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REVIEW

Gian Luca PELLICIONI,
La dimensione iniziatica nei riti di Ordinazione.
“Agnosce quod ages, imitare quod tractabis”
(Bibliotheca “Ephemerides Liturgicae”. Subsidia 217),
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Reviewer

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Reviewed Book

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Review

Gian Luca PELLICIONI, *La dimensione iniziatica nei riti di Ordinazione. "Agnosce quod ages, imitare quod tractabis"* (Bibliotheca "Ephemerides Liturgicae". "Subsidia" 217), Rome 2025

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Gian Luca Pelliccioni opens his book *La dimensione iniziatica nei riti di ordinazioni* with an important insight: "Tenendo conto del rinnovato clima di ricerca negli studi di liturgia e teologia sacramentaria, intendiamo rivalutare la liturgia dell'Ordine [...]" (11). Indeed, while many books have been written about the rites of ordination, few have approached this topic with a combined appreciation for both Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology. Fresh from earning his doctorate from the Pontifical Lateran University in 2024, Pelliccioni, a priest of the Diocese of San Benedetto in Tronto, promptly published his dissertation the following year, yielding to the work under consideration in this review.

La dimensione iniziatica consists of a brief introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction succinctly presents the work, starting from the line "Agnosce quod agis, imitare quod tractabis" from the rite of ordination of priests, which serves as the subtitle of the book. There in the introduction, Pelliccioni expresses the thesis of his study:

La nostra ipotesi di ricerca, esplicitata nel titolo del presente studio, ha come obiettivo l'approfondimento delle attuali liturgie di ordinazione nella loro dimensione iniziatico-liminale, per verificare in esse la presenza strutturale di riti di passaggio/iniziazione di cui si riscontrano, ad una prima osservazione, indizi rituali. (9)

He concludes this preliminary section by offering salient questions that get to the heart of his project.

Chapter one, *Contesto iniziale* (11–29), presents the general background of the study in light of several dialectics that need to be overcome. These involve the divergences between Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology (11), the rites of ordination and apostolic succession (11), the Paschal Mystery and rituality (13–14), Christological and ecclesiological readings of Holy Orders (23–24), the common and ministerial priesthoods (25–26), charisms and institution (27–28), and the eschatological reality of “there but not yet” (28). To overcome these divides, he proposes an emphasis on apostolic succession and its liminal character.

Chapter two, *L’iniziazione* (31–55), introduces anthropological concepts, such as initiation and liminality, which would provide the framework for the subsequent examination of ordination liturgies. Pelliccioni defines liminality, from the Latin word *limen* (threshold), as “una interruzione – separazione – del flusso della vita ordinaria che il rito stesso opera nel suo esser messo in atto; una frattura che vuole aprire ad una realtà ‘altra’, trascendente rispetto a quella quotidiana, ma che risulta essere in stretta relazione a essa” (31). Thus, he depicts the Church’s liturgies as rites of passage that accompany the Christian community towards the eschaton. These passages involve theandric (divine and human) acts.

Pelliccioni then borrows from Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner in describing the three transition points of rites of passage: separation, limen/margin, and aggregation (38–39). In these movements, not only the individuals undergoing passage but the whole community is the subject (39–40). These rites serve two functions: to pass through disorder towards order (40) and to form or transform the life of the ones(s) going through the passage (41). Regarding initiation rites, he reiterates that they involve the entire community, whose culture, identity, and even secrets need to be transmitted (42–45). These rites involve a “death” that brings about an existential change – a reminder that death is not final (46–46). He closes this chapter by discussing the connection between initiation and succession, both of which are aimed towards perpetuation of the community and transmission of identity – in a sense, an “institutionalization” of charism (48–53).

Chapter three, *La dimensione iniziatica nella evoluzione delle liturgie di ordinazione* (57–136), traces the development of the rites of ordination and examines historical liturgies in light of the threefold framework of separation, limen, and reaggregation. It begins with a general overview of the evolution of ordination rituals, involving an institutionalizing tendency. For each liturgical source examined, Pelliccioni describes the proceedings of episcopal, presbyteral, and diaconal ordinations (as well as rites for the so-called “minor orders”), accounting for how each symbolic action fits his framework. He examines the following sources: the *Traditio Apostolica* (70–78), the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* (78–82), the *Ordines Romani* (83–98), the *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum* (99–104), the *Pontificale Romanum* of the Twelfth Century (104–108), the *Pontificale Romanae Curiae* of the Thirteenth Century (108–111), the *Pontifical of William Durandus* (112–116), the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1485 (118), the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1595/1596 (119–124), and the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1961/1962 (125–128). Near the end, he provides a table summarizing his findings (129–132).

Chapter four, *Le liturgie attuali come riti di passaggio iniziatico* (137–181), examines the current (i. e. Post-Vatican II) rites of ordination and applies to them the same structural analysis from the previous chapter. It opens by providing some background information on the deliberations of *Coetus XX* of the *Consilium* in revising the *Pontificale Romanum*. Pelliccioni analyzes the 1968 *editio typica* of the ordination book (141–146) as well as the 1990 *editio typica altera* (146–152). He provides a helpful table synthesizing the structure of all the ordination liturgies in the sources examined from the *Traditio Apostolica* to the current rites (154–158). Similarly, he offers visual schemata of various structural interpretations of the current rites of ordination. Pelliccioni himself presents a diagram that depicts the separation phase as a descent to the low point of *limen*/margin before an ascent back to the top in the reaggregation phase (164–168).

Chapter five, *Liturgie iniziatiche di ordinazione: Aperture di ricerca* (183–236), provides a theological examination of the current rites of ordination. He begins by placing “in dialogue” two different approaches to the theology of Orders: Severino Dianich’s approach centered on ecclesiology (186–188) and Andrea Grillo’s approach that links together liturgical rites and the Church’s hierarchy (188–190). Pelliccioni then provides an eccle-

siological investigation of initiation liturgies, exploring their eschatological dimension (192–193), the relationship between the common and ministerial priesthoods (193–196), and the issue of active participation (196–200). He also presents a theological reading of ordained ministries (202–216) and initiation liturgies (216–227) in light of apostolic succession. He concludes the chapter by considering the instituted ministries from the perspective of initiation (227–236).

The book closes with a brief concluding chapter (237–244) that draws out the study's findings, affirming the unity between the Church's experience, the rites of ordination with their initiatic form, and the Paschal Mystery – in other words, harmony between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* (237–244).

Overall, *La dimensione iniziatica* features an admirable goal of integrating various fragmented branches of theology (Liturgical Studies, Sacramental Theology, Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology) and disparate dialectics with the help of anthropology. In his work, Pelliccioni succeeds in bringing together both competent structural analysis of rites and an impressive familiarity with secondary literature. At times, however, the latter veers towards excess, as Pelliccioni's train of thought can become muddled by an over-abundance of citations and block quotes. The clarity of his message shines brightest in the sections that simply and directly synthesized his findings. Ultimately, Pelliccioni fulfills his objective of reading both historical and current liturgies of ordination from the framework of liminality, an investigation that is sure to be useful for scholars of various fields – for liturgical historians, theologians, and social scientists alike.