, however, that those from the same areas, like Kress, Klug, and Schreiner from Grimma, tended to be questioned together and certainly had greater opportunity to converse daily. Part of the answer can be seen in the

89. Stumpf, *Handlunng* (n. 15), fol. Aiii^{r-v}.

90. Stumpf, *Handlunng* (n. 15), Aiv^{r-v}.

91. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 58^v, Bruck and Pauli to Frederick, July 1524.

decision of Stumpf and Klotzsch to take their case to a larger audience by publishing details of their August 1523 hearing, representing the changing tactics of married priests evident throughout 1523.

Based on his continued inability to prevent clerical marriage and with the support of the renewed mandate, Adolf decided to undertake a comprehensive visitation of his territory. This 1524 visitation gives us significant insights into communal dynamics and the growing consistency of the position of the clergy. Public support for married priests had been growing since 1523 as more priests joined Klotzsch and Stumpf. Clerical marriage thus moved from being a dialogue between individual priests and officials to a larger communal issue. As a result, Adolf unsuccessfully attempted to close sessions in Grimma to include only his retinue, perhaps concerned that a public interrogation would only fuel growing resistance of the Grimma clergy and further engage the community in this dialogue.⁹² The intervention of ducal representatives prevented him from doing this, demonstrating how strong both local and territorial interests had become in the issue of clerical marriage. When Adolf questioned local clergy using earlier lines of inquiry, Kress answered ominously that he would now only recognize the authority of the elector of Saxony.⁹³ In contrast, Adolf held public discussions with clergy in Borna during the weekly market, mistakenly underestimating the degree to which support for clerical marriage had grown. Borna clergy, not previously questioned by Adolf, nonetheless expressed opinions supportive of their married colleagues, even when they had not married. One particularly outspoken unmarried preacher, Gregor Mohr, quickly turned the tables on Adolf by asking him as "his highest level Ordinarius" what he should do since "he could not be without a wife," inquiring if Adolf thought that it was better that he married or that he kept a concubine.⁹⁴ The irritated bishop answered that he would do the preacher's soul no good if he advised either "a concubine or a wife." Mohr then demonstrated the scriptural legitimacy of clerical marriage, concluding that the bishop's advice was therefore "unchristian."⁹⁵ Adolf had no better luck with Mohr's colleagues. He called a priest and chaplain back to confront them with evidence "that one of them had already married, and the other had

92. Förstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch* (n. 5), p. 99.

93. ThHStAW Reg. N28b fol. 10^r, von Minckwitz to Frederick, April 28, 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 25^r-28^r, Visitation Report for Grimma and Borna, dated May 1524.

94. ThHStAW Reg. N28B, fol. 30^r, Visitation Report of Adolf.

95. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 19^r, von der Strasse to Frederick, May 3, 1524.

publicly stated his intention to do so.” He sought to investigate rumors about a Franciscan monk who supposedly had married. None of the Borna clergy backed down from their statements about clerical marriage or separated from their wives.⁹⁶ Within the context of the area around Borna and Grimma, the reform process surrounding clerical marriage had strengthened to the point of open defiance.

The visitation ended abruptly as Adolf found that he was making no progress, at least in Ernestine Saxony. The visitation reports indicate, however, that the *clergy* had made headway on the reform process supporting clerical marriage. Three defenses become evident in the Merseburg clergy’s attempts to justify and legalize clerical marriage. The first explained how clergy found themselves in a crisis of conscience because of the unnatural, and unscriptural, vow of celibacy. The second outlined scriptural texts supporting priestly marriage. The third pointed out the failure of episcopal officials to confront clerical concubinage and to enforce proper clerical conduct as justification for seeking other jurisdictional oversight whether secular or scriptural. Clergy directed the first two of these arguments not to a popular audience but to their colleagues. However, they aimed the last argument, that episcopal failure to enforce celibacy constituted a tacit approval of clerical sexual misconduct, at the experience of local congregations, potentially exacerbating tensions over clerical sexual misconduct that already existed in the community. Many scholars have noted the importance of anticlericalism in fueling rural and urban popular action, noting particularly the connection between portrayals of sexual misconduct in Reformation propaganda and increased incidents of anticlerical violence in the early years of the Reformation.⁹⁷ This was not the case here. This may explain the lack of popular hostility towards clergy in this region. Congregations remained relatively peaceful, and criticism was limited to the effectiveness of the church in maintaining clerical morality and public order. They developed a cohesive ideal of clerical conduct and what Bob Scribner has called “evangelical solidarity” among the married priests of Merseburg and their congregations.⁹⁸ This is much more in line with jurisdictional

96. ThHStAW Reg. N28B, fol. 29^v-30^v, Visitation Report of Adolf.

97. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, “What a Tangled and Tenuous Mess the Clergy Is! Clerical Anticlericalism in the Reformation Period,” in Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman (eds.): *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Leiden 1993, pp. 502–504; and Bob Scribner, “Anticlericalism and the Cities,” in Dykema and Oberman, p. 147.

98. Scribner, “Anticlericalism,” pp. 163–165.

concerns of secular leaders such as Frederick than with discussions of a reformation driven exclusively by residual anticlerical feelings. The relationships between local clergy and the laity appear relatively harmonious. Through their rhetoric of reform and marriage, local priests had succeeded in identifying church authorities, not their colleagues, as the source of immorality.

The testimony and disputations of clergy in Borna and Grimma in 1524 are the last direct voices from the Merseburg clergy, although indirect evidence of their continued resistance is indicative of the broader entrenchment of the Reformation. These initial confrontations proved to be crucial in setting the stage for the continuing roles that community, clergy, and officials played in the stalemate over clerical marriage and jurisdictional issues surrounding married clergy. Adolf complained that he had been unable to convince clergy to obey; and all “still have their wives with them” despite his best efforts. In a final move, Adolf summoned five clerics – Stumpf, Klotzsch, Klug, Kress, and Schreiner – to Merseburg, giving them the option of either conforming by setting aside their wives and returning to their cloisters or facing the penalty of losing their benefices and being banned “as the law demands.”⁹⁹ In the subsequent ban of excommunication, Adolf specifically noted their marrying in violation of canon law and stripped them of their benefices in his dioceses in accordance with canon law and imperial mandates.¹⁰⁰ He proved unable to implement this punishment despite over two years of trying either to persuade married clergy to return to “old customs” or to convince Frederick and John to assist him. Thus, Adolf found himself unable to enforce a norm of celibacy as the expected moral behavior for clergy in at least the Ernestine parts of his diocese; *de facto*, he conceded control to the Ernestine dukes.

V.

Longer-term jurisdictional conflicts over morals and sexual behavior of clergy, already evident in the late Middle Ages, found a clear outlet in the case of Stumpf and Klotzsch and those who followed them. Archiepiscopal, episcopal, and territorial rulers and officials in the area of Saxony attempted to sort out how to react to individual challenges to canon law and to episcopal and imperial policy that the marriages of these two men represented. Remarkably, church officials using imperial edicts were the only group that appeared

99. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, 71^r-72^v, Adolf to Frederick and John, August 25, 1524.

100. ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 80^r, Excommunication, August 1524; and ThHStAW Reg. N28b, fol. 81^r.

to respond with a unified plan to punish miscreant priests. Despite Frederick's concern, he did not have to worry about imperial retribution or loss of authority. Adolf's inability to convince or coerce married clergy in the region controlled by Frederick to comply with his demand that they leave their wives effectively ended his control over clergy near Grimma and Borna.¹⁰¹ Each time Adolf repeated his demand, John responded, "The bishop should be satisfied with the previous answer."¹⁰² The failure of Adolf to carry out punishments dictated by canon and imperial law foreshadowed problems that imperial and ecclesiastical officials would have throughout evangelical territories and cities.

Adolf encountered one of the great conundrums facing sixteenth-century bishops: evangelical clergy who had married refused to acknowledge his authority, while those who acknowledged his authority failed to heed the call for celibacy. The problem of clerical misconduct that shaped the initial years of his episcopate persisted unabated to his last weeks as bishop. In 1526, Archbishop Albrecht sent Adolf a letter asking that he endeavor to install "learned, pious, honest" men into every parish and warned that they should not have "suspicious women" in their households.¹⁰³ Adolf died shortly thereafter without having accomplished his original intention of establishing clerical obedience or his larger goal of maintaining church discipline. This failure to create a single accepted definition of proper clerical conduct, as well as the struggle between secular and ecclesiastical authorities for jurisdiction over clergy, was repeated in towns and territories throughout Germany in the 1520s through 1540s with very similar results. Adolf's lack of success in his tiny diocese was just the first of many episcopal failures as the Reformation spread. While all parties might agree that clerical sexual misconduct was unacceptable, they diverged on what constituted misconduct and on who would set a definition of improper behavior, thus opening new roads to conflict.

The reactions of the elector of Saxony illustrate the double game initially played by secular rulers, who were at once inclined to support evangelical clergy as a means of gaining secular jurisdiction in their territories and unwilling to publicly defy imperial or ecclesiastical mandates. While Frederick the Wise and his brother John gradually developed a method for dealing with

101. Gabriel, *Fürst Georg III.* (see n. 37), p. 101.

102. Fraustadt, *Die Einführung* (see n. 5), p. 52.

103. Albrecht to Adolf, March 3, 1526. As found in Heinrich August Erhard, *Ueberlieferungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte alter und neuer Zeiten*, vol. 3, Magdeburg 1828, p. 37.

married priests in their territory, they consciously left it unstated. Their practice remained unofficial, without full authority, at least until after the death of Frederick.¹⁰⁴ It is only at this point that Luther felt able to marry, which he did on June 13, 1525. Adolf's authority declined in the Ernestine portion of his diocese as the reform movement moved to a new level, and by his death in 1526, he had conceded effective control of the region to John.

For the married priests of Schönbach and Großbuch, their isolated and impetuous act ultimately shifted the religious landscape of the whole region, but this movement expanded more by chance than design. Nonetheless, the clearly personal decision of the Merseburg clergy to marry, and their unrelenting willingness to defend the validity of this decision, forced Frederick the Wise and Adolf, Bishop of Merseburg, to act. The resulting interaction with officials supporting and opposing their marriages led Stumpf and Klotzsch to create a unified position eventually adopted by the reform leadership. Their decision to marry may have been made in isolation and for personal reasons of conscience, but Stumpf and Klotzsch ultimately established an effective model of evangelical action on clerical marriage characterized by gathering support through personal appeals to their congregations and colleagues, by forcing official action through direct confrontation of secular and ecclesiastical policies, and by defending and publicizing their actions through the use of mass media. Evangelically-leaning clergy closely followed this pattern of reform advocacy as the issue of clerical marriage moved from territorial Saxony into southern imperial cities in 1523 and other areas throughout the late 1520s and 1530s.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Anfang des Jahres 1522 erreichte die Debatte über die Priesterehe die Diözese Merseburg, als die beiden Pfarrer Johann Stumpf und Franz Klotzsch sich zur Heirat entschlossen. Stumpf und Klotzsch verteidigten ihr Handeln in mündlicher und schriftlicher Form vor den bischöflichen und herzoglichen Beamten, während andere Pfarrer

104. Günther Wartenberg, "Luthers Beziehungen zu den sächsischen Fürsten," in Jonas Flöter and Markus Hein (eds): *Wittenberger Reformation und territoriale Politik*, Leipzig 2003, p. 18.

sich entschieden gegen die Priesterehe aussprachen. Die durch Aktenmaterial gut belegten Fälle zeigen, wie sich die Reformation außerhalb Wittenbergs durchsetzen konnte. Insbesondere die Korrespondenz zwischen Friedrich dem Weisen und dem Bischof von Merseburg erhellt den reichspolitischen Umgang mit der erstarkenden Reformationsbewegung in den Jahren 1522–24. In der frühen Reformation war die Priesterehe ein in höchstem Maße öffentlicher und umstrittener Akt, der durch zahlreiche Interessen – theologische, rechtliche, gemeindliche und persönliche – bestimmt war.