The eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed some of the greatest changes in the theology of the Eucharist in the history of Western Christianity. Beginning with the debates over the presence of Christ in the Eucharist occasioned by Berengar of Tours, theologians undertook an intense discussion of that presence. Over the course of the next two hundred years, theologians gradually appropriated the newly discovered metaphysics of Aristotle as a scientific aid for explaining how such a presence could occur. Theological discussions of the Eucharistic presence became more precise but also more esoteric. Resistance to a belief in the presence of Christ in the sacrament also marked this period. Starting in the twelfth century, several influential heretical groups denied either that Christ was present in the sacrament or that Catholic liturgy as it then existed could effect that presence. Preachers collected stories of miracles intended to refute heretical claims and miracle hosts became the focus of veneration and pilgrimage. Theologians, in turn, responded to this outpouring of devotion, sometimes with approval and sometime with skepticism.

Throughout this period, however, theologians were equally insistent that the purpose of the presence of Christ in the sacrament was to bring the believer into an increasingly intense spiritual relationship with Christ. This relationship was described in unmistakably ecclesiastical terms. To truly “receive” the body and blood of Christ was to live a life of active faith and charity within the communion of all those who so lived. Based in part on this theology, a set of popular rituals centered on the belief that certain prayers or actions could substitute for sacramental reception when coupled with an active Christian life of faith and charity. This so-called “spiritual communion” became the most common form of lay reception of the sacrament.

At the same time, church authorities determined that a properly ordained priest was the only person who could make Christ present in the Mass, while theological discussions gradually determined when in the liturgy Christ became present, by what means that presence
was brought about and how such a presence was possible. The Council of Lateran IV in 1215 mandated that all laity who had reached the age of reason were obliged to receive the Eucharist once a year from their own parish priest. These changes tended to focus on the moment of consecration as the center of the liturgy and on the priest as mediator of the presence of Christ. The Eucharistic celebration that emerged from these centuries, then, tended to transform the Mass into a spectacle performed by the priest for a laity whose participation in the sacrament took place through devotions other than those of the liturgy itself.

*The Celebrant of the Eucharist*

All of these remarkable changes began in the eleventh century with the sweeping reforms of ecclesiastical structures generally known as the Gregorian Reform Movement, due to its most famous advocate, Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085). Most importantly for the Eucharist, the reform movement would insist that only a properly ordained priest could confect the sacrament, and further, that ordination itself was limited to the three clerical orders of sub-deacon, deacon and priest. This gradual separation of the clerical from the secular realms would more closely define the priest in terms of his ability to make Christ present in the Eucharist.

Describing the understanding of ordination that prevailed up until the reform movement, Yves Congar remarked, “...instead of signifying, as happened from the beginning of the twelfth century, the ceremony in which an individual received a *power* henceforth possessed in such a way that it could never be lost, the words *ordinare, ordinari, ordinatio* [before the twelfth century] signified the fact of being designated and consecrated to take up a certain place or better a certain function, *ordo*, in the community and at its service.”1 “*Ordinatio*” before the twelfth century was used to describe the selection for and appointment to any office of Christian service within a particular community. One was appointed for service only to that community, and movement to service in another community was severely condemned (although it certainly happened). Rather than receiving a

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