

FINAL REPORT
FACULTY RESEARCH GRANT PROJECT

Parish Priests in Late Medieval Germany

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This final report addresses the results of a research project funded in part by an ATU Faculty Research Grant. I received \$1900. This report follows the instructions provided in the Guidelines for Faculty Research Grants.

A. Title Page (see above)

B. Restatement of Problem Researched

Research in the religious history of Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries has long moved beyond studies of kings, popes and reformers to study the roles played by various social groups in embracing or resisting religious change. One group that has attracted recent attention is the lower clergy, made up of common parish priests, simple pastors, lowly local ministers, and village vicars. Historians have especially focused on how early-modern clerics—whether Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist or Anglican—redefined their religious and professional identities in the light of the changes brought by the Protestant and Catholic Reformations and the so-called ‘confessional age’ (the period 1500-1700).

Less understood is the professional identity of the parish priest in the previous century: in many ways the ‘base-line’ from which to understand the changes of the 16th and 17th centuries. My dissertation and subsequent research has sought to fill in this gap by studying the expectations placed upon parish priests in southern Germany during the 15th century and how these clerics negotiated their duties and status: that is, how these priests at the bottom of the ecclesiastical hierarchy interacted with the episcopal hierarchy above them and the patronage, parish and civic networks around them.

C. Brief Review of Research Procedure Utilized

In June 2006, I traveled to Germany to pursue research over the course of two weeks. I sought to gather further examples of two categories of documents.

1. Manuals for pastoral care: guidebooks written by and for parish priests, these detail in simple language the liturgical and sacramental duties of the common priest. Often shortened and simplified versions of academic treatises, these manuals poured off the printing presses of the late-15th century. One of them, the *Manipulus curatorum*, became a bona fide best-seller, having been printed in 119 editions between 1460 and 1500.

2. Endowment agreements: contracts between wealthy patrons and local priests to endow new clerical positions or to finance new priestly duties, whether sermons, memorial masses, or visits to a filial chapel. These agreements not only define the tasks to be carried out, but they also reveal characteristics desired in the priest as well as any demands raised by the clerical candidate. They are, in effect, job descriptions and negotiated contracts.

While in Germany, I worked at the archive of the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz and the University Library in Tuebingen, both of which have an abundance of works falling into category 1 above. I also worked briefly in the Wuerttemberg State Library and Archive in Stuttgart, which has a sampling of the sources described above as category 2.

D. Summary of Findings

The Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, a center for research on early printed books, had several copies of the *Manipulus curatorum*, two of which I examined (one due to its early date and the other due to marginal comments added by a reader). I compared these to another copy from the Tuebingen University Library. The simplicity and clarity of this text helps to explain its popularity, a point I will address further in an upcoming presentation "Early Print Culture, the *Manipulus Curatorum* and Manuals for Pastoral Care," at the 2006 Sixteenth Century Society and Conference.

The search for endowment agreements was less successful, in part because I missed one day of research in Stuttgart due to a Catholic holiday (yes, in southern Germany the state archives are closed on religious holidays). I did find seven endowments, most of which demanded that the priest not be absent from the parish while two also requested that the priest offer a sermon at least once a week (an increasingly common demand in the late 15th century).

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research project was very brief, only 8 days actually working in archives, and most of the money received went towards airfare to Germany. However, my work did expand the source base for my research and will greatly strengthen my upcoming conference presentation. Since receiving this grant, I have signed a contract with Brill Academic Publishers for a book-length manuscript provisionally titled *Conflicting Expectations: Parish Priest in Late Medieval Germany*. The manuscript is to be delivered by October 2007. I hope to spend about five weeks in Germany next summer to expand upon the work completed this past summer. To fund that aspect of the project, I intend to apply for an ATU Professional Development Grant.

Peter Dykeman

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