

“Que lo lean literalmente”: Clerical Ignorance and a Late Medieval Wedding Ceremony

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The common conception of a medieval priest is that of a learned man who, in order to be ordained, had to attain an intellectual competence in the theological beliefs of the Church and the ability to perform its liturgy and sacraments. An essential qualification for such was a certain mastery of Latin, the language of liturgy. However, there is ample evidence that in late-medieval Spain a vast number of priests charged with carrying out the Church's everyday liturgical responsibilities were undereducated and had little or no capacity in that language. Entertaining testimonies of this intellectual deficiency can be found in the literature of the period. For example, in the thirteenth-century tale “El clérigo ignorante” in *Milagros de nuestra Señora*, by Gonzalo de Berceo, a cleric is reprimanded by his Bishop because he knows how to say only one mass, and “más la sabié por uso que por sabiduría” (Berceo, 109-112). In another instance, the narrator of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1544) gives a scathingly humorous indictment of much of the general clergy's illiteracy in Latin affirming that some priests are ordained more by money than for their education. In Chapter five, the narrator, Lázaro, serves a swindling *bulero*, one who sells indulgences for the remission of sins. Upon arriving to a new town, the *bulero* ingratiates himself with the local clergy and attempts to discover their proficiency in Latin. Lázaro dryly observes:

Si decían que entendían, no hablaba palabra en latín, por no dar tropezón; mas se aprovechaba de un gentil y bien cortado romance y desenvoltísima lengua. Y si sabía que los dichos clérigos eran de los reverendos (digo, que más con dineros que con letras, y con reverendas se ordenan), se hacía entre ellos un Santo Tomás y hablaba dos horas en latín. A lo menos, que lo parecía, aunque no lo era (*Lazarillo* 114).

In the following pages we demonstrate that the above passage from *Lazarillo* hardly represented an anomaly; rather, the tale's renowned “realism” was closer to the reality of the day than our typical modern vision of the learned medieval Spanish priest.

The point of departure for this essay, the document to which its title refers, *Sacramentum matrimonii*, is a largely neglected description of a wedding ceremony, bound to a *Misal Hispalense*, a fifteenth-century manuscript from Seville currently housed at the Lilly Library of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, under the designation of Ricketts 75 (ff. 3r-8r).¹ The prayers and psalms of the ceremony are in Latin, as one would expect, but

¹ The wedding ceremony found in the *Misal Hispalense* was reproduced with very minor alterations from the *Manual Hispalense* (Seville, Biblioteca Colombina, Ms. BB-146-12 with a modern designation of Vitr. I-12). This text, studied in detail by Ireneo García Alonso (351-450), was written in Seville in the middle of the fourteenth century, comprised of 134 folios, is preserved in good condition with little sign of use. In it we find Castilian renderings of the procedures for the realization of sacraments heretofore normally presented in Latin. García Alonso (361) briefly presents the table of contents of the *Manual Hispalense* and transcribes the Castilian sections of the baptism, the marriage ceremony, and the viaticum. In addition, he traces the history of the *Manual Hispalense* back to a *Manual Toledano* (360), emanating from the 1323 synod of Toledo and asserts that the Christian doctrine in the *Manual Toledano*, written in Castilian, “estaba destinado a los párrocos más que al pueblo” (358). Furthermore he notes the liturgical changes that occurred in Spain in the fourteenth century, of particular interest to anyone studying the evolution of Spanish Catholic liturgy. García Alonso mentions another *Misal Hispalense* from 1393 kept at the Biblioteca Colombina (sign. 85-8-9) that also contains the wedding

what interests us most is that the instructions for the priest detailing his responsibilities before the wedding and also for the performance of the ceremony itself are in vernacular. This means that the sections in Latin can be read phonetically without any understanding on the part of the priest (or the public), but anything that must be *understood and acted on* is in the vernacular. The underlying practical reason for this is that many priests simply did not have the intellectual formation to comprehend Latin and consequently needed instructions in the vernacular in order to carry out the sacraments. This manuscript represents an important chronicle that supports the theory that Berceo and the author of *Lazarillo* were not writing in a vacuum and is central to our understanding of the priests' lack of significant training.

Specific aspects of this *Sacramentum matimonii* will be discussed later on. First, however, the topic of priestly competence in medieval Spain, especially concerning their knowledge of Latin, must be addressed. Scholars who study the topic of clerical literacy in Latin in the Middle Ages agree that it is difficult to determine the competency in that language of the typical member of the lower clergy based on the available written evidence. Research has been done to try to determine the number of clergy who received university degrees, but what is more significant in terms of the daily life of a village or city is not the maximum level of Latin that a priest had attained, but the minimum.

A glimpse at the proceedings of Spanish synods found in the first ten volumes of *Synodicon Hispanum*, directed by Antonio García y García, provides harsh assessments of the intellectual ability of much of the medieval Spanish clergy, vituperative testimony that attests to the general culture of clerical ignorance, in which our *Sacramentum matimonii* was written. For example, in the *proemio* of the synod in Segovia of 1325 we find

Onde, porque vemos grand sinplçidat en la mayor parte de los clerigos de nuestro obispado que non entienden, asi como deven, los articulos de la fe, nin los sacramentos, nin los mandamientos, ante, trayendolo por los labros cada dia, *non entienden que dizen nin saben que es*, e [...] por ende fue nuestra voluntad de poner en este cuaderno algunas cosas de romançe, en la sobredicha razon, de los articulos e de los mandamientos e de los sacramentos e de otras cosas, *para alumbramiento de los dichos sinples clerigos que non lo entienden.*²

Apparently the situation improved little in the ensuing century and a half in Segovia because in 1472 the complaint continues:

E por quanto somos çertificado [*sic*] por vista e por examinaçion e por çierta sabiduria que muchos de los beneficiados de la dicha nuestra iglesia cathedral, e otros clerigos curados e non curados, ordenados de ordenes sacras, del dicho nuestro obispado son tan ygnorantes e ynsufiçientes que non saben leer ni cantar, ni son gramaticos *ni saben la construçion e lengua latina, ni entienden ni saben entender lo que leen.*³

ceremony in the vernacular with the same text as the *Manual Hispalense* (360). Therefore, this *Sacramentum matrimonii* appears in the vernacular in the *Manual Toledano*, the *Manual Hispalense*, the *Misal Hispalense* (1393, Biblioteca Colombina) and the *Misal Hispalense* (fifteenth century, Lilly Library). The alteration mentioned above refers to a gloss from the *Manual Hispalense* that was inserted into the text of the ceremony found in the Lilly manuscript, indicating that the Lilly version was produced at a later period.

² *Synodicon Hispanum* VI, 262 (my emphasis).

³ Synod of Aguilafuente. *Synodicon Hispanum* VI, 441(my emphasis).

Although invectives against unskilled priests can be found in other countries during the Middle Ages,⁴ the present focus is on medieval Spain and the place of the *Sacramentum matrimonii* in the discussion of priestly illiteracy in that country. As a point of departure for his study on the deplorable condition of the Church in Spain in the thirteenth century, Peter Linehan recounts the efforts of the Legate to Spain, John of Abbeville (1228-1229), a disciplinarian sent by Pope Gregory IX to bring back into the fold a sizable body of clergy that had gone astray having almost entirely neglected the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council convened in 1215. In Spain, John found a clergy that “were incontinent, largely uneducated and total strangers to the discipline of council and synod” (29), whom the bishop Tello of Palencia “had described as ‘pre aliis regionibus inscii litterarum.’” In one of his many attempts at reforming the Spanish clergy, for instance, John ordered the establishment of schools in every archdeaconry that Linehan concludes “would at least provide the parish clergy with a smattering of Latin” (31).

As the century progressed, illiteracy among the clergy was still prevalent. Any attempts at excommunication failed because the clerics did not know how to write in Latin the sentence of excommunication: “‘propter imperitiam clericorum qui sententiam excommunicationis non scribere nec formare sciunt.’ And the higher clergy were very often no better” (237), an example of whom was one Juan Ibáñez, one of Sancho IV’s bishops, who was illiterate and “even the choir boys knew it” (235).

Examples of the Church’s simplifying from Latin to vernacular certain liturgy and teachings for the sake of “clerigos simples” appear in the proceedings of synods from several parts of Spain during the Low Middle Ages (*Synodicon Hispanum* Vols. I-X). For instance, in 1354 in Pamplona documents containing summaries and compilations were drawn up in vernacular “porque los dichos rectores, vicarios et capellanes, algunos de los quales non saben bien latin, puedan clarament entender los articulos en la dicha suma” (VIII, 380). Similarly, the synod of Cuenca in 1399 feels the need to order “de latin trasladar [las ordinaciones] en romance” so that all the clergy could understand them, both the “simples” as well as the “letrados” (X, 73). Furthermore, the introduction of the synod of Tuy, 1482, announces that, due to the “gran ynorançia que fallamos <en> la mayor parte de los clerigos de nuestro obispado por non saber nin entender latin,” the proceedings of the meetings are to be in the vernacular “porque todos las entiendan” (I, 344).

In several of the synods from the peninsula the inability of much of the clergy to function in Latin is specifically mentioned or strongly implied, a concern that goes hand in hand with their lack of intellectual formation in general, and occasionally it is quite brutally apparent. In Braga in 1477, for instance, the synod reports that “achamos muitos clerigos ou religiosos asy beneficiados como nom beneficiados que lhes non abasta non seren letrados [...] nen soamente saberen nen entenderen alguun pouco de latin” (II, 100). Furthermore, in the above-mentioned synod of Tuy in 1482 we find that “en este nuestro obispado ay grande defecto de personas letradas, e la mayor parte de los clerigos de nuestro obispado non solamente son ynorantes de theologia...ynoran la gramatica e non saben ni entienden latin” (I, 375). The synod of Jaén in 1511 states: “E, otrosi, por quanto visitando nuestro obispado

⁴ One telling example of such is found in *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. In 1551, after Archbishop George Dowdal had expressed resistance to the recent decree from the crown of England that English language prayer books replace Latin language texts throughout the kingdom, Sir Antony Saintleger replied: “we have too many illiterate priests among us already, who neither pronounce the Latin, nor know what it means, no more than the common people that hear them” (Reid 27).

ovimos hallado que algunos priores, clerigos e beneficiados tienen la dicha ignorancia e no saben leer ni cantar, ni grammatica e lengua latina” (IX, 642). In León the synod of 1528 complains that “ay muchos clerigos ydiotas y que no saben gramatica y, lo que es peor, que no saben leer” (III, 341). In 1528 in the city of Tuy further consternation with the priests faulty knowledge of Latin and pitiful performance of the liturgy is expressed: “porque hallamos en este nuestro obispado en la visitaçion que hezimos, grande ignorancia y falta de todas sçiençias, y que la mayor parte de los clerigos deste obispado no saben gramatica ni cantar, que es grande dolor de lo oyr y ver” (I, 513). The 1531 synod in Cuenca adds “Somos certificados que muchos con falsa relacion ganan facultades para se ordenar *extra tempora a quocumque antistite*, y muchas vezes sin saber latin” (X, 406). As well, in Palencia 1545 the synod bemoans that “muchas personas idiotas ocupen los beneficios en las yglesias de Dios” (VII, 609). In another source from the period, *Gramática castellana* (1558), the *Licenciado* Cristóbal de Villalón attacks charlatan priests who take advantage of the ignorance of the simple laborers in their congregations by passing incomprehensible nonsense off as Latin (51-52).

Finally, in Santiago, as Baudilio Barreiro Mallón observes, little progress was made throughout the sixteenth century, according to the judgment in 1607 of one Álvarez de Caldas: “los clérigos de esta diócesis llevan por lo general buena vida; sin embargo son poco doctos” (80), their level of intellectual preparation not reaching acceptable levels until the middle of the eighteenth century. Barreiro Mallón’s conclusion is stark: “La realidad a principios de la Edad Moderna está marcada por el bajísimo nivel cultural del clero y del pueblo, con el consiguiente desconocimiento de la doctrina y moral cristiana” (89).

Many other synods echo the above-mentioned concerns lamenting the priests’ general ignorance of Church doctrine (as expressed in detail in the Segovia synod of 1325 quoted above), although without mentioning Latin specifically (Cuenca 1399 and 1409, Toledo 1481, Salamanca 1396 and 1410, Oviedo 1450, Burgos 1511, Palencia 1545,⁵ and others). Throughout, Church officials decry the ignorance of its priests, even those who have been granted benefices, and the fact that several of the complaints are found in the *proemios* of certain synods (Segovia 1325, Ávila 1481, and Tuy 1482) indicates a high level of concern over the matter. This ignorance can range from not knowing the Sacraments, the Commandments, the Articles of Faith, the Virtues, or the Seven Mortal Sins to not being able even to read. Additionally, Pedro Cátedra relates an anecdote about an Italian priest who visited the north of Spain in 1435 and his subsequent amazement at the ignorance of the clergy he met regarding the most basic liturgical knowledge: “...los clérigos no saben [...] los tiempos en los que se pueden celebrar las bodas, no dan la extremaunción, ni siquiera bautizan directamente, si no es en tiempo de necesidad” (24). The bottom line here is that if a priest was so ignorant of these basic tenets of the Church, it was extremely unlikely that he would have been competent in Latin.

The ignorance of Spanish priests was hardly a taboo topic among scholars in the past. In 1855, for example, Juan Tejada y Ramiro published volume V of his massive compilation of the councils and synods from medieval Spain and offered this scorching assessment of the overall bleak condition of the Spanish clergy in the latter third of the fifteenth century:

Como que la ignorancia estaba apoderada de los eclesiásticos de España en tanto grado que muy pocos se hallaban que supiesen latín, dados de ordinario a la gula y

⁵ *Synodicon Hispanum* X, 41, 135, and 674; IV, 26 and 177; III, 453; VII, 71; VII, 582.

deshonestidad, y lo menos mal a las armas, se trató de remediar este mal y otros en las conferencias posteriores. La avaricia había invadido la iglesia, y con sus manos robadoras lo tenía todo estragado. Comprar los beneficios, en otro tiempo se tenía por simonía, en este por granjería (2).

A common dread expressed in the synods and other sources is that of the dire peril exposed to the souls of the faithful by clergy incapable of teaching even the most basic tenets of the faith (Barreiro, 74). Not only were the souls of the followers put at risk by clerics and rectors in such a state of ignorance, the overall education the public suffered as well. As the fifteenth century progressed, the schools of Castile, the majority of which were tied to the church, were obligated to teach Latin, which was a necessary requirement for the acquisition of the type of education needed for anybody who wanted to rise in society (Beceiro Pita, 879-880). Therefore, if the priests are not sufficiently able to read or write in Latin, it has an adverse effect on the intellectual advancement of the community in general and the clergy in particular. Future priests failed to receive adequate instruction in Latin as young boys due to due to their teachers' intellectual incompetence causing the next generation of priests to be intellectually unprepared as they attempt to enter the priesthood, and this academic decay was bound to continue in succeeding generations. The fact that the Spanish Church repeatedly attempted substantive amelioration of the problem in every region of the country over the centuries, as indicated in the synods, reveals an ongoing lack of success thereof.

Various theories have been advanced as to the causes of the Spanish clerics' lack of intellectual formation and their resistance to reform. Linehan cites a "frontier mentality" among the clergy. Spain was the boundary in the war against the Muslims, and that these cleric frontiersmen exerted a "contempt for distant authority—papal authority included—and their rejection of any reforms which threatened their peculiar institutions" (2). They felt that living on the perimeter of the Christian world on the front line against the Muslim threat afforded them a certain independence and laxity regarding the observance of Church policy.

A second cause was the unholy marriage between the Church and state, in which the Church was invariably at the mercy of the kings' greed, whims, or political pressures at any particular moment. The Castilian and Aragonese kings manipulated the ecclesiastical machinations, either by enriching the royal coffers ostensibly to "fight infidels" at the expense of the Church (thereby depriving the Spanish Church of essential funds used for, among other things, educating its members) or by censuring bishops who failed to toe the royal line, with the effect of delaying or halting the implementation of all aspects of the Church's business (including educational reforms).⁶

A more immediate determinant is the socioeconomic reality of the drastic separation of classes during that time. Ana Arranz Guzmán takes the stance that the separation of medieval society into the three estates was not as rigid as is often thought, being dictated more by economic reality than by political ideology. More specifically, the upper clergy had more in common with the upper strata of the other estates than it had with the lower clergy, whose way of life had more in common with that of the *campesinos* (591-592). Arranz Guzmán, after studying the workings the synods, concludes that "jamás hubo un interés idéntico por el tema de la mejora de las costumbres y del nivel cultural entre todos los miembros del episcopado" (597). She further postulates reasons for the inefficacy of the various programs

⁶ See, for example, Linehan, 240-50, and Oliver, 4-60.

proposed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries for the elevation of the level of education of the parish priests: those priests who attended university belonged by and large to the upper clergy such as members of the cathedral authority or future bishops, and those who studied who did not come from this class thereupon aspired to higher offices more in accord with what their new degree could command (598); consequently, the parishes did not benefit from their priests' newly-gained knowledge. Furthermore, given the state of education in general, it was difficult to provide schooling to the lower classes, of which the parish clergy were members. Finally, it is unclear how much of the Church funds was appropriated by the upper clergy for their personal use, most of whom were from the upper class and undoubtedly felt a natural sense of entitlement to the money, and how much managed to trickle down to the lower clergy (593).

Moreover, as one could well expect many priests were more interested in the benefits and privileges that their office would afford them than they were in sincerely serving God and His Church. The Gaudix synod of 1554 complains about the attempts at tonsure by “muchos moços prophanos y que no tienen intencion de applicarse al culto divino, ni en su vida pensaron de servir a la Yglesia” (*Synodicon Hispanum* IX, 259). Some unqualified priests employed nepotism in order to become ordained. The 1545 synod of Palencia notes that “muchas vezes ha acontecido que un beneficiado, queriendo beneficiar a su pariente o amigo, de cierta sciencia se ausentava, y le avisava... para que impetrase primero que otro... sin entrar en examen e tener otros competidores,” adding contemptuously that “las yglesias de Dios se hinchan de personas idiotas” (*Synodicon Hispanum* VII, 609), thus allowing another generation of Latin-less priests to be ordained.

Other priests entered into the priesthood by resorting to sheer deceit. The synod in Calahorra attests that some such priests went to the great length of going to Rome with false documentation in order to obtain the dimissory letters so that they could be ordained by a bishop to whom they were unfamiliar.⁷ The presentation of false references by unqualified priests (who, among other defects, typically did not know Latin) in order to be ordained was such a problem that local bishoprics refused to allow any unknown priest to celebrate any part of the liturgy without first being examined by their own officials. It was not known to them if said priest had been excommunicated, suspended, or was even a priest at all, and ordainment even from Rome was not trusted (*Synodicon Hispanum* V, 404-405). In certain cases devious priests duped their examiners in order to obtain benefices, taking advantage of the latter's ignorance of Latin:

A hemos fallado aver acaesçido en algunos beneficios vacantes que algunos, no temiendo a Dios ni a sus conçiencias, han ocupado las posesiones dellos con falsos titulos, porque los clerigos notarios delante quien fazen sus autos e diligencias no saben latin ni entienden si las tales bullas se estienden a los tales beneficios.⁸

In conclusion, substantial evidence attests to the incapacity of the medieval Spanish priest to communicate in Latin, therefore leading to, in the opinion here, the Church's extensive use of the vernacular in certain areas of the liturgy in order to achieve their correct

⁷ The matter of priests presenting themselves for ordainment under false pretenses is addressed in the synods of Cuenca 1531, Plasencia 1534, and Calahorra 1539: *Synodicon Hispanum* X, 406; V, 404; and VIII, 81 and 89 respectively.

⁸ Jaén, synod of 1478 and repeated in the synod of 1511 (*Synodicon Hispanum* IX, 560 and 643). A similar claim is found in the Cuenca synod of 1457 (*Synodicon Hispanum* X, 345).

and meaningful performance. At the end of the fifteenth century, even the self-same Cardinal of Spain, Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, recognized that, three centuries after the Fourth Lateran Council, there still existed a vast state of ignorance among the clergy. He affirms that “son ordenados de órdenes mayores, hombres indoctos e ignorantes” and that when it comes to explaining the gospel to the faithful, he directs “que lo lean al menos literalmente o que busquen a otra persona que lo sepa y quiera hacer” (Sánchez Herrero, 91). It is within this culture of “leerlo literalmente” that this *Sacramentum matrimonii* was produced.

***The Sacramentum matrimonii from Ricketts 75:*⁹ what it entails**

This description of the wedding ceremony offers us an interesting and somewhat charming view back in time. The text is preceded by a rubric that announces: *Sacramentum matimonii. Quando algund clerigo ouier desposar novios* and alternates between Latin and vernacular, depending on what is happening at a particular moment. In order for the priest to easily distinguish between the two as he follows in the manuscript, the parts in vernacular are underlined in red and the script is approximately one millimeter smaller than the bulk of the body in Latin. On one level this text is a graphic representation of the theatrical nature of liturgical rites. Of greater interest here, however, is the presence of vernacular as its only linguistic communicative vehicle.

It is possible to find vernacular text in edited versions of some other medieval wedding ceremonies, but it is invariably found in the vows spoken by the couple or the questions to the couple or the public posed by the priest. For example, in the Sarum Manual (Salisbury mid-fourteenth century), the vows spoken by the couple are in English where we find the familiar “I *N.* take *N.* to my wedded wyf” and “With this ryng. I the wed” [*sic*] (Collins, 47-48). The rest of the ceremony, however, is conducted exclusively in Latin. Slightly more vernacular is found in some of the French ceremonies edited by Molin and Mutembe such as the proclamation of the banns and the dialogue between the priest and the couple; however, the instructions to the priest remain in Latin (Molin and Mutembe, 284-318). What sets the *Sacramentum matimonii* and its source apart from the rest is that its author or authors eliminated any attempt at communication via Latin.

Presented in the pages below is the vernacular text in its entirety as found in MS Ricketts 75. At the beginning, we see the motions the priest must go through in preparation for the wedding, the *bannas* or banns, the public announcement given in the parish church of the intended marriage.¹⁰ The priest must confirm that the couple in question is not related either by blood or by marriage and that neither of the two has already been married. In turn, he asks anyone who objects to this union to come forward:

⁹ Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

¹⁰ Regarding the banns, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* informs, “In order to check the increase of clandestine marriages, the Council of Trent decreed that before the celebration of any marriage the names of the contracting parties should be announced publicly in the church during the solemnization of Mass, by their own parish priest on three consecutive Holy Days...Omission of the banns, even partial, makes a marriage illicit, but not invalid... The bishop is empowered by the law to inflict on the offending parish priest, besides other punishment, three years suspension from his office.” The severity of this penalty suggests that the Church was marrying with certain frequency people who either were related or who had already been married and felt and that it had become a problem that needed to be addressed.

Ante que los despose sean fechas bannas, que quiere dezir pregones en la iglesia, e sepa por la collación e por la vezindat si son parientes o si entre ellos es algund parentesco o afinidat de cuñaderío e estos pregones se fazen en esta manera: “Fulano e Fulana quieren casar de consuno. Si ay alguno o alguna que sepa algund caso por qué este matrimonio se embargue e non deba ser fecho, véngalo dezir.”¹¹ En otra manera el clérigo que lo así non fiziere e se non guardare sepa que será suspenso por tres años. Los que quisieren casar e seyendo en la iglesia pregonados, el clérigo a de desposar e jurarlos en su casa de ellos o en la iglesia e pregúnteles si son desposados o jurados por mano de clérigo, e si dixeren que non, diga el clérigo así: “Fulano e Fulana quieren casar de consuno. Si ay aquí alguno o alguna que sepa algund caso por qué este matrimonio non deba ser fecho yo lo amonesto.” (3r)

Next the scene shifts to the ceremony itself. When reading the text, one gets a clear sense that this is a text oriented towards the *celebration* of the rituals related to the different sacraments; this is, therefore, a performance text. It provides us with the principal elements of theatricality: dialogue and stage directions. The “stage directions” give an idea of the placement and movement of the “characters” involved, the priest and the couple. Also the “props,” the rings, the coins, and the veil come into play in the drama. Finally, there is the dialogue, some of it specifically “scripted” in the exact words the participants must say (which is not surprising, given the liturgical nature of the ceremony described). Other times it is present as indirect speech, instructing the priest as to what he must say but requiring him to produce parts of the dialogue himself.

The following is the liturgy scripted in the vernacular for the priest to follow: If after the third bann there are no objections to the union, the priest is instructed to take the hands of the couple and to administer the vows:

La primera, la segunda e la tercera vegada que lo diga, e, si non fuer fallado contrario, demande fiadores, e los fiadores tomados, tómeles las manos e diga, “Fulana, ¿otorgades vos por muger e esposa de Fulano segund manda la Sancta Iglesia de Roma?” E diga ella, “Sí, otorgo.” Et diga él, “Yo así lo rrecibo.” (3r)

The text goes on:

Et eso mesmo diga a el, “Vos, Fulano, ¿otorgades vos por marido e por esposo de Fulana segund manda la Sancta Iglesia de Roma?” Diga él, “Sí, otorgo.” E ella. “Yo así lo recibo.” (3r)

After the vows, the priest calls for the coins and rings, blesses them, and then reads a psalm:

E todo esto así fecho demande las arras e los anillos e bendígalos así diziendo este psalmo (3r)

¹¹The *Castigos e documentos del Rey don Sancho* outlines specifically what constitutes the acceptable degree of separation between the couple regarding relation by blood, as well as by marriage. It even goes on to explain that *cuñaderío* is not determined only by marriage: “También se gana este parentesco por la fornicación como por el parentesco de matrimonio, e tampoco puedo casar con la barragana de mi hermano como con su mujer, después que él fuere muerto” (213). So, according to the limitations of *cuñaderío*, one was not permitted to marry either his brother’s wife or his brother’s concubine.

At the completion of the psalm, the priest is instructed to sprinkle holy water on the rings and coins:

E asperg[ue] el sacerdote agua bendicha sobre las arras e los anillos. (3v)

The next movements are performed by the groom and the bride. The groom takes the ring and puts it on the fourth finger from the thumb of the left hand of the bride, and the bride does the same to the groom:

E tome el anillo el esposo e métalo en el quarto dedo de la mano siniestra de la esposa, el qual es llamado médico.¹² E comience del pulgar assí diziendo: “In nomine patris.” E al otro dedo siguiente diga. “Et filii.” E al otro. “Et spiritus sancti amen.” Esso mesmo faga la esposa a él. Tome el anillo e métalo en el quarto dedo de la mano del esposo, el qual dedo es llamado médico, e diga commo dicho es. (3v)

Interestingly, during the ceremony the ring is put on the fourth finger of the left hand as opposed to the modern custom of wearing the wedding ring on the right hand that many Spaniards follow. J. Wickham Legg mentions that in a wedding ceremony in Salamanca in 1532, the ring was put on the left hand of the bride but on the right hand of the groom (209). This is obviously not the case in Seville because the text states that the bride does the same to the groom. Upon examining the information that Legg provides about wedding ceremonies throughout medieval Europe, it is apparent that whether to put the ring on the right hand or the left hand varies from locale to locale and from century to century. Nevertheless, since many Spaniards currently wear the wedding ring on the right hand, sometime within the past 500 years the custom in Spain changed. When putting on the ring the spouse holds the first finger from the thumb and says “In nomine patris,” moves to the next finger, “Et filii,” and to the next and says “Et spiritus sancti amen” following the typical formula.¹³

Next, the priest is instructed to give the coins to the groom who in turn gives them to the bride after the couple exchanges rings:

Et tome el sacerdote las arras e delas al esposo, e la esposa pare las manos en que las resciba. (3v)

Given the spirit of the ceremony and the license which this document grants regarding the use of vernacular, in the parts which would be the “stage directions,” such as the one just mentioned, it would be expected that the priest would speak to the couple in vernacular, instructing them to open their hands and take the coins or something similar. Then the priest tells the groom:

Et diga el sacerdote al esposo, “Dezid así, ‘Esposa, estas arras vos dono en señal de matrimonio así como manda la Sancta Iglesia.’” (3v)

The groom is to repeat this phrase verbatim. Following, the priest is instructed to tell the groom to take the bride’s hand and for them both to go to the altar and hear the Mass:

¹² The RAE dictionary defines “dedo médico” as “dedo anular.”

¹³ “At Amiens the bridegroom puts the ring on the thumb and little finger together at *In nomine patris*: on the fore and middle finger at *et filii*; and on the ring finger at *et spiritus sancti*. In one of the forms used at Limoges the ring was put on the forefinger at *in nomine patris*, and so on” (Legg, 213-14).

E mande el sacerdote al esposo que la tome por la mano a la esposa e váyanse para el altar e oyan su missa. El sacerdote en yendo diga el psalmo. Todo con esta oración que se sigue. (3v)

In the remaining small pieces of instruction in the vernacular interspersed among the Latin prayers throughout the rest of the text the last actions of the ceremony are described. Immediately following the “raising of the body,” the couple covers themselves with a veil, the groom over the neck and the bride over the head:

Alçado el corp[us] cubran los novios con el velo al novio por el cuello e a la novia por la cabeça. (5r)¹⁴

Leading in to the recitations of the succeeding prayers and psalms, we see the remaining directions to the priest. They include instructing him to turn to the bride and groom:

Tórnese el sacerdote a los novios e diga esto que se sigue. (5v)

Turn to the altar:

Aquí se torne al altar e faga su officio commencando in fractione hostie. (6r)

Announce the end of the mass:

Acabada la missa, tórnese el sacerdote a los novios e diga. (7r)

And finally, he hands the bride over to the groom

Aquí disiunga el sacerdote los novios e entregue la novia al novio diciendo ansý. “Trado tibi uxorem non ancillam. Tu autem custodi et dilige eam sicut xps ecclesiam.” Que quiere dezir. “Yo te do muger e non sierva. Tu así la aguardarás e amarás commo Jesucristo a la Sancta Madre Iglesia.” (7r)¹⁵

At the end he declares: “El prephatio sea de los novios.” (7v). The ceremony is now concluded with a hymn.

Conclusion

The *Sacramentum matimonii* (and the other sacraments in Castilian) found in above-mentioned codices is evidence of church officials accepting the reality that the public, and more important the parish priests, had little or no idea of the contents of the Latin texts they were confronted with; the parish priests’ inability to understand Latin impeded or severely limited the correct performance of the sacraments, especially awkward in ones when the direct participation of the public was required, such as the baptism, or, as examined here, the marriage ceremony. Our text provides evidence that the diocese in Seville (and Toledo)

¹⁴ The tradition in Spain of binding the couple with a veil covering the head of the bride and the shoulders of the groom dates back to at least the eleventh century (Leonard, 185, 188).

¹⁵ This is the only point in the ceremony where the priest offers a translation of the Latin. Apparently concerned about the proper treatment of women, the authors found it necessary to emphasize *in vernacular* to the priest, the groom, and the community as well: “I give you a wife and not a slave,” a contrast to Gratian, who in his *Decretum* asserts, “Femine velantur dum maritantur propter hoc vt nouerint se semper suis viris subditas esse et humiles.” (Women are veiled when they marry so that they know they are always subject to their husbands and humble.) *Decretum* II, causa xxx, qu. 5, c.7 (C.J.C. i., 1106) (Collins, 47).

decided that it was more practical to write key parts of the service in vernacular as opposed to elevating the priests' ability to function well in Latin, sacrificing some tradition in exchange for a more meaningful participation by the parishioners and priests alike.

This document containing the marriage ceremony is certainly a product of its time. Latin simply was not an effective language for interpersonal communication; it was much more feasible for all involved to communicate in their daily language. The instructions to the priest and the exchanges between the priest and the bride and groom, in which reception of the message is as important as the delivery ("Do you give yourself as husband..." etc.) are in vernacular and require a proper response on the part of the receiver. The prayers in Latin, on the other hand, could be recited and listened to passively, their comprehension not being imperative either by the public or by the priest himself. In short, anything emanating from the text that required an appropriate response by the receiver was communicated in vernacular, be it from the writers of the text to the priest performing the ceremony or from the priest to the congregation or the couple. It is difficult to determine the extent of priestly illiteracy regarding Latin, but this document is one more indication of the conflict between the modern idealistic image of the learned medieval priest and the reality of the time.

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