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Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity and Reform in Normandy and England, 1066-1300*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. viii + 230 pp. Notes, figures, bibliography, and index. \$90.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8122-4752-7.

Review by Laura L. Gathagan, State University of New York at Cortland.

This is the first full-length treatment of a subject that has come under increased (and welcome) scrutiny in the past five years: the imposition of celibacy on the secular priesthood in England and Normandy. Thibodeaux's monograph is a thorough examination of a topic that has been addressed by smaller important studies such as Elisabeth Van Houts' on Serlo of Bayeux.[1] It also fits into a broader corpus of other works addressing aspects of clerical masculinity such as Cullum and Lewis' edited collection *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*[2] and Smith's monograph, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*. [3] Thibodeaux's first foray into the topic was her introduction in the edited collection *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*. [4] She returns here to address clerical celibacy and masculinity in the Anglo-Norman realm more completely.

The importance and originality of Thibodeaux's study is two-fold. First, she locates arguments for clerical celibacy on the priestly body. A new construction of religious masculinity, not the obsession with Eucharistic purity or economic concerns over inheriting priests' sons, was the driving force behind the reformers' insistence on celibacy for secular clergy. The new virility was a "religious manliness" (p. 17), described and displayed as a superior, ordered, self-controlled, and celibate body. Reform writers contrasted it with unrestrained, passionate, soft secular masculinity, a category which included lay clerics. Second, Thibodeaux links the reform efforts of the eleventh- and twelfth-century with those of Lateran IV in the thirteenth century. The legislation of Lateran IV, Thibodeaux argues, was the logical extension of struggles regarding clerical celibacy as it further restricted behavior that was secular and, therefore, uncontained. The battle for clerical celibacy had already been won, at least for the higher orders of secular clergy. The reforms of the thirteenth century did more than simply sweep up after it, legislating against gambling, frequenting taverns, and wearing inappropriate clothing. The later reforms targeted the still obstreperous lower orders who refused to embrace celibate clerical masculinity.

Norman monasteries were outliers in the general trend toward reform. David Spear argued several years ago that the monastic school at Caen suffered a diminution of prestige and saw its school decline as a result of being on the wrong side of the debate on clerical celibacy. [5] Likewise, both Thibodeaux and Van Houts make the case that Normandy was home to the last opposition against radical insistence on celibacy for secular priests. Normandy's resistance to the ban on clerical marriage was sustained by a number of different factors, including the ducal family's tight control on clerical offices and their successful obstruction of external episcopal meddling. Thibodeaux also credits the traditional link between high civil service and bishoprics, and Lanfranc's support of diocesan control of reform efforts. She also notes that Normandy's lack of political cohesion allowed for more flexibility in terms of the lives and habits of its clergy. Indeed, papal decrees against lay investiture were quite consciously buried

by Anglo-Norman bishops. For these reasons, and because of Normandy's significant historical writing tradition, Thibodeaux uses England and Normandy as a case study for the imposition of the new model of religious male body.

The first chapter lays out the arguments religious writers used to promote the new masculinized celibate body. In these texts, the foundational element of gender identity was the battle against fleshly lust. Chaste bodies were virile bodies. Thibodeaux argues that adjusting traditional translations of *vir* from 'virtue' to 'virile' allows for a more accurate and pointed reading of reform texts. She demonstrates that while this argument was not unique to Anglo-Norman writers, its saturation was thorough and completed via multiple media including "hagiography, chronicles, histories, letters, theological tracts, laws and conciliar decrees" (p. 11).

The focus on virile celibacy in its Anglo-Norman context is taken up in chapter two. Thibodeaux traces out how it was translated into law. She argues it was not immediately effective in large part because it worked against virtually every social assumption about the nature of manliness. It also ran in opposition to the reality of clerical experience; marriages were an important part of local and regional clerical identity and contributed to their networks of influence. Especially for those clerics who were royal and ducal chamberlains, papal policy on strict clerical celibacy simply seemed impracticable. Lanfranc's policies on clerical celibacy are examined here. While Lanfranc (abbot of St. Stephen's in Caen, abbot of Le Bec, and finally archbishop of Canterbury) clearly approved of clerical celibacy in the abstract, his letters reveal he was quite willing to accept clerics who lived chastely with their wives. Thibodeaux's evidence shows that married clergy, especially in the lower orders, were still receiving dispensations to live with their wives into the 1170s. Despite uncompromising conciliar legislation from the papacy and even from regional Anglo-Norman reformers, clerics still considered their unions valid and legal.

The 'precarious' position of cleric's sons is addressed in chapter three. They were living proof of their father's failure to control their sexual desires. Thibodeaux examines the careers of numerous clerical sons and the legislation targeting them. These laws were meant to inhibit clerical fatherhood by punishing the sons, disallowing the inheritance of benefices and clerical offices, as well as their ordination. Again, Thibodeaux traces out the resistance to these restrictions in the Anglo-Norman realm. Especially in Normandy, clerical sons still saw success as informal apprentices in their father's "trade" assisting them at the altar and training for a career in orders. Ordinances that targeted this practice in the lower clerical orders were still being issued well into the fifteenth century. Even so, Thibodeaux argues that clerical sons did feel the effect of legislation that targeted their livelihood and careers, indeed their status as legitimate offspring.

In chapter four, Thibodeaux gives voice to those who wrote to resist the new model of clerical celibacy and locates them in a culturally distinct Norman tradition. These works, by authors such as the Norman Anonymous and Serlo of Bayeux, celebrated clerical marriage and insisted its validity had never been questioned. Thibodeaux frames this debate in terms of a contested version of masculinity. Anglo-Norman clerics subscribed to assumptions about masculinity that were grounded in the lay world. The push back against clerical celibacy was also grounded in theological ideas about free will and grace. Continence was a divine gift, according to those writing against clerical celibacy, and thus the fight against the flesh was not only futile, but harmful. Biblical authorities like Paul were used in the debate as advocates attempted to re-frame clerical masculinity. The male body was "sexually vulnerable, unable to retain its integrity without marital sex" (p. 111). Accusations of sodomy and dishonor formed part of these treatises, especially in Serlo's writings. This line of argument was ultimately ineffective. Thibodeaux argues that while clerical marriage continued, the philosophical battle had been lost by the 1130s. Priests still married and had children, but vocal defense of the practice died out.

Thibodeaux moves into a later period in chapter six. By the mid-thirteenth century clerical celibacy was the norm. What followed was a new, stricter focus on controlling priestly behavior and "compartment,"

that is, the social behaviors that separated the laity from the clerical world (p. 141). Thibodeaux sees this tension especially in attempts by high ecclesiastical authorities to control the unreformed parish clergy. The lower orders still clung to the masculinized identity of the laity that gave them status in their local communities. Thibodeaux uses the registers of Eudes Rigaud, archbishop of Rouen, to good effect. She also addresses changes in ecclesiastical legal procedure that made it easier to accuse and censure priests for sexual crimes. Among these, *per notorium* dispensed with formal accusations or even an accuser. *Per inquisitionem* allowed justices to initiate an investigation without a complaint. These innovations allowed a priest to be investigated for and convicted of a sexual charge if there was general agreement that he might be guilty. Efforts to control priests were again enacted on the masculinized celibate body and attempted to tame its resistance to regulation, its sexual weakness. Thibodeaux locates scandal and *fama* on the clerical body in terms of sexual sin, inappropriate violence, athletic competitions, and quarreling. Secular masculinized behaviors were the locus of thirteenth-century attempts by the high clergy to transform the unrepentant clerical male body of the lower orders. Thibodeaux holds that these local priests had no interest in clerical “vocation” but only in clerical “occupation” (p. 150). Their behaviors as secular men remained unreformed. The importance of their status in their local community outweighed the benefits of membership in the new celibate clerical elite. Their refusal to subscribe to a remote masculine identity furthered the chasm between them and the high elite clergy who embraced the model of manly celibacy.

In her conclusion, Thibodeaux addresses the minor clerical orders who were permitted to marry but only until they ascended the career ladder into major orders. Their prospects were modest indeed. Most minor clergy could not support a household on the low wages that accompanied a position in the lower orders. Thibodeaux shows evidence that clerical concubinage was sometimes the answer for such clerics who might eventually hope for entry into higher positions. Yet marriage alone was not the only factor at play. Isolation from a community of one’s peers accompanied the adoption of the new masculinized clerical model. The choice to pursue higher clerical orders demanded the repudiation of even more than a marriage and a wife. It necessitated the abandonment of one’s broader social network for a new identity inside a celibate male community. The risk was profound.

The book ends with the Reformation as accusations of sodomy were turned against the celibate priesthood again and legal clerical marriage was legitimized. Reformation thinkers “loosened the model of the manly priest” (p. 158) and allowed for sexuality in marriage. But with this freedom came increased scrutiny of clergy in their roles as fathers and husbands. They were to be models of patristic authority, disciplinarians, and supervisors of model families; God the father and his church in microcosm.

Thibodeaux’s monograph is important for medievalists with an interest in gender and masculinity and also for those who examine clerical behavior. It is innovative, well researched, and a crucial contribution to a significant lacunae in the field. One might be forgiven for wishing that the author engaged more fully with the feminizing language of Bernard of Clairvaux and Anselm of Bec/Canterbury in constructing celibate male identity. Her assertion of the difference between devotional “private” texts versus “public” ones doesn’t fully convince this reviewer (pp. 18-21). A more thorough examination of this polyvocality would only have enriched a wonderful book. This minor critique in no way dims the enthusiasm with which this work should be met.

## NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Van Houts, “The Fate of Priest’s Sons in Normandy with Special Reference to Serlo of Bayeux,” *Haskins Society Journal* 24 (2003): 57-106.

[2] P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, eds., *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013).

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[3] Katherine Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011).

[4] Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, ed., *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[5] David Spear, "The School of Caen Revisited," *Haskins Society Journal* 4 (1993): 55-66.

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