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Book Section:

Bamji, AE (2013) The Catholic life cycle. In: Bamji, AE, Laven, MR and Janssen, GH, (eds.) The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation. Ashgate , 183 - 201. ISBN 9781409423737

The Catholic Life Cycle

Alexandra Bamji

Upon the death in September 1646 of Angelo Cesi, Bishop of Rimini and papal nuncio to the Republic of Venice, his secretary hastened to write to Rome to inform the papacy that 'his mortal life ended very happily, since the previous day he had received the *viaticum* of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist from the hand of the patriarch Morosini; … and one hour after he had been fortified by extreme unction he flew off directly to heaven'.[1] A magnificent funeral, which the secretary explained was planned for the following week, shows that Cesi's life and death were exceptional in many respects. At the same time, the sacraments of communion and extreme unction were expected to be central to the process of dying for all Catholics.

Life and death are the basic elements of shared human experience, and both had a substantial religious dimension in the early modern period. Yet scholars have not previously considered the meanings and significance of the 'Catholic life cycle'. This undertaking should be informed by two more established areas of scholarship. Firstly, the explosion of interest in the history of the family since the 1960s has prompted consideration of particular phases of the life cycle, especially childhood. The early modern period became a locus of debate following Philippe Ariès's provocative claim that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist'.[2] Ariès suggested that high infant mortality resulted in little emotional investment in children, and argued that childhood was not seen as distinct from adulthood. His view found some support, notably from Simon Schama, who claimed on the basis of visual evidence that the seventeenth-century Dutch were fixated on their children, and viewed them with considerable affection, 'in a manner arrestingly unlike those of other European cultures'.[3] While the idea that the early modern period witnessed the discovery of childhood has now been comprehensively rejected, it has fostered a wealth of research on attitudes to the

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[1]   Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, Venezia, B. 71, 22 September 1646. I am grateful to Mary Laven for her advice and comments.

[2]   Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962), p. 128.

[3]   Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York, 1987), ch. 7, esp. p. 486.

young, which in turn has sparked an interest in other phases of life, especially old age.[4]

Secondly, Ariès's contention that the early modern period was a time of transition for the concept of childhood, due to 'the growing influence of Christianity on life and manners', has stimulated reflection on the interface between religion and age.[5] For this reason, an assessment of the 'Catholic life cycle' can turn to its more fully studied Protestant counterpart. Historians of the Protestant Reformation have conducted extensive analyses of the consequences of religious change for the family, for the life cycle as a whole, and for phases and moments within it.[6] Steven Ozment has taken us through the life cycle of the people of Lutheran Nuremberg, from courtship and marriage to the point at which a new generation embarked on adult life.[7] David Cressy's study of the life cycle in Tudor and Stuart England emphasized its ritual character, which functioned to bring people together and to assign them to their place in society.[8] Other studies of Protestant Europe have focused on particular rituals, such as baptism and weddings, exploring what they tell us about relations between family, church, community and city, and arguing that 'the Reformation made the boundaries between the sacred and secular far more precise'.[9]

Research on gender and the family in the Catholic world has recognized the significance of individual moments and segments of the life cycle, but has not explored the connections between these points and phases, and the meanings of the life cycle as a whole. Just like Lutheranism or Calvinism, Catholicism was lived religion.[10] And an individual's experience of Catholicism was affected by their age. Age was a significant part of individual identity, and played a role in the organization and government of society.[11] Peter Laslett described ageing, alongside gender, ethnicity and class, as 'one of the four dimensions of individual and social

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[4]   Critiques of Ariès include Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge, 1983); Steven E. Ozment, *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

[5]   Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, p. 43.

[6]   Joel Harrington's study of marriage has an important comparative dimension. See Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge, 1995). The use of autobiographies has also been fruitful. See T.M. Safley, *Matheus Miller's Memoir: A Merchant's Life in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 2000).

[7]   Steven Ozment, *Flesh and Spirit: Private Life in Early Modern Germany* (New York, 1999).

[8]   David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997).

[9]   Karen E. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva: The Shaping of a Community, 1536–1564* (Aldershot, 2005); Lyndal Roper, '"Going to Church and Street": Weddings in Reformation Augsburg', *Past and Present*, 106 (1985): 99.

[10]   See Chapter 9.

[11]   Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe, c. 1300– c. 1500* (Manchester, 2006), p. 2.

experience'.[12] The distinctive characteristic of ageing is that it is a dimension of experience which embodies continual change. For this reason, the Catholic life cycle can help us to understand the dynamics of identity and power in the early modern world. More specifically, as Alex Walsham has demonstrated in her study of the impact of the Reformation on relations between generations, the life cycle can be 'a tool with which to investigate religious change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'.[13]

The Catholic life cycle had distinctive features. It was punctuated by sacramental observance and steeped in ritual. It was also complex and varied. There was a normative Catholic life cycle in which the sacraments played a prominent but not exclusive role, and a range of variations upon it were possible, notably cyclical as well as linear life cycles, and different routes for those who married and those who did not. We must acknowledge several methodological issues from the outset. Firstly, how did early modern people understand the concept of the life cycle, and how does this correspond with the terminology of modern scholars? Secondly, any exploration of the institutional Church's attempts to reshape or standardize the life cycle must be set carefully against evidence of wider contemporary attitudes and sacramental practice. Thirdly, although the sacraments were certainly a crucial component of the Catholic life cycle, we must be wary of paying too much attention to them, or blurring distinctions between different sets of rituals.[14] More broadly, we need to consider the relative importance of exterior spirituality. In order to confront these methodological challenges and reveal the Catholic life cycle's contours and significance, this discussion begins by considering how the life cycle was and can be defined, before assessing the connections between the life cycle and the sacraments, and the Church's interventions in their intersection. We shall then move beyond the sacraments to assess inconsistencies, abuses, other significant life-cycle rituals, and the cyclical, gendered and relational nature of the life cycle. The Catholic approach to the life cycle was inclusive, with familial and communal – as well as individual – dimensions, and with scope for a range of life courses.

Defining the life cycle

Age was meaningful in early modern society. An extensive terminology of age demonstrates that people were attuned to its nuances, and would identify and

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[12]   David I. Kertzer and Peter Laslett (eds), *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society and Old Age* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), p. 4.

[13]   Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation of the Generations: Youth, Age and Religious Change in England, c. 1500–1700', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 21 (2011): 93–121 (93).

[14]   See the caution of Marc R. Forster, *Catholic Revival in the Age of the Baroque: Religious Identity in Southwest Germany, 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 107.

differentiate between individuals of different ages with linguistic precision. Although the age profile of society differed from today due to high levels of infant mortality, many lived to what would still be considered old age. Age mattered in the political milieu, with a minimum age for participation in political life in some contexts, and an association between seniority and holders of high office.[15] The political and legal implications of age encouraged the development of chronological memory through registers of birth, such as Venice's *Libri d'Oro* (Golden Books), which recorded the births of male nobles from 1506. Early modern people saw life as a succession of six or seven ages, influenced by a range of classical and medieval writers whose work had informed Roman and canon law. Saint Augustine wrote of six ages of man which correlated with the days of Creation and the ages of the world. Similarly, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae Origines* set out six ages: infancy (birth to seven), childhood (7–14), adolescence (14–28), youth (28–50), maturity (50–70) and old age (70–).[16] These authors also associated characteristics with each of these ages. As the Roman orator Cicero wrote,

> The course of life is fixed, and nature admits of its being run but in one way, and only once, and to each part of our life there is something specially seasonable, so that the feebleness of children, as well as the high spirit of youth, the soberness of maturer years, and the ripe wisdom of old age – all have a certain natural advantage which should be secured in its proper season.[17]

Isidore drew out these qualities with reference to the etymology of the name for each age, connecting infancy with the incapacity for speech implied by *non fari*, and the Latin term for childhood, *puerizia*, with purity. In the conceptualization of seven ages, the final stage was divided into old age and extreme old age, and the chronological markers were adjusted for all but the first two ages. Chronological boundaries between these divisions, all the same, were used flexibly throughout the early modern period, especially for later ages. Biological age was overlaid with other temporal inflections. Devotional activity provided a structure to the lives of early modern Catholics throughout the year and the life course. Certain phases of the life cycle had particular religious connotations. The young were thought to be especially open to salutary religious influences due to their ignorance and innocence.[18] Equally, the very old were thought to be closer to God.

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[15] See Robert Finlay, 'The Venetian Republic as a Gerontocracy: Age and Politics in the Renaissance', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 8 (1978): 157–79.

[16] Ilaria Taddei, '*Puerizia*, *adolescenza* and *giovinezza*: Images and Conceptions of Youth in Florentine Society during the Renaissance', in Konrad Eisenbichler (ed.), *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150–1650* (Toronto, 2002), pp. 15–26.

[17] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Two Essays on Old Age and Friendship*, trans. E.S. Shuckburgh (London, 1903), p. 57.

[18] Walsham, 'The Reformation of the Generations', p. 97.

Modern scholars often follow early modern views and divide the life cycle into six or seven parts, but they also deploy other terms which reflect their methodological inclinations and perceptions of significant times in the life cycle. Some focus on the key moments of birth, marriage and death. These constitute a powerful tripartite set due to their incorporation of beginning and end, and because of the centrality of marriage to early modern society. Others, influenced by anthropology, rename ages as stages and focus on the process of the life cycle and on ritualized transitions between stages. A gendered variant of the life cycle identifies women in terms of their marital and sexual status, as virgin, wife and widow. Our terminology also includes the life course, demographic events, life-cycle events, life-cycle rituals, and rites of passage. In addition, in view of the intimate connection between the living and the dead, the afterlife can be considered as a final stage of life. Ritual should be highlighted as a recurrent scholarly preoccupation.[19] According to Arnold van Gennep, rites of passage marked significant biological and social changes, and were characterized by a three-stage sequence of rituals – rites of separation, transition and incorporation – which took place at a particular time in a specific place.[20] Rituals have been of sustained interest since they transcend the individual, functioning as a form of communication and creating community. The repetitive quality of ritual, even as it evolves, adapts and changes, also conjures up a sense of circular, rather than linear time, which helps to explain the cyclical element of the term 'life cycle'.[21]

For early modern Catholics, life-cycle rituals involved entry into and participation in the Christian community. By their very nature, these rituals entailed more than individual experience. The family was particularly prominent amongst the broader figurations of the life cycle. This echoed the increased devotional emphasis on the holy family from the late medieval period onwards, which amplified the attention paid to Jesus' childhood, Mary's motherhood and Joseph's fatherhood.[22] For instance, intensified devotion to Saint Joseph is illustrated by the addition of his feast to the liturgical calendar in 1479, and its subsequent promotion to a festival of obligation in 1621. He was made Mexico's patron saint in 1555, and became the protector of the missions in China in 1678. This attention was mirrored in art: Joseph became the most frequently depicted saint in the early modern Spanish empire.[23]

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[19]   For a valuable synthesis, which blends pre-Reformation, Protestant and Catholic experiences, see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2005), ch. 1.

[20]   Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago, IL, 1960), p. 21.

[21]   On ritual and circular time, see Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 183.

[22]   Ulinka Rublack, 'Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996): 88.

[23]   Charlene Villaseñor Black, 'Love and Marriage in the Spanish Empire: Depictions of Holy Matrimony and Gender Discourses in the Seventeenth Century', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 32 (2001): 637–67.

We can even think in terms of family life cycles, following Tamara Hareven's approach of viewing the family 'as a process over time rather than as a static unit within certain time periods'.[24] There were often four key family life stages in early modern Europe: the *union* when a couple married and combined assets in a household; the *birth* of children; *fission* when these children married and extracted assets; and the distribution of the estate upon the *death* of the couple.[25] The many treatises on a Christian upbringing which were published in the wake of the Council of Trent, several at the instigation of Carlo Borromeo, archbishop of Milan, demonstrate that the Catholic life cycle was familial as well as personal.[26] These treatises, as well as confession manuals, emphasized the responsibility of parents, especially fathers, for their children's moral and religious education. As Cardinal Richelieu observed, the fourth Commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother', 'imposes obligations not only on children towards their fathers, but also on fathers and mothers towards their children, inasmuch as love should be reciprocal'.[27] Families overlapped with households to a greater and lesser degree, and the head of a household was responsible for ensuring that all its members received religious instruction. This also had a reciprocal dimension: the institutional Church encouraged servants to spread Catholic values in their masters' families.[28] Just as historians of gender have long observed its relational character, we should heed the relational component of age and the importance of the generations. Here, too, we see that the meaning of the life cycle transcends moments of transition. The life cycle's value as a category of analysis is thus enhanced by its broad meaning, which incorporates ageing, ritual, stages of life and connectivity.

The Church and the sacraments

For Catholics, stages of life and transitions between them were intimately connected to the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church: baptism, confirmation, confession, communion, marriage, extreme unction and holy orders.[29] The

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[24] Tamara K. Hareven, 'The Family as Process: The Historical Study of the Family Cycle', *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974): 322.

[25] Sarah Hanley, 'Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France', *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1989): pp. 4–27 (23).

[26] See Oliver Logan, 'Counter-Reformatory Theories of Upbringing in Italy', in *The Church and Childhood: Studies in Church History*, 31 (Oxford, 1994), pp. 275–84.

[27] Cited by Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, 2nd edn (Harlow, 2005), p. 55.

[28] See Raffaella Sarti, 'Dangerous Liaisons: Servants as "Children" Taught by their Masters and as "Teachers" of their Masters' Children', *Paedagogica Historica*, 43 (2007): 565–87.

[29] A. Prosperi, 'I sacramenti in età tridentina', in A. Alberigo and I. Rogger (eds), *Il Concilio di Trento nella prospettiva del terzo millennio. Atti del convegno tenuto a Trento il 25–28 settembre 1995* (Brescia, 1997), pp. 251–66.

discussion of these sacraments at the Council of Trent must be seen in a longer context, since the particular significance of these seven sacraments was elaborated at the Council of Florence, and expressed in the papal bull *Exultate Domine* of 1439. Scholarship has focused on the negotiated reception of the Tridentine decrees on the sacraments, and individual historians have often concentrated on a single sacrament, especially marriage. These studies are frequently interested in what the sacraments can tell us about the reforming power of the Catholic Church, rather than what they tell us about the life cycle. The motives of the Church and the implementation of Tridentine decrees are central to these analyses. Was the Church, as in John Bossy's view, trying to enforce a uniform code of religious practice?[30] And did it seek an increased role in the life cycle at Trent? In order to assess the attitude of the pre- and post-Tridentine Church to the life cycle, we must examine its strategies for the implementation of its vision of the sacraments, and consider what changes took place to the sacraments themselves and to their role in Catholic lives during the early modern period.[31]

Sacramental participation was affected by factors as diverse as the availability and assiduousness of local priests, the influence of political circumstances and the persuasiveness of devotional imagery.[32] Trent marked the beginning of a concerted effort by the Church to pursue correct sacramental observance on an institutional basis. Information-gathering, education and episcopal visitations were the three main strands of this endeavour. None of these strategies was new, but each became more developed, more frequent and – for the most part – more standardized. Cardinal Ximenes had instituted baptismal registers in his archdiocese of Toledo in 1497, and while other bishops followed his lead, this practice remained patchy.[33] In 1563, the Council of Trent decreed that parish clergy should maintain marriage and baptismal registers. In the wake of the Council, *status animarum* inspections became more common. These soul counts, in which the parish priest or his delegate went house by house, street by street, recorded the names of parishioners and whether they had been baptized and confirmed.[34] From 1614, as specified in the Roman Ritual, *status animarum* censuses (conducted annually at Easter) were one of five sets of records for which parish priests were responsible, alongside registers of baptisms, marriages, burials and Easter communicants.[35]

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[30]   John Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe', *Past and Present*, 47 (1970): 52.

[31]   For an assessment of sacramental observance in early modern France, see Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France, 1580–1730* (New Haven, 2009), ch. 11.

[32]   On the impact of the local context, see Trevor Johnson, *Magistrates, Madonnas and Miracles: The Counter Reformation in the Upper Palatinate* (Aldershot, 2009), ch. 8.

[33]   W.E. Tate, *The Parish Chest*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, 1969), p. 43.

[34]   See Monica Chojnacka, 'Singlewomen in Early Modern Venice: Communities and Opportunities', in Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (eds), *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250–1800* (Philadelphia, PA, 1999), pp. 217–35 (218).

[35]   Bossy, 'Counter-Reformation', p. 53.

These records enabled the upper echelons of the clergy to measure how successfully parish priests encouraged their parishioners to lead a sacramental life. Catechisms played a central role in educating Catholics in the Church's expectations about how they should live their lives via regular classes held on Sundays and feast days. Instructions on the sacraments typically comprised a third of catechetical material. Although the Council of Trent obligated bishops to ensure children were educated about Catholicism, the Council itself had a limited impact on the catechizing of the laity.[36] The most popular sixteenth-century catechism, the Jesuit Peter Canisius's *Summa doctrinae christianae* (1555) was inspired by the use of catechisms by Protestant reformers, and the official Tridentine catechism of 1566, mainly composed by Carlo Borromeo, was written in Latin and aimed at the clergy. In addition, a great deal of catechetical instruction was not carried out by priests. It was often delivered by *kloppen* (celibate lay sisters) in Dutch communities and by the laity – sometimes in the context of youth confraternities – in Italian cities.[37] The perceived value of catechisms in bolstering sacramental observance is evident from their increased sophistication from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Bishops published catechisms tailored to their own dioceses, with separate catechisms for those at different points in their religious education, such as the stages leading up to confirmation and first communion.[38] Catechisms thereby augmented visitations in the episcopal promotion of Counter-Reformation piety.

Trent sought to champion the sacramental status of marriage, as articulated at the Council of Florence in 1439.[39] Marriage differed from other sacraments in its dual nature as a ceremony and a phase of life. Both elements had a religious dimension. The indissoluble bond between husband and wife mirrored that between Christ and the Church. Married men and women were expected to remain monogamous and to fulfil God's command to Noah and his sons to go forth and multiply. For women, marriage also entailed subjection to the authority of a husband, as a consequence of Eve's sin.[40] Marriage was tied to the life cycle by canon law, which required the mutual consent of both partners, with no impediments of error (about the identity or sexual ability of the partner) or age. The minimum age for betrothal was seven. The minimum age of marriage was the age at which each partner was thought able to grant consent and engage in sexual activity, 14 for men and 12

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[36]   *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H.J. Schroeder (St. Louis, MO, 1941), p. 196. Jean Pierre Dedieu, '"Christianization" in New Castile: Catechism, Communion, Mass, and Confirmation in the Toledo Archbishopric, 1540–1650', in Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (eds), *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain* (Minneapolis, MN, 1992), pp. 1–24 (4).

[37]   On *kloppen*, see Chapter 9.

[38]   Karen E. Carter, 'The Science of Salvation: French Diocesan Catechisms and Catholic Reform (1650–1800)', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 96 (2010): 234–61.

[39]   Gabriella Zarri, 'Il matrimonio tridentino', in P. Prodi and W. Reinhard (eds), *Il Concilio di Trento e il moderno* (Bologna, 1994), pp. 437–83.

[40]   Genesis 3:16.

for women. All the same, the religious significance of marriage for early modern Catholics was closely intertwined with legal, economic and familial considerations.

Before Trent, most marriages did not take place in church, and the presence of a priest was supplemental. Understandings varied about whether a marriage was complete when a verbal promise of marriage was made, after sexual intercourse, or when the promise was legitimized by a priest with a public wedding and nuptial blessing. The outcome of the discussions about marriage at Trent was published in the *Tametsi* decree of 11 November 1563, which aimed to place the marriage ceremony more firmly under the control of the Church. The decree laid down the expectation that marriages take place inside a church, and required the publication of banns and the presence of a priest and two witnesses. Disputes at the Council about the nature of clandestine marriage meant that *Tametsi* was a compromise decree. For the French bishops, the absence of parental consent made a marriage clandestine. However, the Church's eventual position was that a clandestine marriage lacked freely expressed *public* consent, which banns and witnesses sought to ensure. Nonetheless, the implementation of the Tridentine conception of marriage was slow and inconsistent.[41]

Like marriage, baptism had religious and social dimensions, with individual and communal significance. Firstly, the infant was cleansed of original sin, receiving the gifts of grace and salvation, as well as a name.[42] Secondly, baptism marked the incorporation of the individual into the Christian community, symbolized by the placing of the infant into the arms of its godparents in the final stage of the ritual. It could also define other communal affiliations, marking the entry into parish and city. Before Trent, concerns had arisen about the speed of baptism, who it was performed by and where, and the number of godparents. Baptism, particularly godparenthood, was discussed by the Council of Trent in 1547. Guido Alfani has argued that the distinctive outcome of Trent was not the decision that each Catholic should have one godfather and one godmother, the names of which were to be recorded by the priest along with the names and surnames of infant and parents, but the ability of the post-Tridentine church to implement its position on godparenthood.[43] Records of post-Tridentine baptisms show a gradual reduction in the number of godparents, and high levels of compliance with the Tridentine catechism's advocacy for naming infants after saints. Evidence of lay demands for speedy baptisms by priests suggests a shared regard for this life-cycle ritual amongst both clergy and laity.[44]

Baptism was coupled with confirmation in the initiation ceremony of the early Church, but confirmation, which was not required for salvation, became separated over the centuries, and came to be administered to those over the age of seven.

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[41] See Silvana Seidel Menchi and Diego Quaglioni (eds), *Matrimoni in dubbio. Unioni controverse e nozze clandestine in Italia dal XIV al XVIII secolo* (Bologna, 2002).

[42] John 3:5.

[43] Guido Alfani, *Fathers and Godfathers. Spiritual Kinship in Early-Modern Italy* (Farnham, 2009), p. 91.

[44] Forster, *Catholic Revival*, p. 108.

The sacrament was carried out by a bishop, who anointed the individual on the forehead in the sign of the cross with chrism (oil scented with balsam), and laid his hands on the child as a reminder of adversities, sometimes by slapping its cheek. In confirmation the Holy Spirit entered the soul, strengthening it against temptation. The Tridentine catechism differentiated between baptism and confirmation using a military analogy: 'In baptism the Christian is enlisted into the service [of God], in confirmation he is equipped for battle'.[45] This battle was to be fought against the Devil and heresy, and a confirmed Catholic was not only responsible for their own sins, but also for the salvation of others.[46] While the bishop's role in this sacrament provided opportunities for the assertion of episcopal authority, the accessibility of bishops resulted in substantial variation in the administration of this sacrament. In early sixteenth-century New Castile, almost everyone was confirmed at the age of 14, and in late sixteenth-century Venice, adults, including servants, had invariably been confirmed.[47] By contrast, many in France were not confirmed, even in the seventeenth century, and hardly anyone was confirmed in Galicia and rural Catalonia.[48] Confirmation played a less significant role in the lives of Catholics than it did for their Protestant counterparts. In Lutheran areas in particular, confirmation was a requisite for receiving a funeral oration, made the individual eligible to be a godparent, and had a range of social resonances connected with the practice as a transition to maturity, as exemplified by gifts of a first pair of long trousers or a hat.[49] By contrast, the Counter-Reformation had little impact on interest and participation in this sacrament.

Communion was a repeated sacramental experience for adult Catholics, and first communion had an additional set of resonances as an initiation into adult spirituality. First communion is a central facet of modern Catholic observance, but has been largely neglected by early modern scholars.[50] Until the eleventh century, first communion was part of the infant initiation ceremony, alongside baptism and confirmation, but concerns that infants were unable to chew the host and might spit it out became coupled with a sense that communicants should understand that they were consuming the actual body and blood of Christ.[51] The Fourth Lateran Council thus linked communion to the age of discretion, placed by different texts

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[45]   *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. Rev. J. Donovan (Dublin, 1829), p. 196.

[46]   Allyson M. Poska, *Regulating the People: The Catholic Reformation in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Leiden, 1998), p. 38.

[47]   Dedieu, 'New Castile', p. 20; Chojnacka, 'Singlewomen', p. 218.

[48]   Dedieu, 'New Castile', p. 20; Poska, *Regulating the People*, p. 37; Henry Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter Reformation* (New Haven and London, 1993), p. 7.

[49]   Michael Mitterauer, *A History of Youth: Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times*, trans. Graeme Dunphy (Oxford, 1993), pp. 53–5.

[50]   On first communion's significance in modern England, see Peter McGrail, *First Communion: Ritual, Church and Popular Religious Identity* (Aldershot, 2007).

[51]   Kathryn Ann Taglia, 'The Cultural Construction of Childhood: Baptism, Communion, and Confirmation', in Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (eds), *Women, Marriage*

between the ages of 7 and 14. Infant communion nevertheless continued in some parts of Europe, including Milan, Amiens and Augsburg, and it was explicitly proscribed at Trent in 1562.[52] All the same, the Tridentine catechism left it to parish priests to judge when a child had reached the age of discretion. Although Trent merely reiterated the Church's position on first communion, the character of this sacrament was fundamentally changed by a development unconnected to the Council. In 1593, the first documented group first communion took place in the parish of Aumale in the diocese of Rouen.[53] The practice was soon taken up in Paris and began to spread more widely. Group first communion emerged from catechism classes which prepared children for taking the Eucharist; it was a logical step from group instruction to a single ceremony in which the whole cohort participated. Over time, other rituals were added to the mass of first communion. On its eve, children would ask forgiveness from their parents and receive the latter's blessing; during the morning mass, they would process with lighted candles; and an additional vespers service would take place in the evening. The change in the ritual dimension of first communion had several consequences. The practice was taken up with enthusiasm by Jesuit missionaries, who added a masquerade element to the procession.[54] More broadly, first communion tightened the religious bonds between the new communicant, their family and the parish community, and provided an edifying display of devotion to all.

While sacramental rituals of initiation certainly marked significant moments in any Catholic's life course, the sacraments which most Catholics would experience most frequently were confession and communion. These sacraments were often paired together, following Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council, which demanded the annual confession of sins from the age of discretion, and annual communion at Easter in the same sentence. The observance of these sacraments was at the heart of contemporary understandings of what it meant to be a good adult Catholic, as is shown by Inquisition records, in which regular observance is repeatedly presented as evidence of the piety of the accused. The importance of confession and communion in the lives of Catholics is also evident in the prominence of these two sacraments in catechisms.[55] Confession and eucharistic devotion were also central parts of religious instruction during Jesuit missions.

Scholarship has tended to frame these sacraments as instruments of control, pointing – for instance – to Carlo Borromeo's association of sacramental

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and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan (Kalamazoo, MI, 1998), pp. 255–87 (273).

[52] Norman P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (2 vols, London, 1990), vol. 2, p. 727.

[53] Paul Turner, *Ages of Initiation: The First Two Christian Millennia* (Collegeville, MN, 2000), pp. 6, 7, 10.

[54] David Gentilcore, '"Adapt Yourself to the People's Capabilities": Missionary Strategies, Methods and Impact in the Kingdom of Naples, 1600–1800', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 45 (1994): 269–96 (279).

[55] Carter, 'The Science of Salvation', p. 245.

confession with the maintenance of social order. Closer scrutiny reveals other ways in which the significance of these sacraments changed for early modern Catholics. Firstly, the Catholic Church not only wished for compliance with the expectation of annual confession and communion, but also aspired to increase the frequency of the practice of these sacraments. By the eighteenth century, this goal had been achieved, but practice was not regular or routine. Instead, confession and communion became connected to major feasts in addition to Easter. Secondly, confession and communion – particularly when they did not take place at Easter – enriched Catholic lives by bringing them into greater contact with the regular clergy, who encouraged this aspect of sacramental observance. Thirdly, a full confession of one's sins before death was seen as essential for salvation, and deathbed confessions amplified.[56] The increased importance attached to deathbed confession is at odds with a seeming lack of interest by contemporaries in the final sacrament of the life cycle – extreme unction. This sacrament combined prayer with the anointing of the body with holy oils which both sanctified it and prepared the soul for the afterlife.[57] It could be performed if the individual was unconscious, but children were not allowed it, and those who died suddenly also did not receive it. The scarcity of evidence about the practice of extreme unction may partly reflect the unlikelihood of those who received it leaving documentary traces about this life experience. Yet there are also hints that fear may have provoked avoidance. One German priest wrote in the 1670s that his parishioners 'shied away from extreme unction, saying that [if they took it] they would die immediately, and if they did recover they would not be allowed to put their feet on the ground again and would no longer be able to dance'.[58]

The final sacrament – holy orders – is rarely connected to the life cycle. Yet both men and women who chose to follow a religious life also embarked on a well-defined path, in which ritual and age played significant roles. Age was central to the procedure for ordination defined during session 23 of the Council of Trent, which specified that priests 'shall ascend step by step, that with increasing age they may grow in worthiness of life and learning'.[59] Confirmation was a prerequisite for the first tonsure, and there were prescribed interims between the minor orders of porter, reader, exorcist and acolyte. No one was to be promoted to subdeacon before the age of 22 (and unless a year had elapsed since promotion to acolyte), to deacon until the age of 23, or to priest until the age of 24. Marc Forster has found that seventeenth-century priests were usually appointed in their early thirties, and that as time went on, they had often served long apprenticeships.[60] The valuing of celibacy was a distinctive quality of the Catholic life cycle. Trent asserted the

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[56] Forster, *Catholic Revival*, pp. 109–11.

[57] Poska, *Regulating the People*, p. 128.

[58] Forster, *Catholic Revival*, p. 109.

[59] Kathleen M. Comerford, 'Italian Tridentine Diocesan Seminaries: A Historiographical Study', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 29 (1998): 999–1022 (p. 1000).

[60] Forster, *Catholic Revival*, p. 173.

binding nature of clerical celibacy and the superiority of virginity over marriage.[61] Mobility was another characteristic aspect of the lives of the male religious, who were often drawn away from their place of birth by educational or devotional opportunities.

Although a nun's religious vocation was not sacramental, a woman who entered a convent also embarked upon a clearly defined, age-correlated path.[62] She began as a postulant, living in the convent wearing lay clothing, and then became a novice, wearing a novice's habit for at least a year before taking her solemn vows of profession. The Council of Trent imposed minimum age requirements of 12 years for the clothing ceremony, and 16 years for profession.[63] Prioresses and office-holders had to be at least 25 years old. In seventeenth-century France most women were clothed in their late teens; between 1650 and 1700 the average age at clothing increased by two years. Convents played other roles in women's life cycles. *Conversae sorores* (lay sisters) often entered convents at a slightly later age. In addition, many girls entered convents as boarders between the ages of seven and twelve, typically for a period of one to two years, in preparation for first communion.[64]

Beyond the sacraments: the experience of Catholicism

The possibility of an avowedly Catholic life in which the sacrament of marriage did not feature reminds us to look beyond the sacraments when analysing the Catholic life cycle. Two trends of recent scholarship on the Counter-Reformation – an attentiveness to local particularities and an appreciation of the global character of early modern Catholicism – indicate the implausibility of a single Catholic life cycle. Given the complex realities of early modern lives, it is hardly surprising that the sacraments were inconsistently observed, contested and transcended, that some life cycles were more cyclical than others, and that a range of life cycles could be acceptable to the Church. Indeed, the Church's recognition of the diversity of the Catholic world was expressed at Trent in the suggestion of 'allowance being made for place, time and occasion'.[65]

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[61] See Helen Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c. 1100–1700* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 192–3; Henry Charles Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 4th edn (London, 1932).

[62] See Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent* (London, 2002), ch. 2; Amy Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago and London, 2005), p. 22.

[63] Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 2, pp. 781–2.

[64] Elizabeth Rapley, 'Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France', *French Historical Studies*, 18 (1994): 613–31.

[65] *Canons and Decrees*, p. 194.

Varied sacramental observance had a number of facets. Firstly, some Catholics could access the sacraments more easily than others. Priests and bishops were often less accessible in rural locales, and crises such as plague epidemics could bring about a sudden shortage of the clergy in cities. Those living in non-Catholic areas might be baptized in private or in a reformed church, married by reformed ministers, and mentally contemplate seeing and eating the host in order to receive the associated spiritual benefit.[66] Secondly, bishops adapted or elaborated on Tridentine expectations within local and regional contexts. In 1585, for instance, when the Third Mexican Provincial Council published its findings on marriage, these included specific guidelines for Indian marriages. In 1592, likewise, Bishop Antonio Grimani of Torcello raised the minimum age for the clothing of would-be nuns in his diocese to 15, commenting that the Council of Trent had not prohibited the provincial raising of this age.[67] Thirdly, secular authorities modified the Church's vision of the life cycle, usually via legislation. In France, dissatisfaction with Trent's position on marriage led to a series of edicts which superseded canon law and compelled parental consent on pain of disinheritance.[68] Fourthly, conversion complicated the chronology and rituals of the sacraments in the convert's life course. While there were few mass conversions in early modern Italy, institutions which educated and baptized converts opened up and down the peninsula, in Rome (1543), Venice (1557), Bologna (1568), Mantua (1574), Ferrara (1584), Naples (1601) and Reggio (1630). Non-infant baptism developed ritual characteristics of its own, such as the 40-day minimum period between acceptance into the House of Catechumens and baptism in seventeenth-century Venice.[69] Fifthly, Catholics abused and misused the sacraments, consciously and unconsciously. The Church attempted to tackle incorrect distribution and receipt of the sacraments, especially via bishops and the Inquisition. Abuse of the sacrament of marriage by the laity was a particular concern.[70] In the seventeenth century, nonetheless, the Inquisition appears to have been increasingly preoccupied by the misconduct of the clergy, particularly when non-ordained priests surpassed their remit.

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[66] Alexandra Walsham, 'Beads, Books and Bare Ruined Choirs: Transmutations of Catholic Ritual Life in Protestant England', in Benjamin J. Kaplan et al. (eds), *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570–1720* (Manchester, 2009), pp. 103–22; Judith Pollmann, 'Burying the Dead; Reliving the Past: Ritual, Resentment and Sacred Space in the Dutch Republic', in Kaplan et al., *Catholic Communities*, p. 94.

[67] Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, p. 27.

[68] Hanley, 'Engendering the State'.

[69] Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550–1670* (London, 1983), chs 14 and 15, esp. p. 262.

[70] This topic has received extensive scholarly attention in recent years. See Silvana Seidel Menchi and Diego Quaglioni (eds), *Coniugi nemici: la separazione in Italia dal XII al XVIII secolo* (Bologna, 2000); Silvana Seidel Menchi and Diego Quaglioni (eds), *Trasgressioni: seduzioni, adulterio, bigamia (XIV–XVIII secolo)* (Bologna, 2004); Silvana Seidel Menchi and Diego Quaglioni (eds), *I tribunali del matrimonio (secoli XV–XVIII)* (Bologna, 2006); Kim Siebenhüner, *Bigamie und Inquisition in Italian 1600–1750* (Paderborn, 2006).

Framing the Catholic life cycle exclusively in terms of how quickly, successfully and fully the Tridentine conception of the sacraments was implemented overshadows the acknowledgement of their flexible role by both clergy and laity. Faith and devotion were the priorities for the clergy, not total uniformity of practice or deep doctrinal understanding. Even if they incorporated the sacraments selectively into their lives, as Marc Forster has highlighted was frequently the case, most laypeople would still have considered themselves to be good Catholics.[71] Of course, some Catholics were more devout than others. Exceptional piety was mapped onto the life cycle, especially by the tropes of precocious piety and the casting aside of a misspent youth in spiritual autobiographies and hagiography.[72] This first trope characterized the life of Saint Luigi Gonzaga (1568–91, beatified 1605, canonized 1726), who pledged himself to God aged seven, resolved to remain celibate aged ten, and became a Jesuit novice aged 17. His choice of the Society of Jesus was, moreover, motivated by its status as a young order and its commitment to the Christian instruction of youths.[73] Similarly, Marie de l'Incarnation (1599–1672) wrote in later life of how she had been visited by Jesus in a dream as a girl. Her behaviour in her late teens epitomized dedication to a Catholic life cycle – she married aged 17, attended church on a daily basis, and gave birth to a son. Widowed shortly afterwards, she subsequently embarked on an alternative female life cycle by entering an Ursuline convent.[74] Women who neither married nor took religious vows could also express a heightened commitment to a Catholic life by pledging celibacy and joining the congregated Ursulines or Dimesse, often while still living with their families.[75]

Sacramental observance also played a limited part in the final phase of the life cycle, because the rituals of dying only formed a minor part of the transition from life to death. The other components of this phase comprised preparation for death, funerary and burial rituals, and prayers and masses for the dead. These characteristics underline the cyclical, familial and communal nature of the Catholic life cycle, in which life and death can be seen on a continuum, and in which each individual was entangled in a collective process. The Counter-Reformation modified the configuration and importance of the elements of this process. Although the art of a good death was a substantive medieval genre, the literature on preparing for death burgeoned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was mirrored by an amplification of themes of death in sermons.[76]

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[71] Forster, *Catholic Revival*, p. 110.

[72] Walsham, 'Reformation of the Generations', p. 112.

[73] Paul F. Grendler, *The University of Mantua, the Gonzaga and the Jesuits* (Baltimore, MD, 2009), pp. 43–5.

[74] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 63–139.

[75] See Gabriella Zarri, 'The Third Status', in Anne Jacobson Schutte et al. (eds), *Time, Space, and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe* (Kirksville, MO, 2001), pp. 181–99.

[76] Michel Vovelle, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983); Alain Croix, *La Bretagne aux 16e et 17e siècles* (Paris, 1982).

Catholics believed that the destiny of each soul was decided immediately after death. This idea of particular judgement corroborated the importance of preparing for death throughout one's life, and altered the significance of funerals and masses for the dead. The focus was increasingly placed on the period shortly after death, with a condensed funeral process, masses concentrated in the days following death, and a corresponding decline in requests for perpetual masses. Certain clergy even successfully petitioned to be released from some of their obligations to recite perpetual masses.[77] At the same time, increasingly elaborate cemeteries sustained the presence of the dead in the community of the living.

The ongoing relationship between the living and the dead indicates that at the levels of family and community the life cycle was cyclical indeed. For individuals, too, the life cycle was often not a linear progression from cradle to grave. Across Europe, it appears that a quarter to a third of marriages were not the first marriage for one or both spouses.[78] Widowhood, remarriage and births with different partners characterized the life cycles of many devout Catholics, but – beyond examining the prosecution of bigamy – scholars have yet to assess whether the Catholic Church had a distinctive attitude to remarriage. In addition, the economic and social implications of widowhood and remarriage have been explored, but was remarriage also motivated by the centrality of marriage to a lay adult's Catholic identity? Furthermore, widowhood brought disruption to the family life cycle, with charitable institutions such as orphanages taking over the parental role of raising children to be good Catholics especially in the event of the death of both parents. Equally, the widowed might support the community through substantial charitable expenditure.[79] There is scope for further scrutiny of the intersection between the Catholic life cycle and Counter-Reformation charity. Exploring these issues may also shed light on the extent to which the life cycle was gendered. Widows rather than widowers appear to have been far more involved in charitable activities. But in other respects, differences between male and female experiences of the Catholic life cycle were of detail rather than essence. The different minimum age for marriage reflected perceptions of the age of sexual ability, not misogyny, and – even if women could not be ordained – a celibate life cycle was open to both sexes.

The early modern Catholic life cycle was the *process* through which an individual experienced Catholicism. It was framed by sacramental observance,

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[77]   Elizabeth Tingle, 'Purgatory and the Counter-Reformation: Perpetual Chantries in Southern Brittany, 1480–1720', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 60 (2009): 464–89.

[78]   Kamen, *Phoenix*, p. 312; Ariadne Schmidt, 'Survival Strategies of Widows and Their Families in Early Modern Holland, c. 1580–1750', *The History of the Family*, 12 (2007): 268–81 (277).

[79]   Stephanie Fink De Backer, 'Constructing Convents in Sixteenth-Century Castile: Toledan Widows and Patterns of Patronage', in Allison Levy (ed.), *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 177–94; Olwen Hufton, 'The Widow's Mite and Other Strategies: Funding the Catholic Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 8 (1998): 117–37.

coloured by ritual, and shaped by familial and communal as well as individual concerns. Analysing the Catholic life cycle sheds light on the religious and age dimensions of identity, relationships between centres and peripheries and the impact of Trent on devotional lives. This exploration requires detailed consideration of moments and phases in the life cycle, as well as the relationships between them. In general, changes to the sacramental elements of the life cycle were in the realms of the social and the ritual. The Church insisted on its involvement in the marriage ceremony. With baptism, there was a slow but harmonious adaptation to the Church's position on godparents and naming. First communion was transformed by its shift to a group ritual. Confession and communion became more frequent features of devotional lives, thereby increasing the laity's interaction with the clergy. The sacraments of confirmation, extreme unction and holy orders present particular opportunities for future research. Did the meaning of confirmation encourage diligent bishops to promote the sacrament, in order to involve the laity in the Church's fight against heresy? Can we tease out the significance of extreme unction by unearthing misappropriations of the sacrament, such as by healers who anointed their patients with oil in the sign of the cross?[80] And can we supplement our understanding of entry into the priesthood with an examination of the lives and life cycles of ordained priests?

Further questions merit investigation. How can we trace the devotional lives of those who neither transgressed nor surpassed the expectations of the Tridentine Church? What can the religious materiality of Catholic households tell us about how the household traverses the life cycle? What characterized the life cycles of those who chose to devote their lives to God, and how was this affected by the explosion in the number of regular and secular clergy during the early modern period? Did the post-Tridentine papacy continue to make allowance for 'place, time and occasion'? As we move forward, we should join up the different moments and stages of the life cycle, as this will rightfully highlight its relational nature. Every observance of a sacrament reinforced the individual's connection to the Christian community. These links between macro and micro were overlaid with the life cycles of families and local and regional communities, and with the ongoing presence of the dead in the lives of the living. To make sense of these relationships we must approach the life cycle from a range of perspectives: the young and the old, the married and the celibate, the laity and the parish clergy, the bishops and the papacy. We must also ask the question: did Catholics experience Catholicism differently at different points in the life cycle? For religious observance was shaped by generation as well as age.

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[80] See Guido Ruggiero, 'The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini: *Male*, Signs, and the Everyday World of Pre-Modern Medicine', *The American Historical Review*, 106 (2001): 1141–58 (1152).

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