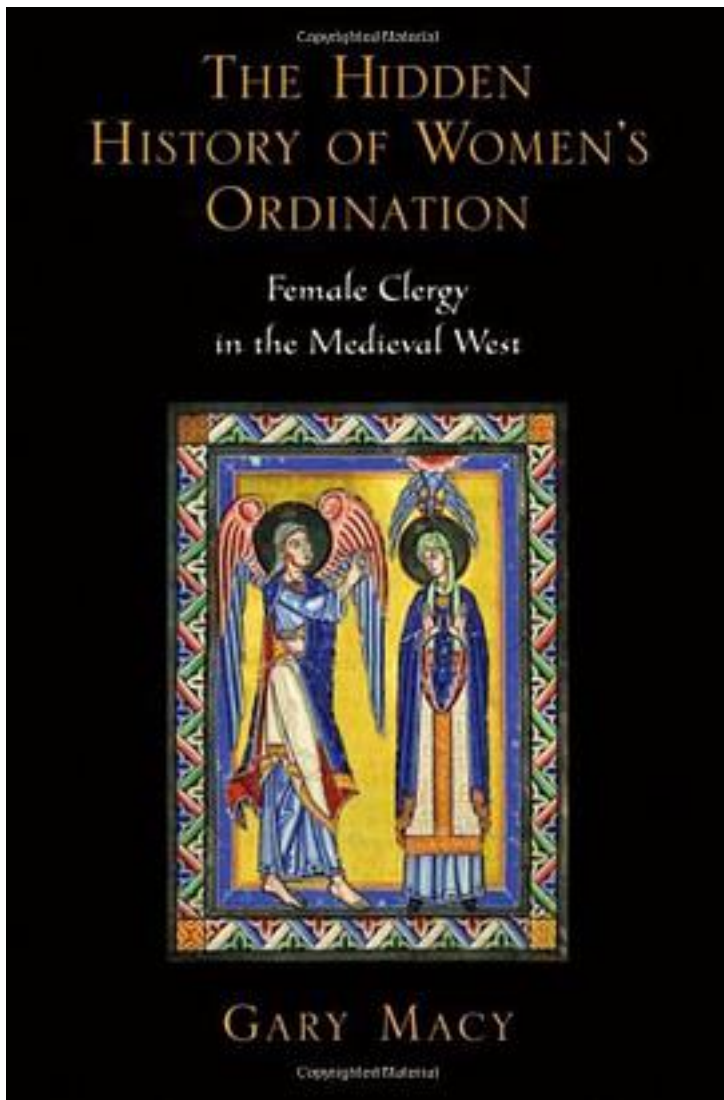


The Hidden History of Women's Ordination



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The Roman Catholic leadership still refuses to ordain women officially or even to recognize that women are capable of ordination. But is the widely held assumption that women have always been excluded from such roles historically accurate? How might the current debate change if our view of the history of women's ordination were to change? In *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination*, Gary Macy offers illuminating and surprising answers to these questions. Macy argues that for the first twelve hundred years of Christianity, women were in fact ordained into various roles in the church. He uncovers references to the ordination of women in papal, episcopal and theological documents of the time, and the rites for these ordinations have survived. The insistence among scholars that women were not ordained, Macy shows, is based on a later definition of ordination, one that would have been unknown in the early Middle Ages. In the early centuries of Christianity, ordination was understood as the process and the ceremony by which one moved to any new ministry in the community. In the early Middle Ages, women served in at least four central ministries: episcopa (woman bishop), presbyteria (woman priest), deaconess and abbess. The ordinations of women continued until the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries radically altered the definition of ordination. These reforms not only removed women from the ordained ministry, but also attempted to eradicate any memory of women's ordination in the past. With profound implications for how women are viewed in Christian history, and for current debates about the role of women in the church, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination* offers new answers to an old question and overturns a long-held erroneous belief.

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