The Power of the Council:

The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, New Models for Spirituality

An honors thesis for the Department of History

Benjamin J. Smith

Tufts University, 2010

Table of Contents

I. *Introduction: Medieval Social Change, Heresy, and the History of Conciliar Decisions*

1

II. *Services and Benefits for the Laity in the Fourth Lateran Council*

17

III. *New Policies and Practices in the Fourth Lateran Council*

27

IV. *A Special Instance of Services: Canon 21 and Confession*

40

V. *Clerical Reform in the Fourth Lateran Council*

54

VI. *Enforcement of the Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council*

64

VII. *Unaddressed Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council*

69

VIII. *Conclusion*

72

Bibliography

74

I. Introduction:
Medieval Social Change, Heresy, and the History of Conciliar Decisions

At the opening of the Fourth Lateran Council, Europe was ripped by religious strife and heresy, and true believers in orthodox Christianity seemed to be on the decline. The established religious hierarchy, dominant in Latin Christianity for a millennium, seemed in danger of collapse. Yet, within a few decades after the council, Latin orthodoxy had achieved the upper hand, and heretical movements across Europe were in retreat. The Fourth Lateran Council helped to achieve such a massive turnaround through its radical reforms at the most basic levels of lay religious life. Under the program implemented by the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, alert and attentive clergymen, reformed and transformed from their earlier, more secular ways, would monitor lay religious life. The clergy would offer constant guidance and spiritual services that brought the laity more closely under the collective thumb of the organized church. In order to combat heretical movements and meet the needs of an increasingly spiritual population, the church hierarchy would need to focus on addressing issues of lay spirituality and the direct interaction between layman and priest. The canons of the Fourth Lateran Council strove to create a new mode of priest-layman interaction and reveal the path taken by the ecclesiastical hierarchy to return from the abyss it overlooked in the opening years of the thirteenth century.

This paper will explore the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council as they work together to advance a program of dramatic spiritual reform. In doing so, the paper will analyze in detail each canon relevant to lay spirituality. As a general guideline, the canons directly forming a part of the council's program will be divided into five separate and independent groupings. The first are those canons designed to offer new spiritual benefits to the laity. Following are those that changed church policies to improve the quality of ecclesiastical service. Among those that changed church policies, canon 21, which mandated annual confession and was possibly the most momentous canon, merits an independent discussion. Thereafter come the canons that reformed the lower clergy so that they might adequately fulfill the roles laid out for them in the earlier sections. The final group of canons discussed endeavored to enforce the other canons of the council and show the gravity the council attached to its reforms. Taken together, these five sections cover the breadth of the program of the council, and it is through their detailed study that the goal of the council becomes clear.

In order to clarify this paper's analysis, it is worth noting from the start the concept of a cleavage between laity and clergy that will be utilized. This concept is best expressed with the term 'organized church,' which includes all ordained Latin clerics from the lowest levels up to the pope, as well as the general goals and theological beliefs of this body, expressed best by the ecumenical and other church councils. The organized church is distinct from the laity in its position as a religious authority. This concept is key because it embodies the shift first emerging in the period of this paper—the early thirteenth century—away from a secularized clergy and towards a distinction between broader Latin Christian society and the Latin religious hierarchy. In particular, many of the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council made such a distinction, calling for new restrictions on the lowest levels of the clergy but not similarly addressing the laity. Nonetheless, this distinction would not have been entirely clear to a person of the thirteenth century, and therefore it is important that it be noted. With this term defined, discussion of the prelude to the Fourth Lateran Council can commence.

The twelfth and early thirteenth centuries had seen economic prosperity relative to the preceding period, resulting in social change that would eventually spur the Fourth Lateran Council's reforms. The largely rural and isolated economy of the Europe of the early Middle Ages had begun to transform itself into a more trade-oriented one. The late tenth and eleventh centuries had seen radical improvements in agricultural production across Europe. New land had been brought into production as woods were felled and swamplands drained.[1] New technology had also improved yields: improved plows and harnesses as well as the horseshoe allowed previously cultivated land to become more productive.[2] This came hand-in-hand with a revival of trade of agricultural goods, which in turn spurred trade in other raw goods such as tin and wool.[3] With new land under production and commerce restarting from its near-complete halt in the late ninth century, the agricultural revolution of the late tenth and eleventh centuries gave rise to the growth of towns across Europe. Towns served as centers of commerce and trade, and their new prominence challenged all authorities to adapt, including the organized church.

In particular, the prominence of new towns weakened the influence of the organized church and weakened the ties between priest and layman. The Lateran councils of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries would have to combat this through reform designed to reassert their authority and draw laymen back into the spiritual sphere of the orthodox Latin church. As the towns grew, they introduced a new member of medieval society, the bourgeois. Increasingly wealthy and influential themselves, the bourgeoisie used their newfound influence to shed or attempt to shed the secular or episcopal masters of the growing towns and govern themselves. The episcopal towns of Europe, in which a bishop rather than a minor lord ruled, were the most vulnerable to this sort of upheaval. In France, where waves of localized upheavals resulted in numerous independent towns, called communes, outside of royal lands, most of the municipal rulers cast out of their seats of power were bishops.[4] Elsewhere, a similar pattern took hold, with minor lords or fledgling republics replacing episcopal rulers across northern Italy and even Germany, where imperial forces opposed to the papacy tolerated bishops loyal to themselves but weakened episcopal rulers who were not.[5]

---

[1] Robert S. Hoyt, *Europe in the Middle Ages* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 262.

[2] Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Medieval Civilization and the Byzantine and Islamic Worlds* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1979), 172-173.

[3] Sidney Painter, *Mediaeval Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1951), 67.

Additionally, the relocation of people from the countryside to the growing towns severed traditional connections between priests and laymen, while at the same time the larger town communities created new spiritual links between laymen without the intercession of the church. Previously, priests had lived among laity on rural manors, and therefore laymen interacted with their priests frequently and had little exposure to outside religious ideas. However, the towns allowed separation of priest from layman and moreover allowed religious ideas counter to official doctrine to be disseminated widely and rapidly. One of the most notorious figures to take advantage of this was Henry of Le Mans, who after preaching publicly for just a few months in 1101 turned the entire town of Le Mans against its priests and bishop.[6] Henry presented one of the first faces of lay anti-clerical sentiment and might be seen as a forebear of the heretical movements that would challenge the organized church over the course of the twelfth century. The rise of the towns thus presented the organized church with resistance from the newly urban populations and required action on the part of the hierarchy to reestablish the organized church's authority and legitimacy. This, combined with the erosion of episcopal power by secular rulers in France, Germany, northern Italy and elsewhere, meant the organized church was increasingly losing the battle for secular authority. It therefore had to advance itself within the niche left in its possession: religious life and practice.

---

[4] Painter, *Mediaeval Society,* 75.
[5] Painter, *Mediaeval Society,* 75.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy had, in the eleventh century, made a serious effort to embrace the reforming spirit of the towns during and after the Investiture controversy. However, the decline of this spirit left reform in the church slow, piecemeal and insufficient to meet the hierarchy's needs. As Moore controversially writes, during the eleventh century, "The goals of the 'heretics' became those of the church."[7] While certainly the organized church itself did not become heretical (which might well be a contradiction in terms), it did embrace a radical new agenda for reform. Bishops and other ecclesiastical leaders railed against simony and clerical marriage, and the lower levels of the priesthood, under assault from the laity, found themselves also heavily criticized for their behavior by the highest authorities in the church.[8] Yet such a wave of reform within the ecclesiastical hierarchy could not be sustained. Secular rulers, incensed by their defeat in the Investiture controversy, continued campaigns to remove episcopal authority over towns. The towns themselves were only briefly appeased by the ecclesiastical hierarchy's fleeting zeal, and by the twelfth century, radical anti-clerical leaders like Henry of Le Mans had once again emerged outside of the church hierarchy.

---

[6] Robert Ian Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 19.
[7] Moore, *Persecuting Society*, 18.
[8] Moore, *Persecuting Society*, 17.

The Lateran Councils of the twelfth century were therefore struggling with maintaining the balance between reform on the eleventh century model and controlling the radical preachers of the twelfth century. The First Lateran Council, which took place in 1123, when it did attempt reform, did so piecemeal and largely by restating past rulings. Canon 4 of the First Lateran Council restated the Concordat of Worm's standards against lay investiture; canon 18 made a similar assertion, requiring that priests appoint bishops.[9] Practices such as the long-banned simony were condemned, and rules on consanguineous marriage, asserted at earlier synods, were mandated.[10] The farthest the council went in reforming lay behavior was to condemn some practices largely unrelated to religious devotion: robbery and counterfeiting.[11] Of the 22 canons, only two (canons 3 and 21) attempted to improve the spiritual status of the priesthood; both made age-old calls for clerical celibacy and against clerical marriage.[12] By contrast, four of the 22 canons dealt with the aftermath of an antipope and asserted the protection of papal-held land, and another four shuffled authority around within the hierarchy for the purpose of weakening the monasteries and lower priesthood.[13] The remaining canons covered a variety of unrelated issues including the Truce of God, converting churches into fortresses, lifting excommunication, and so forth.[14] As a whole, the canons were not obviously cohesive. Of the issues they covered, only a few would be present in later councils, usually in stricter terms: clerical celibacy, consanguineous marriage, and use of churches for secular purposes. These were not-insignificant bases for future decisions, but they do not hold a candle to the changes of the Fourth Lateran Council. Instead, the First Lateran merely laid the basis for innovation in future councils, in particular the Fourth Lateran.

---

[9] H. J. Schroeder, ed. and trans., *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937). 187.

[10] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 189.

[11] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 191.

[12] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 193, 196.

[13] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 194-195.

The Second Lateran Council, taking place a decade and a half after the First in 1139, contained a greater degree of reform, but it focused primarily on the internal structure of the organized church. It met immediately following a schism between Pope Innocent II and the antipope Anacletus, with the latter's decrees explicitly annulled by the final canon of the council.[15] For that reason, much of the council was directed towards restoring the church hierarchy, rather than addressing the laity, and with an eye towards clarifying which persons were eligible for which offices; notably, canon 28 demanded that candidates for episcopal office be "capable and trustworthy", presumably unlike Anacletus.[16] Clerics were to be free from harm, and neither tithes nor the possessions of deceased clerics could be seized by lay authorities.[17] Some canons did continue and slightly expand on reformist tendencies, with canons 1 and 2 maintaining the longstanding ban on clerics obtaining office through simony or other illicit manners, while canon 16 forbade clerical offices from being inherited.[18] Along related lines, canons 6, 7 and 8 forbade clerics and religious from marrying,[19] an oft-repeated mantra that had been present in the First Lateran Council as well, and the council made additional overtures towards separating the sexes by restricting nuns and beguines from religious practices.[20] Furthermore, all members of the religious hierarchy could not profit from the practices of medicine or law.[21] In order to ensure that the religious hierarchy was further obeyed, bishops could no longer lift excommunications they had not themselves made.[22] All of these latter changes offered reform of the clergy and priestly behavior, but moderate reform that could not satisfy the increasing demands on the organized church. Still, the Second Lateran Council had begun to seriously acknowledge the issues that the organized church faced in coping with its critics.

---

[14] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 192, 194, 196.
[15] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 213.
[16] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 212.
[17] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 202. 204.
[18] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 197, 206.

It was, however, insufficiently radical in its social engineering to end the criticism or even take a major step toward silencing it. Where the Second Lateran Council did attempt social engineering outside of the church hierarchy, its attempts were largely haphazard. Canon 12 clarified the Truce of God, while canon 13 condemned usury, canon 14 condemned tournaments and canons 18 through 20 condemned arson,[23] all merely reiterating existing Christian law. Only two canons specifically attempted to confront the alienation of society from the church hierarchy: canon 22 instructed clergy to preach against false penance, while canon 23 excommunicated a variety of anti-clerical heretics.[24] While certainly interesting as a sign that council took notice of lay discontent with the church, these canons fell short of a comprehensive attempt to improve the quality of interactions between clergy and laity or to control lay religious thought. The Second Lateran Council shows signs of precedent for future attempts at reform, but it did not strike at the heart of anti-clerical movements.

---

[19] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 201-202.
[20] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 211-212.
[21] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 201.
[22] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 198.
[23] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 203-204, 207-208.
[24] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 209-210.

The Third Lateran Council's canons aimed for the same modest but insufficient level of reform as those of the Second Lateran Council, despite increased unrest by its opening. Like the Second Lateran Council, the Third, in 1179, came in the immediate aftermath of a series of antipopes and internal church schism.[25] Even more than the preceding council, then, the Third Lateran Council focused on reforming the internal hierarchy of the church. For the first time, the canons of a council called for popes to be elected only with a two-thirds majority, and minimum ages were set for accession to various ecclesiastical offices.[26] Various other restrictions were also placed on the ordinations of new clergy, and the monasteries were placed more strictly under the authority of the bishops by requiring that they receive permission from bishops before they could receive tithes.[27] Additionally, canons 13 through 17 attempted to streamline the operations of the chapters: Clerics were forbidden from ministering at multiple churches and from transferring their mandates, while cathedral chapters were to use majority rule (presumably to favor reform) and guidelines were set for the selection of local rectors.[28] All of these restrictions made more distinct the ordering of the church hierarchy, but they were not directed towards the general public. Most actions of the Third Lateran Council, like the Second but unlike the Fourth, attempted to set in order the house of the organized church rather than assert its authority and promulgate its doctrine among the laity.

---

[25] Schroeder*, Disciplinary Decrees*, 214.
[26] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 214-216.
[27] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 220-222.
[28] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 227-228.

Where the Third Lateran Council did attempt a similar program to the Fourth, it did so piecemeal and with excessive precedent. The council repeated many of the mandates of the Second Lateran Council: against clerical marriage, against simony, against tournaments, against usury, against clerics acting as lawyers, and reiterating support for the Truce of God.[29] None of these were particularly monumental. When the Third Lateran Council did innovate in its interactions with the laity, its reforms were small; one canon provided special status for lepers.[30] Only two canons of the Third Lateran Council truly foretold the sweeping changes that the Fourth Lateran Council would attempt; under one, those who sheltered heretics were to be excommunicated, and under the other, all cathedrals were to operate free schools.[31] The former shows that the church continued to worry about the spread of discontent and was beginning to address the issue more harshly, while the latter would be expanded upon as a significant facet of the Fourth Lateran Council's program. The seeds for major change were there in the canons of the Third Lateran Council, but it would be the Fourth Lateran that would bring upheaval in the interaction between ecclesiastical hierarchy and laity.

The Fourth Lateran Council took a decisive turn as the result of events ongoing in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Coinciding with these councils, the twelfth century had seen a massive upswing in intellectualism that would drive much of the rationalization behind the program of the Fourth Lateran Council. The period has become known as the medieval renaissance. It saw a radical increase in both interest in and availability of works from ancient Greece and Rome. By the early thirteenth century, immediately preceding the Fourth Lateran Council, universities, previously virtually nonexistent, appeared in some of the cities of the Europe, offering new hubs for study. In turn, this meant the beginning of substantial achievements across the board in such practical fields as science, medicine and law as well as, most importantly for the church, in theology and philosophy.[32] This last change meant support for new or altered religious practices, many of which would be implemented by the Fourth Lateran Council. New ideas about law and religion spurred increased trust and reliance upon canon law to enforce these ideas. Most popes and members of the papal curia from c.1150 to well into the thirteenth century would be canon lawyers,[33] and they could be expected to focus their reform efforts on canon law. New intellectualism meant new ideas for the appropriate nature of the whole church and Christianity, all of which would manifest in the Fourth Lateran Council.

---

[29] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 221, 224-225, 231, 233.

[30] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 232.

[31] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 229, 234.

This rise in intellectualism saw a corresponding increase in spiritual challenges to the organized church. The twelfth century saw religious turmoil and upheaval in the form of heresy and ostensible reform movements on a scale not seen in Europe since the early days of Christianity. It was in the main this to which the Fourth Lateran Council reacted, as the approaches of the preceding councils had been insufficient to stem or counter evolving spiritual challenges to church authority. Even before the most significant religious turmoil, the earlier years of the twelfth century had seen religious conflict and small uprisings. These included such events as the 1146 insurrection of Arnold of Brescia, who briefly deposed Pope Eugene III[34] as well as more localized resistance such as that of Henry of Le Mans discussed above. Even alone, one such revolt might have scared the organized church and the councils, but they would give way to more serious and organized resistance to the ecclesiastical hierarchy later in the twelfth century. Heretical movements, some similarly anti-clerical and some still anti-clerical but radically different, would characterize the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and force the organized church into action to redeem its spiritual authority and enforce orthodox Christian doctrine across Europe.

---

[32] William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 212.
[33] Cook and Herzman, *The Medieval World View*, 201.
[34] Geanakoplos, *Medieval Civilization*, 315.

The most significant of these movements were the Waldensians and the Cathars (discussed further below), who in drastically different ways forced the organized church to act to counter their messages and their appeal through greater emphasis on the spiritual status of the laity. Of the two, the Waldensians were the less hostile towards the organized church and established Christianity, but as a result their unorthodox and anti-clerical doctrines were more easily promulgated among the people. The founder of Waldensianism, Valdes, held that the average person should attempt to live the simple life of the apostles in order to achieve rapport with the divine.[35] He envisioned himself and his followers as reformers with a mandate to preach despite their lack of ordination, in what he saw as an increasingly decadent and aloof Latin church.[36] They sought not to overthrow the existing order, but to change it in such a way that it would better meet the spiritual needs of the populace. In that sense, Valdes was much like the earlier agitators, although he initially attempted to work within the church hierarchy to advance the supposed benefits of apostolic poverty.[37] Indeed, the organized church might have preferably brought Valdes and his ideas into the fold, as they would do with the nearly identical Francis of Assisi but a few decades later. However, as Lambert describes, the Waldensians instead became "the classic example of the would-be reform movement drawn into heresy by the inadequacy of ecclesiastical authority."[38]

---

[35] Leonard George, *Crimes of Perception* (New York: Paragon House, 1995), 329.

[36] Mary A. and Richard H. Rouse, "The Schools and the Waldensians" in *Christendom and its Discontents*, ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86.

[37] George, *Crimes*, 328.

Following his rejection and excommunication by the established church in 1184, Valdes became more radical, rejecting such sacraments as marriage and increasingly questioning the right of the Latin priests to administer any sacraments at all, steeped as they were in a non-apostolic lifestyle filled, he said, with sin.[39] These accusations posed particular trouble for the organized church, for whenever someone embraced the Waldensian doctrine, he or she also abandoned loyalty to the clerics of the church. In order to meet the challenge, the organized church would move to violently expunge the Waldensians,[40] but violence alone could not suffice. The organized church would have to reform its preaching, services and organized clerical behavior in order to prevent a movement such as the Waldensians from exceeding the clergy in its appeal to the spiritual nature of the laity. The program of the Fourth Lateran Council would attempt just that.

The second of the two groups, the Cathars, proposed the more radical doctrinal challenge and had to be addressed more forcefully by the organized church and the Fourth Lateran Council, both doctrinally and with greater attempts to engage the laity in regular religious practice. Catharism departed significantly from orthodoxy, claiming the inherent sinfulness of all matter (including, most appallingly for the organized church, the Eucharist and the water of baptism[41]) and the unworthiness to preach of any who did not ritually attempt to purge themselves of the evil nature of the physical world.[42] In doing so, they eschewed the traditional order of the Latin church and all it stood for, only occasionally borrowing Christian imagery to draw in supporters.[43] The direct engagement of the Cathar priesthood with the laity—routinely preaching and seeking out converts—found a positive response among the laity, many of whom in southern France and northern Italy converted to Catharism during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

---

[38] Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977), 67.
[39] George, *Crimes*, 329.
[40] George, *Crimes*, 327.
[41] Jeffrey Burton Russell, "Summary of Catharist Beliefs" in *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Burton Russell (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 57.

Embarrassingly for the organized church, the doctrinal differences between orthodox Latin Christianity and Catharism likely would not have been obvious to a laity largely unexposed to Christian doctrine prior to the edicts of the Fourth Lateran Council.[44] Thus, the Fourth Lateran Council had the task not only of condemning Cathar beliefs as unorthodox (simple enough); it had also to plan for the spiritual education and integration of the laity in the standard ritual and life of orthodox Latin Christianity.

At its heart, the Fourth Lateran Council endeavored to do just that through sweeping change of its own to the nature of the interaction between organized church and laity. The council would in some ways emulate the Cathar and Waldensian strategies of active engagement with the laity while at the same time improving the public spiritual character of the orthodox Latin clergy and condemning deviant practices. All of this worked toward combating heresy and preventing future heretical challenges to the organized church, a threat the Fourth Lateran Council took extremely seriously.

The first canon of the Fourth Lateran Council makes clear the council's great consternation with the heretical movements engulfing much of Europe. The canon was not an explicit part of the council's effort at spiritual reform, but it shows just why the council found radical measures to be necessary. The first canon consisted of a new "Lateran Creed," stating explicitly that the sacraments and practices denied by the Waldensians and Cathars were in fact an integral part of Christian life and moreover that orthodox doctrine could not be reconciled with Catharism, Waldensianism or other heresy. The creed declares, "The sacrament of baptism…leads to salvation,"[45] refuting the Cathar claim that water, being material, could not purify a soul. Additionally, the canon explicitly makes mention of transubstantiation for the very first time,[46] asserting the overwhelming importance of reception of the Eucharist and refuting the Cathar notion that nothing good could be of the material world. The Waldensians were not spared implicit condemnation either, for in the same breath the canon declared, "This sacrament [Eucharist] no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church."[47] Those for whom the actual doctrine of orthodox Christianity had previously been in doubt could no longer have doubts. The Lateran Creed made official the council's disavowal and condemnation of all heretical movements. Moreover, it set the stage for the rest of the council's program to cultivate orthodox Christian spirituality loyal to the Latin church across Europe.

---

[42] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 123.
[43] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 124.
[44] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 126.

The second and third canons of the council further emphasized that the council's goal would be to combat heresy through a new, reformed spiritual program. Canon 2 condemned Joachim of Flora,[48] a late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century reformer and mystic who predicted a change in Biblical eras as well as claimed that the divinity contained a fourth member, the sum total of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Joachim was not seen as a heretic *per se*, but his views were certainly unorthodox.[49] The council's decision to condemn Joachim ended serious consideration of his heterodox teachings.

---

[45] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 238-239.
[46] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 238. Cook and Herzman, *The Medieval World View*, 205.
[47] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 238.
[48] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 240.

More sweeping than canon 2, canon 3 excommunicated all those who denied any aspect of the Lateran Creed, denouncing them as heretics.[50] While the Lateran Creed had expressed the council's condemnation of such beliefs, canon 3 now cut all heretics off from the church. Their views would no longer be seen as legitimate challenges to orthodoxy within the organized church, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy could attack them as outside the norm—legitimizing orthodox assaults on the Cathars, Waldensians and others. Only the remaining orthodox believers would remain in the church to be inducted into the new practices implemented by the rest of the council. The stage was set by the first three canons for a sea change in the practice of Christianity in the Latin world. This change was to be the task of much of the remainder of the council's decrees.

---

[49] George, *Crimes*, 166.

[50] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 242.

II. Services and Benefits for the Laity in the Fourth Lateran Council

The Lateran Councils of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries all attempted at least piecemeal reform. However, the continued and rising strength of heretical movements such as the Cathars and Waldensians meant that those attempts were simply insufficient. In the Fourth Lateran Council, the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Latin church came together to create a more substantive and methodical overhaul of the lay experience of religion. The canons of the Fourth Lateran Council strongly reflect this change in priorities for the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Some of the canons of the council introduced substantial new services and policies intended to improve the spiritual health of the laity as well as their connection to the hierarchical church polity. This marked a shift in the policy of the ecclesiastical hierarchy towards appeasing the laity in order to combat heretical movements and prevent further conversion of spiritual laymen to heretical causes.

It has already been shown that the canons of earlier councils relating to the laity made insufficient effort to provide services. Where they did attempt reform, it was in clerical behavior or in banning some particularly sinful behaviors. The Fourth Lateran Council, in contrast, began to craft a vision of positive rights for the laity provided by the organized church. Where priests had previously been permitted to charge for sacraments, now they had to dispense sacraments for free. Education, also, would come to be provided freely, to the benefit of some laymen but more critically for the purpose of raising the quality and education of the priesthood. The council demanded that clerics be called to offer bedside care to ill laymen, and it forbade the heavy financial burdens sometimes imposed by greedy clerics on their parishioners. All of these new rights and services of the laity made the establishment more favorable to the laity in spiritual and secular manners. In the wake of the heretical movements, the ecclesiastical hierarchy was transforming in order to engage laymen and society as a whole in its spiritual proceedings. Church policy moved from a focus on internal disputes to a broad-based approach designed to enhance the spiritual circumstances of the laity and, by doing so, ensure their loyalty to orthodox Christian beliefs.

Four canons of the Fourth Lateran Council provided new services and benefits to the laity from the organized church—canons 11, 22, 34 and 66. Each canon in some way obligates priests and churches to advance the community welfare of the laity spiritually or through guarantees of education, health and safety. None of the actions called for by these canons reduced the authority of the church. In fact, they may have increased church authority by increasing the penetration of the priesthood into the lives of the common people. Nonetheless, that increased presence bought great boons to the laity of the sort not seen in earlier councils. These canons of the Fourth Lateran Council show genuine interest in the improvement of all Christians as Christians, a theme that set the council apart from its predecessors and set the tone for a more available faith.

Canon 11 deals with education in the churches and mandates that all cathedrals and large parish churches employ a tutor capable of teaching the medieval *trivium* and theology. Canon 11 is alone in this group of decrees in stemming from an earlier council; the text explicitly references a canon of the Third Lateran Council that required cathedrals to hire instructors. However, the Fourth Lateran Council extends the earlier decree substantially by requiring instructors "not only in every cathedral church but also in other churches where means are sufficient".[51] This meant a dramatic extension of the requirement, particularly in Italy, where the growing cities supported multiple wealthy churches. Canon 11 meant that each of these churches had to possess an instructor who could educate some laymen—many with the intent of becoming priests, although the canon does not demand that they do so. This requirement shows a sense from the council that the church had to provide a religious education to the laity, although likely to only a few. To do otherwise was to allow the laity to continue in ignorance of the distinctions between orthodox and heterodox beliefs.

Still, the benefits of this canon were not intended solely for the lay residents of a particular church's locale. Quite the opposite was the case; the canon only briefly makes mention of "other poor students" who are also to be instructed.[52] Instead, the chief targets of this canon were the unlearned clergy, mentioned explicitly multiple times. Presumably, the Fourth Lateran Council found that continued lack of learning among many clergymen offensive and detrimental to the authoritative image of the church. The majority of clergy trained from childhood were more or less uneducated: capable of reciting by rote the religious forms learned in their clerical training but incapable of reading or writing.[53] Yet it is clear that clerics who could not read well would receive less respect than those who could impress the masses with their skill and knowledge. By the end of the Middle Ages, at least, literacy had become strongly associated with status and ability to command,[54] something the church undoubtedly sought. By rectifying the problem of clerical illiteracy, the council could hope to gain great moral and symbolic authority. In that sense, it might be compared to bans on clerical marriage: Both placed the lowly clergymen on a level separate and above the laymen whom they oversaw.

---

[51] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 253.
[52] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 253.
[53] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1992), 189.
[54] Jacques Verger, *Men of Learning in Europe at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Lisa Neal and Steven Rendall (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 156.

Yet even by targeting the clergy canon 11 revealed an interest in engaging broader society. Priests, representing the church's closest ties to the lay community, often could not read, instead relying on an oral or memorized understanding of the scriptures.[55] Understandably, this had limited the organized church's ability to communicate its beliefs to the laity: Few laymen had interactions with the learned monks and prelates, but most interacted regularly with priests.[56] Better education for the priesthood improved the ability of those priests to relate important religious information in those interactions. By focusing energy on educating the clergy, the Fourth Lateran Council recognized once more the importance of the lowest level of the priesthood. Earlier councils had conferred this recognition as well, in such decrees as those banning the practice of clerical marriage. But in the Fourth Lateran Council, the ecclesiastical hierarchy trained its focus on how the lowest clergymen could be improved in a thorough education. The organized church was investing in its lowest echelons, and that by extension meant greater and more effective spiritual offerings to the laypeople at large.

The second among the canons expanding the service of the church to the laity, canon 22, improved the lives of the laity in a rather backhanded manner. It declares, "When physicians of the body are called to the bedside of the sick, before all else they admonish them [the ill] to call for the physician of souls," i.e., a priest.[57] The motivation for this demand is at least partially explained by the text of the canon itself. It states, "We publish this decree for the reason that some, when they are sick and are advised by the physician in the course of the sickness to attend to the salvation of their soul, give up all hope and yield more easily to the danger of death."[58] By calling for a priest before administering any medical care, a doctor would, by the reasoning of the council, ensure that his patients had adequate spiritual attention and thereby prevent them from surrendering to illness unnecessarily. Explicitly, then, the council had in mind the continued life and spiritual salvation of the Christian laity, who had to be coaxed into health by a priest as well as a doctor. According to the canon itself, doctors were not always ideally situated to aid patients, some of whom might despair, yet priests could prevent them from despairing. The presence of a priest in addition to a doctor would result in improving patients' actual physical status.

---

[55] Shahar, *Childhood*, 189.
[56] Daniel Bornstein, "How to Behave in Church" in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 113.
[57] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 262.

To the modern ear, this may sound simply backward, that a priest should be necessary to treat all minor ailments. Yet from the perspective of the medieval period it was not. The canon goes on to describe bodily illness as caused by spiritual unhealthiness. According to the text of the canon itself, physical symptoms are manifestations of spiritual troubles, and treatment of physical symptoms will not heal a patient unless the underlying spiritual troubles are addressed.[59] If this were actually the case, priestly services would be of immense benefit to the ill and should constantly be encouraged. And no one of the thirteenth century would have challenged the notion that spiritual well being preceded physical health. Indeed, chaplains and priests concerned with the care of dying souls staffed period hospitals for precisely that purpose,[60] and a series of councils held in France immediately prior to the Fourth Lateran Council held that the organized church had ultimate responsibility for all hospitals due to the spiritual nature of medical care.[61] The presence of a priest able to offer spiritual counseling and, in dire need, perform a confession and last rites, would meet that spiritual need in medical care.

---

[58] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 263.
[59] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 263.

Furthermore, the canon forbids that a doctor should advise a morally sinful treatment on the grounds that the soul must be valued above the body.[62] Doctors who unscrupulously suggested unorthodox remedies could seriously damage the spiritual health of their patients. The council again highlights there the importance of protecting souls, each individual's most valued possession in thirteenth century understanding. Thus, canon 22 was devoted to improving the lives and health of the common laypeople. Requiring the presence of priests contributed to greater overall healthiness and made attending the ill a duty of the priesthood.

Canon 22 might also be perceived as an attempt by the church to extend its authority deeper into the lives of the common man. While priests may well have been present frequently at earlier treatments, now they had to be present during any medical emergency. This meant greater attention to the spiritual needs of the ill, but it also meant that the ill would look more strongly towards the church for help. The presence of a priest at the bedside reinforced the notion that God, with the organized church as his vessel, and not the common physician in attendance, healed the sick of their maladies. The reinforcement of clerical and ecclesiastical power at the sickbed meant that the church was concerned with how the ill, being treated by a physician, perceived their recovery: As a gift from God through the church, or as a work of man. This was already a theme in many hagiographical works well prior to the council, indicating a tendency to downplay the role of physicians in healing. Hagiographies from as early as the eighth century and as late as the thirteenth cite patients saved only by intervention of the divine after medicine had failed.[63] [64] Their medical miracles leaned heavily on the notion that all healing came from God, not from the physicians. This attempt to reinforce divine healing shows the council to be concerned with the organized church's status in the mind of the individual layperson. In order for their authority to be maintained in contrast to the heretics, it was in the interests of the church to be perceived to provide substantial spiritual benefits in addition to the actual spiritual benefits having a priest at the bedside conferred.

---

[60] James W. Brodman. "Religion and Discipline in the Hospitals of Thirteenth-century France," in *The Medieval Hospital and Medieval Practice*, ed. Barbara S. Bowers (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 123.
[61] Brodman, "Religion and Discipline," 125.
[62] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 263.

In canon 34, the council created an additional obligation of the church to the laity not to collect tithes in excess of what the laity could reasonably be expected to pay. According to canon 34, when expenses were running high in a cleric's domain—particularly that of a bishop, but also sometimes of lesser clerics—the local ecclesiastical hierarchy would charge excessive tithes to cover the costs. The canon states that bishops and other clerics often "seek among their subjects plunder rather than help,"[65] or in other words that extremely high tithes would be levied, so high that the local laity might struggle with subsistence. Such abuse could not possibly help the laity, and the council's concern indicates that it did cause severe stress on occasion. Additionally, the canon required that, in addition to paying back any proceeds a cleric gained through excessive tithing, that cleric was also to donate an equal amount to alms.[66] Thus, even when the abuse did occur, the council made the punishment provide benefit to the impoverished laity hit hardest by the tithing. Overall, the council in canon 34 demonstrated concern that the laity should not be taxed beyond their ability to provide for themselves—even if that meant lower revenues for the clerics. It therefore served the interests of the laity; the canon's implementation, curbing a significant abuse conducted by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, would have reduced the possibility of the laity turning against their bishops.

---

[63] Stanley Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine* (Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles, 1974), 83.

[64] Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine*, 93.

[65] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 271.

Furthermore, the council itself implies that the canon also endeavors to improve the morals of the clergy themselves. It states that clerics involved in such high tithing "chase after gain to their own damnation,"[67] a clear indictment of the activity as more than detrimental to the community. Excessive tithing was detrimental to the souls of the clerics themselves. Given the common accusation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the clergy was not fit to perform religious ceremonies due to the poor state of their own souls, canon 34 can be seen also as an attempt to combat that viewpoint and to rectify a genuinely damning behavior among the clergy. As discussed later on in this paper, the clergy were now to be seen as aloof and austere—seeking personal gain at the expense of the laity did not fit that model, but abstaining from enriching oneself at others' expense did.

Canon 66 was the final of the canons that created an obligation of the church to the people: the provisions of the sacraments, free of charge. The primary text of the canon reads, "It has frequently come to the ears of the Apostolic See that some clerics demand and extort money for burials, nuptial blessings, and similar things, and, if perchance their cupidity is not given satisfaction, they fraudulently interpose fictitious impediments."[68] The text of the canon suggests that the sacraments were intended to be administered without any required payment. Priests demanding recompense were already known to be in the wrong, at least by the high authorities present at the council. Still, such practices were widespread, as evidenced by the use of "frequently" in the council's admonition. By cracking down on the exaction of money in exchange for spiritual requirements, the council and the church as a whole showed once again a newfound willingness to intervene to the benefit of the common people of Christendom. When the priests charged for the sacraments, those sacraments might well not be received. Now, access to them was guaranteed for all.

---

[66] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 271.
[67] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 271.

In canon 66, as in canon 11, the Fourth Lateran Council combined concerns for the spiritual welfare of the people with promoting the honor, integrity and purity of the priesthood. Calling for payment for sacraments made priests into vessels for profit: The power to issue God's blessings became a talent to be sold. The Waldensians and other anti-clerical groups cried against supposed priestly greed and avariciousness, as a period tract against them by Alan of Lille testifies.[69] Prices attached to the sacraments could only exacerbate such concerns. Charging for blessings at burials, weddings and so forth needed to be excised in order to cleanse the priesthood of its sinfulness. A priesthood free of greed, much like the educated clergy called for in canon 11, would receive far greater respect.

Additional evidence for the notion that the council intended canon 66 to improve the spiritual welfare of the common people comes from the second declaration of that same canon. In addition to forbidding the practice of charging for the administration of the sacraments, canon 66 explicitly allows the donation of gifts to the church as thanks for performing sacraments.[70] In fact, it goes so far as to condemn as heretics laymen who speak out against the practice of, as Schroeder paraphrases, "giving freely something for ecclesiastical services rendered."[71] Demanding such payments damaged the reputation of the church and prevented the laity from receiving necessary sacraments and therefore had to be eliminated. Nonetheless, the organized church did not oppose the increase in its own wealth as a result of gracious donations. It still saw fit to enrich itself through sacraments, so long as the thankful donors donated freely and so long as those unable to donate still received their necessary blessings. The organized church as a whole was perhaps not made any less concerned with its profit-taking, but it did take into account the spiritual needs of the people as well as the public relations advantages of not mandating payment.

---

[68] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 289.

[69] Alan of Lille, c. 1200, "On the Catholic Faith Against the Heretics of his Time" in *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey Burton Russell (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 53.

---

[70] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 289.

[71] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 289.

III. New Policies and Practices in the Fourth Lateran Council

Some of the canons implemented by the Fourth Lateran Council sought to improve the spiritual welfare of the common people through the creation of new organized church policies and practices. Strictly speaking, these were not the same as the rights of the laity provided by the previously discussed canons. While that first group of canons offered specific services or protected the laity from abuse, the canons discussed below instead changed the operating procedures of the organized church in such a way that enhanced clerical-lay interaction, improved lay spirituality within orthodox Christianity, and isolated heresy. The canons changing church policy affected a wide variety of matters: new policies required that some priests be able to speak the local vernacular, called for episcopal vicars when bishops could not fulfill their full range of duties, protected the sanctity of the Eucharist and chrism oil, and reformed the strict religious standards behind marriage. Yet, on the whole, all of these changes in policy worked towards the same goals: an increase in the quality of religious services and a reduction in lay isolation from the organized church.

In order for religious services to draw in the laity, the clerics providing them had to be able to command the sympathy and understanding of their local parishioners. Canon 9 of the Fourth Lateran Council provides for the appointment by bishops of vicars in polyglot communities. Those vicars would conduct the rites of the church as preferred by each separate linguistic community. Schroeder considers this canon to have been primarily motivated by the Fourth Crusade and subsequent nominal unification of the Greek and Latin churches.[72] This interpretation is most probably correct, as the text of the canon itself makes reference not only to a variety of languages but also "various rites and customs,"[73] indicative of the continued differences between the Greek and Latin rites. It is reasonable to assume that the council did indeed intend the canon to cover the Greek territories that had recently come under Latin administration with the Fourth Crusade. In that case, it represents a serious attempt to engage with the Greek people and to unify the Greek and Latin churches more permanently.

---

[72] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 251.

Tolerance of the Greek rite and its promotion through the preservation of vicars representing Latin rite bishops in the Greek rite could have led to better cross-community ties. The council's tolerance for the Greek rite should come as less of a surprise than might be initially expected. Despite the schism between the Greek and Latin churches almost two centuries previous, the Greek rite was maintained and more or less tolerated among the Catholic Norman rulers of southern Italy and their predecessors.[74] However, separate vicars for the Greek rite community were a novel concept that had not been introduced in the mixed-rite territories of Italy.[75] As southern Italy had already integrated its Greek rite community without the existence of vicars, the presence of Greek rite vicars should have made the Latin job in the east easier. Other factors not worth dwelling on here would prevent the Greeks from trusting or engaging with the Latins. Still, canon 9 was a significant attempt by the council to reach out to the people of the east in much the same way that the council busily engaged with those outside of the organized church of the west.

The text of the canon leaves it ambiguous whether it may also have applied to communities in Western Europe where no single vernacular language predominated.

---

[73] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 250.
[74] Paul Oldfield, *City and Community in Norman Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 49.
[75] Oldfield, *City and Community*, 53.

Differences in vernacular would not matter for the purposes of conducting mass and administering sacraments, all of course performed in Latin in the west or Greek in the east, but they would have mattered for day-to-day communication with the local people. If the canon was considered to apply to polyglot western European communities, it would indicate another attempt to engage the wider community through discussion in the vernacular.

Indeed, the council did coincide with an increasing movement towards the spiritual empowerment of the laity through the introduction of vernacular discussions on religion. Lack of literacy or understanding in Latin had previously excluded the laity from spiritual discourse, but increasing pressure from a more interested elite and bourgeoisie led to a flowering of vernacular religious discourse—oral and written—beginning in the thirteenth century, around the time of the council.[76] This domain had previously been dominated by the heretics, some of whom published in the vernacular and many of whom preached in it.[77] The tendency towards the vernacular in some areas of religious discourse suggests that the council may indeed have intended the canon to cover areas outside of the Greek rite where multiple vernaculars were spoken. The reference to different rites in the text of the canon makes this somewhat unlikely but does not rule it out. In any case, even attempting to accommodate the Greek rite would have shown a greater attempt at universality, regardless of whether the council intended to further extend the canon to other polyglot communities. The council was, either way, willing to accommodate the laity in order to advance orthodoxy within its domains, although the scope of that accommodation cannot be definitively ascertained.

---

[76] Renate Blumenfeld-Kozinski, Duncan Robertson and Nancy Bradley Warren, *The Vernacular Spirit* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1.

[77] Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Universrity Press, 1990), 94.

Although canon 9 made a serious attempt to integrate different rites in an effort to ensure everyone received appropriate preaching, nowhere in the Fourth Lateran Council is a concern for the promulgation of preaching and other religious services to the masses more present than in canon 10. In canon 10, the council calls for bishops to ensure that they provide adequate services to all who live in their dioceses through the appointment of "suitable men, powerful in work and word" to represent them when and where they cannot themselves be present.[78] The canon opens with the declaration, "Among other things that pertain to the salvation of the Christian people, the food of the word of God is above all necessary" and continues in emphasizing the great significance of preaching for the salvation of the people.[79]

By requiring the appointment of representatives to replace those bishops who could not, for whatever reason, perform their duties of preaching to their flocks, the council emphatically endorses the notion that all the people should have access to regular sermons for their spiritual benefit. Bishops had been supporting greater preaching on a local level since at least the preceding century, but no concerted effort had been made to expand preaching across Christian Europe.[80] Therefore, canon 10 creates a new obligation for the church to the laity to provide that service. All the common people must be acknowledged and preached to in such a way as to bring them to salvation, if not by their bishop, then by his representatives.

---

[78] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 252.
[79] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 251.
[80] G. R. Evans, *The Church in the Early Middle Ages* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 75.

Also significantly, the canon concerns itself with the problems facing the church in reaching out to the people. The councils cites a variety of reasons why a particular bishop might be unable to fulfill his episcopal duty: "on account of their manifold duties or bodily infirmities, or because of hostile invasions or other reasons, to say nothing of lack of learning."[81] "Manifold duties" recognizes the large communities served by single bishops; some church provinces covering areas equivalent today to entire countries sent only a handful of episcopal representatives to the council.[82] Despite regular travel, bishops could not hope to provide full services to all members of their dioceses alone. Illness would of course have compounded the problem, perhaps preventing bishops from even performing mass in the cathedral. And an unlearned bishop could provide no readings from the Bible at all, greatly limiting his ability to give "the food of the word of God." All of these deficiencies in the episcopal system canon 10 sought to rectify by requiring bishops to appoint what were effectively stand-ins. Under canon 10, the people would no longer go without preaching simply because their bishops could not or would not adequately serve them.

Equally importantly, canon 10 acknowledges the significance of more mundane religious duties of the bishops, all of which were also to be carried out by his assistants. The canon explicitly mentions that a bishop's replacements might hear confessions or impose penances, both also key to spiritual health (as discussed later with regards to canon 21), as well as a bevy of unstated spiritual services ("other matters that pertain to the salvation of souls").[83] These alike would "nourish the soul", as called for by the canon.[84] While preaching had been, if intermittent in coverage, at least present throughout the past centuries, confessions and penances had, outside of the church hierarchy, withered away.[85] Combined with the mandatory confession called for in canon 21, canon 10 creates an expansive program for providing spiritual services to the common people. The hierarchy, including the bishops, had to take an active role in promoting the spiritual wellbeing of their parishioners—or else make a serious effort to find others who could provide the same service.

---

[81] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 251.
[82] Jane Sayers, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe* (London: Longman Group, 1994), 100.
[83] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 252.

One of these canons that changed church policy is canon 20, which required that "the chrism and Eucharist be kept in properly protected places", that is, under lock and key (as the canon elaborates).[86] According to the text of the canon, this was to prevent their use for "impious and blasphemous purposes,"[87] which must have been widespread enough for such a decree to be warranted. Schroeder claims that such blasphemy was indeed fairly common: Much earlier councils had attempted to deal with the issue and additionally forbade the provision of the Eucharist and chrism to those intending to use it for sorcery.[88] Such abuses would degrade the holiness of the Eucharist and chrism and render them unfit for use in religious ceremonies, and they would also act against God. Accusations of the use of church materials for evil purposes were not unheard of even in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, before the rise of the canonical image of witchcraft.[89] Furthermore, the degradation of the Eucharist and chrism would harm the image of the priest and the church

---

[84] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 251.
[85] Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 70.
[86] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.
[87] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.
[88] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.
[89] John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 99.

as providing some holy service, as the service would not be holy if degraded. The council's interest in the Eucharist and chrism therefore show an interest in the lives and perceptions of the laity.

The Eucharist and anointment with the chrism (during baptism, confirmation and last rites) were among the most important religious experiences the laity would have during their lifetimes, as demonstrated by their continued prominence in the canons of the council—not only in the provisions of this canon, but also in canon 66's stand concerning the practice of charging for the sacraments, and the explicit mention of the Eucharist in the Lateran Creed on the first canon. To receive the Eucharist or to be anointed with the chrism meant to receive something holy into a life otherwise not directly involved in Christian activities.[90] The spoiling of the Eucharist or the chrism oil by sacrilege was therefore of grave concern for the spiritual health of the common people, particularly as even those who otherwise ascribed to church theology often rejected the Eucharist's divinity.[91] If they were anointed with tainted chrism oil or fed a tainted wafer, their greatest spiritual experiences themselves became tainted. The implementation of canon 20 would have combated that problem and allowed the laity to receive their sacraments unpoisoned by others' sinfulness. Thus, canon 20 as well shows a concern for the spiritual integrity of the lay people, even though it meant being protected from themselves.

Additionally, the integrity of the Eucharist and chrism were necessary for the authoritative position of the church to be maintained. This is indicated by the penalty called for by canon 20 against those priests who failed to lock up the Eucharist and chrism. The canon calls for a three-month suspension of any priest who leaves them unprotected, even without actual blasphemy occurring, with a worse penalty to follow if blasphemy did take place.[92] The council clearly took the threat of such blasphemy seriously, and punishment for the priest responsible shows that the council was inclined to believe that a priest who failed in his duty to keep the Eucharist and chrism safe had also lost, at least temporarily, the authority to hold his post. This indicates even further concern for the opinions of the laity as well as for their spiritual health: The council wanted to retain the laity's respect and thereby preserve the dignity of the church hierarchy. Moreover, in order to provide adequate Christian spiritual services to the laity, they needed that respect and that dignity. After all, the laity frequently found the entire practice of communion dubious;[93] there was no reason to make them more suspicious. In putting canon 20 into place, then, the council affirmed its concern for the effectiveness of spiritual services for the laity and also buttressed its own authority to continue to provide said services.

---

[90] Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 119.
[91] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 223.

In addition to direct concerns about the spiritual integrity of the laity, the Fourth Lateran Council went to great lengths to codify and simplify the rules surrounding marriage. One of the sacraments of the church, marriage ("nuptial blessing") was one of the rights explicitly mentioned later on in canon 66's prohibition on charging for the sacraments.[94] But canons 50 through 52 dealt more directly with the issue of marriage in an attempt to resolve issues that had plagued the institution for much of the Middle Ages. Being a holy sacrament, marriage had special importance to the church. However, the earlier restriction on marriage to only those outside of seven degrees of consanguinity both left few eligible partners for the rural peasantry and threatened the validity and holiness of the many marriages that violated this restriction. Canon 50 would relax the restrictions on consanguinity, while canons 51 and 52 provided new guidelines for how proper Christian marriages should be performed. Although these three canons did not directly provide any particular service to the people, they did streamline one of the most essential aspects of life for those outside of the church. This group of marriage-related canons embraced the significance of those outside of the organized church and attempted to ease their lives.

---

[92] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.
[93] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief,* 223.
[94] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 289.

Through the implementation of canon 50, the council abolished some of the particularly stringent restrictions on marriage based on consanguinity to a level more easily achieved by the common people of the era. Although detailed (and occasionally fictionalized) family histories were collected by some of the noble and otherwise wealthy families of the period, most families made little or no attempt to record their genealogies.[95] Nonetheless, previous canons of earlier Lateran councils had required that no marriage take place between two people interrelated within seven generations—far longer than any human memory.[96] This created a dilemma for the common people, who were highly unlikely to know who was within seven levels of consanguinity due to a lack of recordkeeping. Exacerbating this, most of Europe lived in small rural communities with few options for marriage in the first place; it was entirely possible that every person in a small farming village was related to all the others within seven generations.[97] A decade before the council, even the pope himself acknowledged the problem in a decretal issued in 1205.[98] Canon 50 addressed both of these problems by easing the restriction on consanguineous marriages to only four generations. By doing so, the council simultaneously legitimized many marriages that had previously been in violation of church law and also opened up marriage options for a highly restricted common people. The spiritual health of the people was restored—easier marriage in accordance with Christian precepts meant more people fulfilling their necessary sacraments. Previous councils had been content to restate aged and problematic restrictions, but canon 50 addressed the concerns of the common people that had gone ignored. It was yet another sign that the Fourth Lateran Council took engagement with the population of Europe seriously.

---

[95] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 142.
[96] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 189.
[97] Goody, *Development of the Family,* 142.
[98] Michael M. Sheehan, *Marriage, Family and Law in Medieval Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 254.

The further canons relating to marriage show a similar drive to solve problems plaguing the common people. Unlike canon 50, canon 51 implemented restrictions on marriage rather than reducing an existing restriction. However, the restrictions imposed benefited the personal and spiritual circumstances of the laity. Chief among canon 51's provisions was a formal ban on a previously accepted practice known as clandestine marriage. Clandestine marriage caused spiritual troubles for its participants as well as legal difficulty for lay authorities. By addressing it, the council showed a desire to intervene to improve the quality of an institution—marriage—to which no member of the church hierarchy was supposed to be involved himself directly and yet which affected the lay masses greatly.

The ban on clandestine marriage improved the spiritual health of the population. Clandestine marriage, that is, marriage without widespread public knowledge, stemmed from a tradition that any couple could be married so long as they said their vows to one another and considered themselves married.[99] Such marriages occasionally had priestly witnesses, but even this witness was not required for a clandestine marriage to take place, only the saying of vows and consummation of the marriage. Naturally, clandestine marriages had created a great deal of headache for the church and lay authorities alike. Men and women alike frequently claimed clandestine marriage to another person who denied the marriage had taken place, and no authority could easily determine whether such a marriage had in fact been vowed.[100] Moreover, marriage clandestinely put the spiritual integrity of that marriage into question: Clandestine marriage often did not follow the religious requirements on consanguinity.[101] Canon 51 itself implicitly acknowledges this motivation behind the prohibition, citing a desire that the restriction on marriages within four degrees of consanguinity be "strictly observed" as motivating the canon.[102] Finally, clandestine marriage threatened the validity of non-clandestine marriages by associating them with a practice often steeped in sin. Clandestine marriage posed a risk to the salvation of the people whom it affected: They could quite easily become ensnared in sinful practices.

A condemnation of the practice removed the threat to the salvation of those otherwise morally upright and reduced the threat to the institution of marriage overall, assuming the people obeyed the council's commands. Additionally, the ban on clandestine marriage benefited the lay and religious authorities, who could now more precisely track down who was married to whom. Canon 51 also made official the requirement that banns be posted in the local church prior to a marriage.[103] Banns allowed the local people to object to marriages they found to be morally problematic, ostensibly reducing the number of marriages violating church law and common custom. Overall, canon 51 improved the spiritual welfare of the laypeople while structuring society in a fashion that favored the established church and other emerging bureaucracies.

---

[99] Dyan Elliot, "Lollardy and the Integration of Marriage and the Family" in *The Medieval Marriage Scene: Prudence, Passion, Policy*, eds. Sherry Roush and Cristelle L. Baskins (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 40.
[100] Goody, *Development of the Family*, 148.
[101] Goody, *Development of the Family*, 149.
[102] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 280.

The least momentous of the marriage-related canons, canon 52 was still also a substantial contribution to the structure and benefit of lay society. Unlike canon 51, canon 52 made marriages easier to conduct. While canon 51 required that banns be posted in a church prior to marriage and that objections resulting form those banns be taken into account, canon 52 restricted the degree to which objections to a marriage on the grounds of consanguinity could prevent it. Specifically, canon 52 forbids "hearsay witnesses" from providing evidence against a marriage "unless they be reputable persons to whom uprightness is a precious asset."[104] Additionally, such "reputable persons" were required to have hearsay evidence of consanguinity not from only one now-deceased person, "but from two at least, who must have been reliable persons."[105] It is easy to understand how concerns over consanguinity could have resulted in improper objections to marriages without canon 52. An ungrounded or poorly grounded objection on the grounds of consanguinity four generations past would have been difficult to disprove yet easy to manufacture. Thus, in canon 52 the council foresaw a problem that could arise from the requirement of the posting of banns—false or hearsay testimony against marriages—and forbade the practice before it even became a serious concern. The council, then, showed not only worry on behalf the common people but foresight in the problems they might face as well, and a willingness to combat those problems before they caused issues for the church hierarchy. Canon 52 showed a council looking toward the future trends in marriage and the issues that would need to be addressed for the benefit of the common spirituality as a whole.

---

[103] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 280.
[104] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 281.
[105] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 281.

As a whole, changes in official policy tended towards greater simplicity and improved quality of service for the laity. The canons indicate a council endeavoring to streamline Christian religion and bring the organized church's influence upon the laity more pervasively and effectively. This compares well to the models of the heretics themselves, who also found greater support in constant and improved contact between priesthood and laity. But the Fourth Lateran Council was not finished with its program, and the most notable change in organized church policy has yet to be discussed.

IV. A Special Instance of Services: Canon 21 and Confession

Perhaps the most significant of the Fourth Lateran Council's canons, and certainly one of the most important in the apparent program to address the spiritual involvement of the laity, was canon 21. According to the canon, every Christian must "faithfully confess their sins at least once a year" to his or her parish priest.[106] There are a few points to this requirement worth unpacking.

First, it required the laity to consider seriously the state of their moral character through an understanding of the nature of sin. In order to be able to confess sins to a priest, any person would first need to be able to identify their sins to themselves. Indeed, they would need to be able to know the nature of sin. Second, it created an annual communion—in the informal sense—of parishioner and priest. In that circumstance, the parishioner would be expected to discuss matters of spirituality with the priest and perhaps be educated on his or her own moral failings. For a laity that often had no other exposure to discussions of spirituality, the confessional brought the Christian religion into their lives, even if only annually. Third, mandatory confession entailed recognition of the priest as a figure of some authority in the local community. Past doctrine had always asserted this, but mandatory confession, when it actually took place, would have rendered it concrete as every person, even those of great authority, was subject to the absolution of the local priest. Fourth, the council used the canon's mandate that confession be made to the parish priest to counteract worldly motives for avoiding confession. Each of these points merits separate consideration, as do the other contents of the canon and possible objections to the significance of the canon itself.

---

[106] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 261.

However, first it is worth exploring the history of confession and penance prior to the Fourth Lateran Council. The theological tradition of confession had been poorly established prior to the Fourth Lateran Council, and its implementation as mandatory was therefore a sea change in western Christianity. Under the traditional Christian view of the sacrament of penance, forgiveness of sin involved three steps to renewed spiritual purity: confession, satisfaction and contrition.[107] Prior to the twelfth century, the greatest emphasis had been placed on satisfaction, or penitential acts performed to show remorse and to provide restitution to God and to those harmed by a sin.[108] Additionally, theologians made much of the importance of contrition, or complete and total remorse and love of God, in salvaging the souls of those who had sinned.[109] By contrast, the ritualized act of confession, in which a priest himself would grant absolution, found little theological support before the twelfth century.

Over the course of the twelfth century, major innovators in theology such as Peter Lombard began calling for confession. However, Lombard himself did so while claiming that the actual salvation of the soul could not begin until God himself intervened with saving grace, leaving confession a necessary ritual but practically a hollow one.[110] Writing around the same time, Hugh of St. Victor lamented that many of his fellow theologians still argued that confession was unnecessary or even contrary to remission of sin.[111] The theologian Gratian, writing also in the mid-twelfth century, found the arguments for contrition with and without confession equally compelling.[112] Even though confession had acquired theological support, it remained secondary to other aspects of forgiveness.

---

[107] W. David Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 15.
[108] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 16.
[109] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 17.
[110] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 21.

However, this weak pro-confession perspective gave way to stronger support for confession around the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, just in time for the council to change the nature of confession. Thirteenth century theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, uncomfortable with the limited role of the priesthood in even the twelfth century conception, began to claim that the ritual of confession itself led to contrition. Through the "power of the keys," priests could absolve a person's sins and, by extension, cause God to grant them saving grace.[113] Theologians were endorsing confession at around the time of the council, marking a break from previous centuries that the council could exploit.

This theological importance came hand-in-hand with increased frequency of confession. Writing in the twelfth century, theologian Alan of Lille lamented that not even priests confessed their sins as often as once per year; the laypeople were far worse, with only a handful confessing annually.[114] Possibly in part due to the lack of institutional support for confession by the doctrines put forth by theologians, many laypeople simply never met with their priests to discuss their sins. Yet the Fourth Lateran Council changed that. Canon 21 would be actively enforced by the church—primarily through regular reminders within the community and cajolement from priests, but also, occasionally, through punishment of those who failed to confess.[115] Within a century after the Fourth Lateran Council, many laypeople were confessing two to four times annually, and the vast majority confessed at least once a year.[116] The mandate for annual confession had a real and lasting impact on the practice of confession that would determine the future of the practice for centuries to come.

---

[111] Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance*, vol. II, *The Western Church from A.D. 450 to A.D. 1215* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1961), 743.
[112] Watkins, *History of Penance*, 744.
[113] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 24.
[114] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 70.

By mandating annual confession, the Fourth Lateran Council created a situation in which the laity had to seriously consider their own moral and religious failures and take responsibility for such failures. That the canon was implemented at all—especially in the context of earlier local decrees with a similar goal, discussed below—shows that abstention from confession was widespread in the Christian world. This advent of confession in the lives of many laypeople previously cut off from the moral ponderings of religion would have brought great change. For one, the council would have perceived it to greatly improve the spiritual health of the population. Theologians were now finding confession to be necessary for salvation. If confession were necessary for salvation, a mandate for it would vastly improve spiritual welfare. In a spiritual system such as that of Christianity with a great deal of emphasis on salvation in the shedding of sin, identifying those sins would be key. Once the sins were identified, they could be atoned for and absolved.

Such, indeed, was the purpose of confession: The confessing layman would state his or her moral failings, for which spiritual remedies would be prescribed. Meyers defines confession as, "A recounting, made secretly to a priest, with a detailed self-accusation of all sinful acts, their frequency, and their circumstances."[117] By requiring confession, even just once annually, the council effectively required the common people to approach seriously their moral standing. They had to be able to identify their sins and to present them cogently, which meant a rudimentary understanding of the nature of sin itself. In that sense, canon 21 connected deeply to the council's concerted attempt to improve the spiritual welfare of the laity. They would now have to devote greater energy to understanding their sins and therefore would become more familiar with the bounds of orthodox Latin beliefs.

---

[115] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 33.
[116] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 35.
[117] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 16.

Second, requiring confession increased religiosity by offering the laity an opportunity to communicate directly with their priests about theology and what were the behaviors necessary for living a good Christian life. At least in theory, the priesthood was expected to be able to provide serious spiritual guidance and to have a well-grounded understanding of the technicalities of faith, absolution and salvation in Christianity. Due to relatively low education levels among many of the clergy (something addressed in other canons and also elsewhere in this paper), not all were able to communicate the spiritual ideals of Christianity to their parishioners. Nonetheless, the council clearly expected that they should and would, as its attempts elsewhere to improve clerical literacy and general religious education make clear.

In a confessional as mandated by canon 21, an educated priest could provide information about how to properly maintain a spiritual lay lifestyle as well as initiate a serious dialogue about the general tenets of religion. In a context in which the laity otherwise might not attend church at all and would not be able to understand the Latin necessary to read the Vulgate Bible or to comprehend the meaning behind the various religious chants, that sort of dialogue might be the only exposure of the laity to Christian spiritual guidance. Regular religious discourse kept the laity knowledgeable of and adherent to orthodoxy.

Furthermore, the establishment of mandatory confession through canon 21 improved the standing of the priesthood in small, localized communities. Outside of the larger settlements, where bishops often possessed substantial secular authority in addition to their religious power, churchmen might not stand out within the community. Other problems faced by the clergy, such as illiteracy and general immorality, discussed further in other canons and later in this paper, contributed to the problem, and the council would attempt to address them in manners unrelated to canon 21. However, canon 21 also improved the standing of the clergy by placing local priests in an explicit position of authority over each person in their parish at least once a year. In a confession, the priest possesses all of "the power of the keys": The power to advise and also the power to prescribe penances to atone for wrongdoing.[118] In order to achieve their salvation, the people must at least seriously consider the consultation of the priest and presumably obey it. People who did not ever attend confession or other church services beforehand would now be subject to the priests in exactly that manner.

This could certainly be perceived as self-serving on the part of the organized church. However, in the light of the spiritual services provided by mandatory confession, discussed above, it seems more reasonable to interpret this implication of canon 21 as simply an attempt to bring more of the population fully into the Christian fold and away from heresy. The changing theology behind confession also supports this conclusion. With theologians increasingly concerned with absolution through confession as a path to contrition and reconciliation with God,[119] confession by necessity would become a greater spiritual imperative. Those who obeyed their priest and performed the necessary penances would be absolved of sin and eventually admitted to heaven. The council may well have sought to increase the power of the priests, but that increased power also meant greater spiritual benefits for the laypeople, spiritual benefits that a changing theology now required.

---

[118] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 18.
[119] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 24.

Some scholars may object to the significance ascribed to canon 21's requirement for mandatory confession in the broader historical context. Despite the great significance frequently attached to canon 21 (it is well-known enough to be referenced by its first three words, *Omnis utriusque sexus*), it was not the first evidence of a requirement for regular confessions. Schroeder cites earlier synods that instituted similar, occasionally more restrictive requirements: Parishioners might have been required to confess their sins on specific holidays, perhaps multiple times per year.[120] Because of these pre-existing requirements, Schroeder interprets canon 21 as a much weaker declaration intended only to ensure that the laity confessed to their own parish priests and not others.[121]

Yet none of the synods Schroeder cites (Châlons-sur-Sâone in 813, Augsburg in 952, etc.) were particularly important to the broader church or widely followed. Unlike earlier calls for mandatory confession, that of the Fourth Lateran Council had the appeal of the council's official ecumenicity as well as its particularly large attendance; it could be expected by those attending the council to have far greater impact than local synods that did not substantially change even local practices.[122] Schroeder himself admits that the practice and requirement of confession do not appear to have been well established prior to the Fourth Lateran Council.[123] Additionally, Tentler emphasizes that the imposition of confession with the full power of papal and conciliar authority made canon 21 far more likely to be obeyed than prior attempts.[124] The Fourth Lateran Council's call for confession only once a year may have been a pragmatic reformulation of earlier decrees designed to improve adherence. Meyers calls it the organized church "adjusting to the realities of thirteenth-century lay religious life."[125] However, that adjustment also meant that the mandate for confession would be obeyed where it had not been before. Earlier councils and synods calling for similar measures may be taken as precedent for the imposition of such a requirement, but they do not relieve it of its significance.

---

[120] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 261.
[121] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 262.
[122] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 22.
[123] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 261.

This is evident in the great importance attached to canon 21 by both contemporary and later writers. In writing his summary of medieval theological thought on confession and penance, Watkins closes with the Fourth Lateran Council, stating that "The modern system of the Latin Church is henceforth in force," with minimal modification thereafter.[126] Certainly the council itself would have expected that its decrees be followed, and the increasing prominence of confession in centuries thereafter indicates that they were indeed correct.[127] Canon 21 may have had precedent, but its implementation of mandatory confession was still a major step for the council to take, and the canon should be interpreted as significant in the broader context of church history.

Of course, it is also important to recognize Schroeder's interpretation for drawing attention to a separate concern. Canon 21 did have significance as a mandate to the parish priests. The main reason for Schroeder's interpretation of canon 21 as not momentous is the text immediately following the mandate: laypeople must confess annually "to their own

---

[124] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 22.
[125] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 32.
[126] Watkins, *History of Penance*, 749.
[127] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 35.

[parish] priest".[128] This second segment of the mandate, Schroeder argues, was intended to avoid abuse of the parish system by both priests and laity. Laypeople, he says, were inclined to avoid their local priests and instead head to other parishes in order to confess to a different priest. Often this would have been to avoid the possibility of public condemnation. During the period of the Fourth Lateran Council, and for centuries prior, confessions were occasionally held in public, preferably in the sight of all, which meant a penitent's sins could rapidly become public knowledge.[129] An anonymous writer of the late twelfth century cited this issue as causing penitents to travel to distant parishes.[130] Additionally, parish priests themselves had financial motivations to lure in outsiders to give confessions and take communion at their churches. Tithes were paid to the church at which communion was taken.[131] In addition, in many regions an additional payment was to be made directly to the priest hearing a confession, which Meyers cites as inhibiting confession prior to the Fourth Lateran Council but rectified by a separate canon, canon 24,[132] discussed elsewhere in this paper.

In theory, confessing in a different parish should not have proven problematic from a spiritual standpoint if one was confessing elsewhere for wholly innocent reasons. In practice, however, confessing elsewhere led to behavior that was certainly not morally upright on the part of all involved. Priests sought profit and laypeople avoided proper penance. Clarifying that confession had to be given locally meant a reduction in clerical and lay abuses alike, which could not help but improve the spiritual standing of the population as a whole. Thus, Schroeder is correct to interpret the call for the laity to confess locally as significant, as it did substantially contribute to the agenda of the council to improve overall spirituality through control of clerical and lay behavior. However, that particular significance does not detract from the overall import of the canon as mandating the annual giving of confession from a far more prominent pulpit than it had ever been mandated from before.

---

[128] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259, 261.
[129] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 82.
[130] Watkins, *History of Penance*, 746.
[131] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 262.
[132] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 71.

Aside from its policies related to confession, canon 21 further cemented both the authority of the priests and the spiritual redemption of the laity through satisfaction, or penance. In addition to the requirement of annual confession imposed by the canon, those confessing were also expected to follow up with penances assigned to absolve them of sin. Those who confessed were mandated to "perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed"[133] upon them by their priest in order to be absolved of their sins. Certainly this was not a new requirement for those confessing; confession and satisfaction were inextricably linked by their sequential performance.[134] Still, penances now performed by those who previously did not confess opened up a new avenue through which the priests possessed authority. Priests had the power to decide on appropriate penances and to dole them out to the laypeople.[135] This meant that laypeople seeking to atone for their wrongdoing now had guidance for the council's proper Christian manner in which to reconcile with the divine.[136] In addition, the explicit mention of penance made certain that penances would in fact be imposed—and performed, at least so far as the laypeople felt the compulsion to obey the council. Because penances were an essential aspect of achieving contrition in the theology of remission of sin,[137] penances meant a society overall absolved of more of its sins and in greater communion with the divine. And so, in including penances explicitly in canon 21, the council again displayed a concern for presenting the laity with improved methods of spiritual involvement.

---

[133] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.
[134] Sarah Hamilton, "Doing Penance" in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 141.
[135] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 16.
[136] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 97.

In addition to restating the need for penance, the canon also improved the overall spiritual welfare of the people by improving their access to and attendance at regular ritualized religious celebrations. Beside the program of mandatory confession and the performance of penances, canon 21 also required the annual reception of the Eucharist at Easter by all Christians, as well as further encouragement towards taking the Eucharist at other times of the year.[138] Alongside mandatory confession, this meant, for the previously non-attending layperson, a far greater degree of exposure to all of period Christian spirituality. While confession and penance gave insight into Christian morality, taught the laypeople proper behavior, and provided absolution for sins committed, mandatory attendance at Easter mass and reception of the Eucharist fulfilled the important ritualistic function of religious faith. Additionally, heretical movements including the Cathars and various anti-clerical sects had challenged the holiness of the Eucharist and the church's authority to administer it, a challenge that had to be met by a reassertion of the Eucharist's significance.[139]

---

[137] Meyers, *"Poor, Sinning Folk,"* 16.
[138] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.
[139] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 196.

Quite aside from the understanding of morality entailed by confession, Christian salvation still required the appropriate ritualized behavior.[140] For the people at whom this segment of canon 21 was targeted, those who did not previously receive the Eucharist at Easter, the necessary rituals were missed even if confession taught them how to live a good life and removed their past sinful ways. With attendance at the annual Easter mass, the most basic of Christian rituals would also be performed, bringing the layperson one step closer to salvation. Combined with the later canon 66, which guaranteed proffering of the Eucharist free of charge, the laity now had less excuse to miss the ritualistic aspect of the Christian religion as well as the spiritual side.

All of these broad mandates issued in canon 21 would need to be enforced, and unlike many other canons, canon 21 made a serious effort to ensure that its precepts would in fact be carried out and not ignored by those left unexposed to the decisions of the council. In order to promote adherence to the precepts laid forth by canon 21, the council further mandated that all be notified of this particular canon's contents through postings of its requirements at churches throughout the Christian world. As the text states, the council was concerned that the laypeople (and perhaps also unscrupulous priests) would claim ignorance of the decree to avoid their obligations: "Let this salutary decree be published frequently in the churches, that no one may find in the plea of ignorance a shadow of excuse" to avoid confession or attendance at Easter mass.[141] No other canon of the council (or any other period council) received such a mandate for its proliferation in the text of the canon itself, marking the significance the council attached to the annual attendance of mass and the giving of confession. Notably, the declaration targets the laypeople, who had not been targeted in any decree of the earlier Lateran Councils for a failure to know the council's commands. The council was determined to make confession and the Eucharist standard and—more importantly—widespread practices on an annual basis across Europe.

---

[140] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 140.
[141] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 260.

Furthermore, the council attempted to make certain in the final section of canon 21 that no abuse would deter the people from seeking out regular confessions with their local priest. In making confession mandatory, the council did face a conundrum on what to do about the potential for abuse of privacy inherent in the confessional. Priests would learn of sins through confession, but some confessed sins would also be criminal or otherwise damaging to a sinner's public persona. In the event that a priest chose to break the veil of privacy around a confessed sin and reveal that sin to the greater local populace, distrust of the priest could result. To combat this, the council mandated in the final section of the canon that priests absolutely must not reveal any information imparted to them in the privacy of the confessional.[142] This stipulation would have allayed the fears of commoners who might otherwise have distrusted the priests. Such distrust may have been partially behind the motivation of the laypeople, discussed above, who traveled to distant parishes to give confession. If word leaked in the far-distant parish of their sins, it would not have their reputation among the people with whom they interacted on a daily basis. By requiring the priests to remain silent, the council helped to allay those fears and encourage the people both to confess generally and specifically to confess to their own priest in an honest and open fashion. In that sense, the section encourages trust in the organized church and also improves the odds of the laity acting in their own spiritual interests by confessing. The mandate for confession and the mass brought the laypeople more deeply into the spiritual world of Christianity, a mark of the overall program of the Fourth Lateran Council.

---

[142] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 260.

As a whole, canon 21 revamped the process of repentance—confession and satisfaction—and greatly expanded its influence in the lives of the laity. Moreover, it created an environment in which the laity would experience Christian spirituality where many previously had not. By promoting lay spirituality in such a manner, the council counteracted much of the spiritual appeal of heretical movements and at the same time clarified proper Christian doctrine and demonstrated the organized church's spiritual importance to the laity. Although many of the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council contributed to the overall program of promotion of lay spirituality, it is arguable that canon 21 did so the most.

V. Clerical Reform in the Fourth Lateran Council

In addition to changes for the laity, the Fourth Lateran Council turned directly to reform of the clergy. It developed a program for the reform of the lowest levels of the organized church so as to improve the quality and quantity of direct interaction between organized religion and the laity of Christian Europe. Key to this reform were a collection of canons, each denouncing particularly unbecoming or otherwise undesirable behaviors exhibited by many parish priests and other lower clergy and indicating how they were expected to reform their behavior. Though these canons did not, generally speaking, mandate how priests were expected to interact with the common people, they did make a serious effort to improve the image of the Catholic priesthood as a godly order. Such an improvement of the image of the Catholic priesthood meant transforming priests from barely distinguished from the laity to creatures of the church hierarchy. The effort would, if successful, mean greater authority wielded by the priesthood within local communities to implement the council's overall plans for expanding the spiritual involvement and investment of the laypeople in Christianity. Therefore, these canons are essential to the overall goal of much of the council.

Canon 14 restates an already common demand for the chastity of the clergy in order to set the clergy apart. Literally, the canon states that clerics must be "chaste and virtuous".[143] This has significance in two ways. First, and most obviously, it restates the command of earlier councils that clerics should not engage in sexual activity—unholy and distant from God[144]—of any sort. That the Fourth Lateran Council found it necessary to restate this command alone makes it clear that many priests remained far from chaste. In some parts of northern Spain, married priests would be accepted even well after the Fourth Lateran Council, and the practice was widespread beforehand.[145] In addition, the combination of chastity and virtue reemphasizes the supposedly inherent vice in sexual activity.

---

[143] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 255.

The virtue of chastity among the priesthood was not a completely new idea; earlier councils had made similar proclamations in favor of clerical chastity. Nonetheless, the appearance of such an overt combination of chastity and virtue in the Fourth Lateran Council showed concern with sexual activity despite the fact that it had not always been perceived as a problem. This might not come as a surprise, as the heresies to which the council was reacting, including most notably Catharism, emphasized the divinity of celibacy—possibly more extreme even than called for by canon 14—and the evil of sexual activity.[146] The overall program of the Fourth Lateran Council meant that such a decree would receive greater attention, and the chastity of the priesthood would come under increased scrutiny. Whether actually beneficial from a spiritual perspective or not, clerical chastity became, through canon 14, a significant aspect of the Fourth Lateran Council's reform.

However, the Fourth Lateran Council took upon itself to pursue legislation against other clerical vices as well, not seen in earlier councils. Canon 14 only began the parade of canons dealing with such vices; canon 15 immediately following addressed further concerns about other worldly clerical behaviors: imbibing alcohol and hunting animals. Canon 15 did not completely forbid the consumption of alcohol, of course; after all, wine was an essential part of the Eucharist, increasingly the subject of clerical attention at the time, and also found positive mention in the Bible. Still, it called for clerics to "carefully abstain from drunkenness" in order that "abuse be absolutely abolished."[147] So, while clerics were still allowed to drink, excessive consumption would be condemned and, according to the canon, the offending cleric suspended from his office and benefice.[148] This condemnation, while not found in preceding Lateran Council, is nonetheless unsurprising. Prevailing views from the time held that drunkenness was one of the least Godly behaviors, certainly not expected of a priest, a belief that would only increase later in the Middle Ages.[149] Overall, the purity of the clergy required a substantial degree of abstention from alcohol, even though small quantities were necessary for ritual purposes.

---

[144] Paula Rieder, "Insecure Borders" in *The Material Culture of Sex Procreation and Marriage in Premodern Europe*, eds. Anne McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnacion (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 99.
[145] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 31.
[146] George, *Crimes of Perception*, 68.

Canon 15 made clear that the new reformed clergy envisioned by the Fourth Lateran Council did not involve such unbecoming pursuits as intoxication that hindered performance of their clerical duties. Intoxication would, as the canon itself states,[150] banish reason and prevent reasonable discourse on the part of the priests, discourse necessary to provide the ecclesiastical services to their parishes now more expected of them. The punishment for violation of the prohibition of drinking was suspension from office,[151] which would have removed the offending cleric from his duties as a contributor the church. The general improvement of the clergy through the removal of drunkard clerics would be necessary in order to accurately perform the appropriate religious ceremonies, some of which, such as confession, had been reformed by other canons of the council. The clergy had to be effective, and canon 15 attempted to make them more so.

---

[147] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 256.
[148] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 256.
[149] Lynn A. Martin, *Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 78.
[150] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 256.
[151] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 256.

A further set of restrictions in canon 16 again emphasized the austerity of the clergy, although these restrictions did not directly improve the ability of the clergy to provide services. In canon 16, the council forbade clerics from "engag[ing] in secular and, above all, dishonest pursuits", including attendance at theaters or other performances, visiting taverns, and gambling or observing gambling,[152] as well as a host of restrictions on clothing to be discussed later. All are pursuits primarily for the purpose of enjoyment of the experience rather than any productivity. Additionally, theater at the time was associated with unsavory individuals and behaviors, including prostitution.[153] Clerics were expected to avoid activities intended solely for diversion and instead remain devoted to their religious duties.[154] In some cases, these pleasurable activities were or could be sinful: prostitution in the theater, gambling in taverns. But, just as significantly, the restrictions on them were about controlling the image of the clergy as austere. By implementing the latter portion of canon 15 and the earlier portion of canon 16, the Fourth Lateran Council sent a clear message that the clergy had to be controlled in its impulses and forced into a position as the model Christian citizens. They could not be trusted to pursue practices that inhibited their priestly duties, such as drinking, but they also could not be trusted to pursue practices that merely sullied—or might sully—their souls. In the new system, priests were new creatures set apart from the common people, and in creating that system, the Fourth Lateran Council had to keep the priesthood under strict control.

---

[152] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.
[153] Donalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theater in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 112.
[154] Bornstein, "How to Behave in Church", 111.

Further controls of the clergy in canon 16 attempted to enforce this notion of an austere and separate clergy, now intended to watch over the laity. Canon 16 forbids a wide array of clothing, including any red or green garments, buckles, ornamented sashes, rings not associated with their offices, "or anything else indicative of superfluity."[155] This last proclamation makes clear the council's goal: The priests were to be modest and lacking in frivolity. Such austerity could lend credence to their new role as guardians of the secrets of Christianity and would also set them apart from the laity with which they interact. This parallels the Cathar *perfecti* and other priests of heretical movements, who also dressed and behaved austerely in a manner that impressed the laity into supporting them.[156] In order for the established church to achieve the respect and control required to implement that program in the lives of the laity, the clergy had to be remade into an entity both separate and aloof from the laypeople: thus the austerity in clothing called for by canon 16. Control and discipline of the clergy would allow for control of the spiritual lives of the common people as well.

The discipline of the clergy also extended to practical matters, as in canon 17. Canon 17 decried those clerics who did not sleep enough, staying up late into the night after sundown.[157] Because they did not sleep, such clerics rushed through matins or failed to perform to perform them at all due to being late arising; the canon calls their performance of matins “hurried and careless”.[158] Additionally, the canon denounced those who rarely said mass (“scarcely four times a year”) and those who “do not even attend mass” and chatted with the laypeople rather than pay attention when they did attend.[159]

---

[155] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.
[156] George, *Crimes of Perception*, 68.
[157] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.

These condemnations indicate supposed problems with the clergy the council attempted to rectify, one being that the clergy did not perform the proper rituals, or did so poorly. The hasty and careless matins, or the priest who does not perform mass, meant a breakdown in the ritualized nature of religion. Priests were not properly performing the holy actions required of them as a part of their duties. As a result, the overall spiritual health of their parishes would by necessity suffer. This certainly would not fit with the program of the council, to improve the spiritual well-being of Christian Europe. In order to do so, the council needed to control clerical behavior in this case by condemning those who do not sleep properly and those who neglect to perform important religious rituals.

But perhaps even more significantly, canon 17 is an indication of the clergy needing to act as models for the laity. The clerics condemned for their failure to attend mass, or to pay attention, are not so much neglecting their duty to perform the mass as they are taking away from its holiness. Particularly noteworthy is the explicit mention of the laity: Part of the canon reads, “When they [the negligent priests] are present [at the church during mass] they are engaged outside in conversation to escape the silence of the choir.”[160] Such engagement suggested that everyday affairs were more significant than the mass itself. Under the new model the Fourth Lateran Council attempted to implement, such a treatment of the mass was simply unforgivable. When the priest ignored the mass, they ignored and dismissed the central message being put forward by the established church itself, and by Christianity. For a program that endeavored to increase the presence of Christian spirituality in the population, that could not be allowed. Thus, priests who did not maintain rapt attention during mass were condemned, and all priests are commanded to "celebrate diligently and the devoutly the diurnal and nocturnal offices."[161] In that way, the church rituals are performed, and the laity are encouraged to participate in what the council viewed as such important Christian spiritual behaviors as the mass.

---

[158] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.
[159] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.
[160] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.

Somewhat unlike the canons preceding it, canon 18 removed a group of duties from the domain of the clergy in an attempt to prevent priests from harming their reputations as godly individuals. Canon 18 forbade clerics from pronouncing death sentences, executing anyone, or even being present at executions.[162] Additionally, clerics were forbidden to judge a variety of cases relating to banditry and murder—"men of this kind devoted to the shedding of blood."[163] They were also forbidden to perform any "surgery involving burning and cutting."[164] As a whole, these commands make clear that the council desired to keep the clerics' hands clean of human blood. Executions themselves were not banned by the canon, merely designated to lay authorities, so the canon cannot be taken as a condemnation of capital punishment. Rather, the canon should be taken to demonstrate a concern that priests who execute or order the execution of criminals might be contaminated from their exposure to execution, considered a profane act,[165] and therefore not have divine sanction and be able to command their parishes. Given attempts in earlier canons already discussed to set the clergy apart as an austere and august body, this should come as relatively little surprise. Such a dirty job as execution could not possibly fall to one ascetic enough to compete in austerity with the heretical ascetics. Canon 18 sets the clergy apart once more, separating them further from the laity that they serve. The formula of the council in enacting its program is to create a new clergy to oversee the spiritualization of the laity; canon 18 supports that new clergy by absolving them of any duty to perform executions, a worldly and profane task.

---

[161] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 257.
[162] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 258.
[163] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 258.
[164] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 258.
[165] James J. Megivern, *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 25.

Finally among the measures implemented by the council to reform the clergy and the trappings of the priesthood, canon 19 makes most clear the desire of the Fourth Lateran Council to create a priesthood that is commanding and aloof, better than rather than equal to the laypeople of Christian Europe. Canon 19 does not, however, deal directly with the behavior of the clergy, unlike preceding canons. Instead, it commands that no regular household items be stored in churches "so that the churches have the appearance of the houses of lay people rather than of the house of God,"[166] and also that churches as well as religious artifacts and objects "be kept clean and bright".[167] The first quotation reveals the intent of this legislation. Churches must be set apart from their lay counterparts, able to be visually distinguished in a positive manner. They should not contain anything worldly, only godly, and they should shine with cleanliness. Much like the profane executions, the profane dirt and worldly objects that characterized a lay home could not taint a holy place. The purpose of distinguishing from the lay households is clear: The churches must maintain the appearance of divine authority. This fits neatly into the program of the Fourth Lateran Council, for the authority of the church itself is essential to the authority of its attending priest. When the church appears clean, well-kept and holy, so too does its keeper, and the priests can more effectively do their duty of implementing the council's plans for spiritual reformation. Canon 19 therefore works to the goal of the council, that the ecclesiastical hierarchy be able to impose improved Christian spirituality throughout the Christian domains of Europe.

---

[166] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 258.
[167] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 259.

Listed separately from the other canons designed to improve the priesthood but just as significant, canon 27 set out guidelines for who should be appointed as priests or other members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Those charged with appointing priests were admonished not to appoint incompetents into the priestly office because of the new focus on the lower levels of the priesthood for their regular interactions with the laity. The canon informed all levels of the hierarchy that, "It is better to have a few good ministers than many who are no good."[168] Additionally, when appointing ministers, the bishops and their prelates were to "diligently prepare and instruct those to be elevated to the priesthood in the divine offices and in the proper administration of the sacraments of the Church."[169] While none of the canons admonishes the priests themselves, it does acknowledge that many incompetent or uneducated men reached the clergy, something that should not happen. The new standard for achieving the priesthood—knowledge of the divine offices and sacraments and a level of basic competence—would help to ensure that future priests would be of a higher caliber. Canon 27 was therefore as important as the disciplinary canons in improving the priesthood, and its concern for the quality of priests showed an overall concern for the quality of ecclesiastical services provided to the laity, perhaps even more than the canons calling for specific clerical improvements.

---

[168] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 267.
[169] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 267.

In the canons above, the Fourth Lateran Council expressly sought to improve the quality of the priesthood and to more clearly delineate the distinction between the sacred orders of the organized church and the profane nature of daily life. As a response to the heretical movements the council sought to combat, this was understandable. Many heretics, most strongly the Cathars but also the Waldensians (tellingly known as the Poor Men of Lyons)[170] emphasized the isolation of sacred priestly orders from the profane world through abstention from the same activities the Fourth Lateran Council legislated against. In order to appease lay spiritual sensibilities and convince the laity that the orthodox Latin church had correct beliefs, the council effectively borrowed from the heretics' *modus operandi*. Borrow they did in their reforms of clerical behavior, although the council's changes were never so extreme as the practices of the heretics themselves. Nonetheless, the clerical reform was a clear attempt to win back the confidence of the laity in the spiritual services of the Catholic church. It surely fits neatly into the overall program of the council to appeal to the laity.

---

[170] George, *Crimes of Perception*, 326.

VI. Enforcement of the Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council

All of the above decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council shifted the focus of the ecclesiastical hierarchy onto addressing the spiritual state of the laity, and yet none provided enforcement mechanisms. Three canons near the beginning of the council did achieve that, however, and their importance to the overall program of the council must not be understated. The council itself could demand that the priests take on an austere role and cajole the laity into understanding orthodox Christianity. Alone, however, it had no guarantee that these canons would hold in the parishes, far distant from Rome and from the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchs who approved the decrees.

Canons 6 through 8 attempted to change that reality by setting forth guidelines for how bishops and archbishops were to ensure that all parishes under them obeyed the council's decrees. In that matter, the religiously educated upper hierarchy could guarantee that the parish priests did not simply ignore the Fourth Lateran Council's plans, at least some of which they might have preferred not to have been approved. The three enforcement canons respectively called for regular synods within the ecclesiastical provinces, prohibited the use of tradition as an excuse for failure to comply with canon law and set out a specific method for the punishment and removal of clerics who failed to comply with canon law. Taken together, these three meant more rigid enforcement of canon law, especially the newly declared canons, and helped to ensure the Fourth Lateran Council's program's effectiveness.

The most sweeping attempt at enforcement came in the regular enforcement synods mandated by canon 6. The canon informed the archbishops that they were to hold annual synods within their provinces. As many priests and other clerics as possible from within the province were to attend. The synod itself was to examine the progress of each cleric in implementing canon law within his domain. The bishops in particular were tasked with making a sincere effort to implement reform, but the canon called for the discipline of any who did not embrace the policies of the Fourth Lateran Council. The text of the canon does not mince words with the demand that the canons be followed it, reads, "In these [the synods] they [the bishops] should be actuated with a genuine fear of God in correcting abuses and reforming morals, especially the morals of the clergy, familiarizing themselves anew with the canonical rules, particularly those that are enacted in this general council."[171] The bishops were thus called upon to zealously enforce and inquire after the state of reform during the synods. Such inquiries could lead to trouble for disobedient clerics and forced them to adapt to the new canon laws.

Moreover, the canon refers to the Fourth Lateran Council itself in particular as meriting emphasis in the canon law. This demonstrates the need the council saw to guarantee that its policies would take place. Finally, unlike many of the other canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, canon 6 had no precedent in the earlier Lateran Councils. The idea of regular provincial synods to enforce the canons meant the council saw its policies as particularly urgent and in need of implementation, even though preceding councils had been satisfied simply assuming that their orders would be heeded. Canon 6 was an integral part of the Fourth Lateran Council's program for all of those reasons, and it helped ensure that the sweeping social change the council sought would come to pass.

---

[171] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 246.

Yet the sweeping change sought by the council could not come to pass as long as tradition remained a viable excuse for a failure to comply with the council's reforming canons. Canon 7 existed for exactly that reason: To sweep away tradition as a method of subordinating the council's reform. Hints of the problem of tradition appeared in other canons discussed as well. Canon 66, forbidding priests from charging for the administration of sacraments, made reference to allowing an exemption for gifts given out of tradition—although payment could not be demanded solely because it was traditional.[172] Tradition had power that the council hoped to turn back.

Canon 7 took that dismissal of tradition much further, reading, "We decree that no custom or appeal shall stand in the way of their [the bishops'] efforts" to "reform the morals of their subjects."[173] Said subjects included, but were not limited to, the clergy, for any person might attempt to contravene canons and act immorally by excuse of tradition. There could be no contesting the language of canon 7, it being quite express in the notion that traditions contrary to the morals expressed by the council were to be cast aside. In that way, canon 7 instantly lifted a major barrier to the implementation and enforcement of many of the canons. Arguments to the effect that certain practices should be grandfathered in due to their traditional acceptance despite going against canon law would no longer acquire support in the ecclesiastical courts. Those who would attempt to enforce them through any method would have a universal tool to dismiss arguments based on tradition. Canon 7 shows, above all, that the Fourth Lateran Council took its goals seriously and wanted to ensure that those goals would be achieved.

---

[172] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 289.
[173] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 247.

Although the preceding canons set forth mechanisms for encouraging adherence to the council's reform and for dismissing a major argument against that reform, they did not account for how violators of the reform were to be punished. While canon 8 does not specify penalties (many of the canons specify their own penalties for their violation), it does lay out how prosecutions against clergy who did not implement the council's reform were to take place. Specifically, the canon set into order the manner in which accusations of non-adherence were to be handled.

An accuser would have to invoke the authority of a higher ecclesiastical power to act as a judge, a process called called the accusation; the nature of the crime had to be declared by the judge, called denunciation, and the judge was to carry out an investigation to determine whether the crime actually occurred, called the inquiry.[174] Once an inquiry had taken place, a cleric could be suspended from office, permanently removed or otherwise punished.[175] In that way, clergy who were not inclined to obey the repeated cajolements of their bishops in the annual synods to obey the canons could be compelled into obedience. In fact, the process for regular clergy was even simpler, allowing for immediate suspension from office by decree before an inquiry took place.[176] Taken together, these methods could generate very high turnover among clerics disinclined to obey the council. Moreover, they actively sought out practices against canon law rather than requiring that complaints first be brought. Such a clerical inquisition helped to guarantee that canon law violations would not go undetected.

---

[174] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 249.
[175] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 250.
[176] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 250.

Taken together, these three canons show a council not only devoted to reform, but also committed to seeking that reform even against internal resistance within the lower ranks of the church hierarchy. Where previous councils had sought to change the behaviors of the clergy, they could do little but hope and demand that their orders be obeyed. The Fourth Lateran Council saw an opportunity to exploit the hierarchical nature of the established church to better ensure that obedience in these three canons. In that sense, they are as much a part of the program of the council as the other canons discussed: They used the power of the hierarchy to compel the lower priesthood into providing the spiritual services and reform the council viewed as necessary for the long-term survival of the hierarchy itself. The reforming canons themselves were important, but just as significant were the methods with which the Fourth Lateran Council now hoped that those canons would be enforced.

VII. Unaddressed Canons

The remaining canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, forming a majority of the decrees issued by the council, do not merit specific mention in this paper. Primarily, this is because they do not deal with the interaction between the established church and the laity of Europe through the lowest levels of the priesthood. Nonetheless, they are all a part of the overall program of the Fourth Lateran Council. It is worth exploring other issues addressed by the council in order to consider the council's overall impact.

By far the most numerous are the canons dealing with reform of the ecclesiastical judiciary, canons 35 through 49, and, while they were likely significant in the history of the period, they did not deal directly with the program previously outlined. These canons range from ceding authority back to the lay judiciary[177] to rights of the accused[178] to attempts at reform of abuse of judicial power.[179] Although the laity might well have appeared before the religious courts, the judicial reforms had no direct connection to doctrine or religious beliefs. As such, while they might have improved the circumstances of the laity—or they might not—they did not deal with the Fourth Lateran Council's serious attempt to standardize and universalize a commanding Christian theology and are not particularly relevant to this paper. Nonetheless, some would have impacted the council attempts at enforcement, and by laying out substantial guidelines for the ecclesiastical judiciary, these canons did fit with the overall goal of the Fourth Lateran Council to streamline church affairs.

After the judiciary canons, the largest body of canons excluded are those regulating internal church affairs, including canons 23 through 28, 28 through 33 and 53 through 56 as well as a collection of canons related specifically to monasteries, canons 12, 13 and 59 through 61. These affairs include such diverse activities as the collection and apportionment of tithes[180] and the appointment of bishops[181] as well as regular standardization of monastic practices within monastic orders.[182] However, even more so than the judiciary, these canons are far-removed from the laity. They bear far more in common with the overall programs of the Second and Third Lateran Councils, which greatly emphasized the organization of the established church. Ultimately, the established church would have to be properly and efficiently organized in order to achieve the council's other goals, so these canons may still be interpreted as a part of the council's overall program. Nonetheless, they do not deal directly with the new religious movement and renewed priesthood of the other canons and are therefore not directly connected to the council's attempts to engage with the laity and to sculpt lay religious beliefs.

---

[177] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 274.
[178] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 272.
[179] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 279.

The remaining canons are more diverse in their coverage, yet none of them deals with the laity directly, either. Two canons, 4 and 5, deal with consequences of the Fourth Crusade;[183] the last four, 67 through 70, restrict the activities of Jews and Muslims living in Christian lands.[184] Two, 57 and 58 clarify policies on interdict,[185] and another, 62, attempts to clamp down on a proliferation of relics.[186] The remaining three, 63 through 65, reiterate past bans on simoniacal practices.[187] Despite the diversity of these canons, none of them deals directly with the laity. Some still have implications of interest to the overall goal of the council; in particular the restrictions of Jews and Muslims, distinct from the Christian laity, whose conversion canon 70 promotes. The unity of Christian Europe would ultimately require the conversion of followers of non-Christian religions, including the Jews and Muslims. Yet overall these canons are at best side notes to the overall goal of the canons of the council, and their disjointedness belies their relatively low significance to the council's program.

---

[180] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 282.
[181] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 256.
[182] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 253.
[183] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 244-6.
[184] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 290-1.
[185] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 284-5.
[186] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 286.
[187] Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees*, 288.

VIII. Conclusion

The Fourth Lateran Council's canons came together to create a revitalized spiritual society. With new services from the organized church, the council brought in the laity and informed them of, in the council's view, the true nature of Christianity. With expanded and reformed policies, the council improved lay trust in and access to the organized church and the spiritual benefits it offered. With mandatory confession and Easter mass, the council achieved both of these goals together and also forced even the most areligious layman to take seriously his spiritual well-being. With a reformed and rationalized new clergy, the council improved the quality of its spiritual offerings while simultaneously competing with the impressive spiritual feats of the heretical movements. Finally, with its modes of enforcement, the council ensured that its decrees would not be empty words, and that their impact would be felt across the lands of the Latin church.

Spiritually, the organized church of the Fourth Lateran Council offered greater services and fulfillment than it previously provided. Engaged in such activities as confession, the free reception of the sacraments, and simplified marriage, the laity could feel a greater connection to the teachings of the organized church. This in turn lent itself to greater loyalty to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a loyalty for which the council ultimately strove. As a result, the Fourth Lateran Council, for the first time among the Lateran Councils, successfully—in the long run—won back the laity from rampant heresy and laid the foundations for continued organized church dominance. The rationalized organization of the church and direct contact with the laity guaranteed that the organized church would play a part in every western European life in a way that had simply not been true prior to the council. These changes could not all happen overnight, but the Fourth Lateran Council laid their framework in its canons. Western Europe was on a road towards continued dominance of religion by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but in a new way: through rationality and spiritual interaction with the priesthood.

Ultimately, the Fourth Lateran Council achieved its goal: The organized church survived and dominated spirituality in western Europe for another three hundred years before Protestantism shook the foundations of its authority. By the end of the thirteenth century, nearly all of the laity had been won back over: the Cathars neared extinction,[188] the Waldensians retreated to mountain strongholds,[189] and the general tide of anti-clericalism had ebbed. Heresy would never be fully eliminated, but even such relatively widespread heresy as Lollardy in the fourteenth century could not come close to the threat posed to the organized church at the time of the Fourth Lateran Council.[190] For that reason, the Fourth Lateran Council was clearly successful in its overall aim: Not for centuries would the laity become so disenchanted with the organized church's spiritual offerings as to abandon its authority for heresy. By extension, heretical movements would remain unable to overturn the authority of the organized church until the sixteenth century. The council's reforming but not overly drastic measures proved, in the long run, sufficient to get the organized church even through times as trying as the Great Schism without a total collapse in lay support. As a result of the Fourth Lateran Council, the laity were closely tied to their priests, and that bond would not break easily. The organized church had found its saving strategy, and the history of religion and spirituality in western Europe is vastly different.

---

[188] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 140.
[189] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 159.
[190] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 234.

Bibliography

Alan of Lille, c. 1200. "On the Catholic Faith Against the Heretics of his Time" in *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages*. ed. and trans. Jeffrey Burton Russell. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971.

Arnold, John H. *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005.

Binns, L. Elliott. *Innocent III*. London: Methuen & Co., 1931.

Blumenfeld-Kozinski, Renate, Duncan Robertson and Nancy Bradley Warren, *The Vernacular Spirit*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Bornstein, Daniel. "How to Behave in Church" in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*. ed. Miri Rubin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Brodman, James W. "Religion and Discipline in the Hospitals of Thirteenth-century France" in *The Medieval Hospital and Medieval Practice*. ed. Barbara S. Bowers. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007.

Constable, Giles. *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*. Aldershot, UK: Variorium, 1996.

Constable, Giles. *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Cook, William R. and Ronald B. Herzman. *The Medieval World View*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Cathedral and Crusade*. trans. John Warrington. London: Dent, 1957.

Dox, Donalee. *The Idea of the Theater in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Elliot, Dyan. "Lollardy and the Integration of Marriage and the Family" in *The Medieval Marriage Scene: Prudence, Passion, Policy*. eds. Sherry Roush and Cristelle L. Baskins. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005.

Evans, G. R. *The Church in the Early Middle Ages*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2007.

Frank, Isnard Wilhelm. *A Concise History of the Mediaeval Church*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

Geanakoplos, Deno J. *Medieval Civilization and the Byzantine and Islamic Worlds*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1979.

George, Leonard. *Crimes of Perception*. New York: Paragon House, 1995.

Goody, Jack. *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hamilton, Bernard. *Religion in the Medieval West*. London: Edward Arnold, 1986.

Hamilton, Sarah. "Doing Penance" in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*. ed. Miri Rubin. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Hoyt, Robert S. *Europe in the Middle Ages*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966.

Jedin, Hubert. *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: An Historical Outline*. trans. Ernest Graf. New York: Herder and Herder, 1960.

Lambert, Malcolm. *Medieval Heresy*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977.

Le Goff, Jacques. *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*. trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.

Leff, Gordon. *Heresy, Philosophy and Religion in the Medieval West*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002.

Logan, F. Donald. *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Martin, Lynn A. *Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Megivern, James J. *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

Meyers, W. David. *"Poor, Sinning Folk."* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Morris, Colin. *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Moore, Robert Ian. *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Nigg, Walter. *The Heretics*. ed. and trans. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.

Oldfield, Paul. *City and Community in Norman Italy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Painter, Sidney. *Mediaeval Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1951.

Pennington, Kenneth. *Pope and Bishops: The Papal Monarchy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.

Rieder, Paula. "Insecure Borders" in *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation and Marriage in Premodern Europe*. eds. Anne McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnacion. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Rouse, Mary A. and Richard H. "The Schools and the Waldensians" in *Christendom and its Discontents*. ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Rubin, Stanley. *Medieval English Medicine*. Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles, 1974.

Russell, Jeffrey Burton. "Summary of Catharist Beliefs" in *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages*. ed. Jeffrey Burton Russell. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971.

Sayers, Jane. *Innocent III: Leader of Europe*. London: Longman Group, 1994.

Schroeder, H. J., ed. and trans., *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937.

Shahar, Shulamith. *Childhood in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Sheehan, Michael M. *Marriage, Family and Law in Medieval Europe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

Southern, Richard William. *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1970.

Stock, Brian. *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Tentler, Thomas N. *Sin and Confession*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Tierney, Brian. *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1955.

Vauchez, Andre. *The Laity in the Middle Ages*. ed. Daniel Bornstein, trans. Margery Schneider. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993.

Verger, Jacques. *Men of Learning in Europe at the End of the Middle Ages*. trans. Lisa Neal and Steven Rendall. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

Watkins, Oscar D. *A History of Penance*, vol. II, *The Western Church from A.D. 450 to A.D. 1215*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1961.