

The Psychology Behind Celibacy

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Abstract Celibacy began in the early church as an ascetic discipline, rooted partly in a neo-Platonic contempt for the physical world that had nothing to do with the Gospel. The renunciation of sexual expression by men fit nicely with a patriarchal denigration of women. Non virginal women, typified by Eve as the temptress of Adam, were seen as a source of sin. In Scripture: Jesus said to the Pharisees, “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” His disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.” (Matthew 19:3-12). Jesus Advocates for optional celibacy. For nearly 2000 years the Catholic Church has proclaimed Church laws and doctrines intended to more clearly explain the teachings of Christ. But remarkably, while history reveals that Jesus selected only married men to serve as His apostles, the Church today forbids priestly marriage. Also, today the Catholic Church is the only Christian denomination experiencing world wide condemnation from “scandalous” allegations of sex abuse committed against women and children by priests and bishops. Historically, scandals similar to these are known to have appeared only after mandatory celibacy laws were first instituted, centuries after Christ. Why were these changes made?

Keywords Abuse, Celibacy, Catholic, Church, Priest

1. Introduction

As children Catholics are taught that Jesus’ apostles ceased sexual contact with their wives in order to “Act in the person of Jesus”, by adopting His celibate lifestyle and devoting their lives to spreading the Gospel unencumbered by family responsibilities. But history reveals a different story, a story unknown by faithful Catholics. Today the law of mandatory celibacy for priests has exposed a telling historical problem. If priests freely accepted celibacy in the beginning why did marriage later begin, and what authority today permits the Church to deny priestly marriage that Jesus permitted? The answer can be found in historical events beginning around 366AD when a new and different explanation of our first priestly traditions began to appear. This event changed Catholic history. So historically, how and why did mandatory celibacy come into the Church? In order to answer this question we must return to the time of Jesus, and our first Catholic traditions.

2. The Jewish Law

Jesus made few changes in existing Jewish law for His

followers. But among the most important changes He instituted were those concerning marriage for Christians. Jewish men of the time were allowed to have more than one wife as well as concubines; Jesus forbade polygamy. They were allowed to divorce; Jesus prohibited divorce (Matthew 19:9). And most importantly, Jewish law required all Jews, including priests, to marry by age 20 (Genesis 1:28), but Jesus allowed Christians to remain unmarried if they freely chose to do so (Matthew 19:12). And, contrary to current myth, Jesus did not *require* His apostles to take a vow of celibacy or to abstain from marital sex in order to imitate His lifestyle; Christ allowed His apostles to freely choose either marriage or celibacy. For these reasons the question of Jesus’ celibacy is pointless as justification for modern celibacy laws that entered the Church centuries later. As Jesus left the Church, an individual’s free choice to marry and propagate or to remain unmarried was permitted, and no restriction against future marriage by unmarried priests existed. Today many Catholic traditionalists have begun anew to examine these teachings of Jesus and to compare them to the modern law of mandatory celibacy, a law that did not exist in the beginning. (Charles A., Frazee, 1972).

3. Non Biblical Writings

In order to understand the origins of mandatory celibacy modern Catholics must first come to understand the origin and misleading influence that apocryphal non-Biblical

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writings had on Jesus' teaching before the New Testament was first identified as the only legitimate source of Christian Scripture, c.350AD, and their continuing influence on the Church today. Catholics do not tend to turn to the Bible as a historical document in order to understand the foundational teachings of our faith. Those who cite New Testament scripture in support of beliefs that may question Church teaching are immediately accused of Protestant sympathies, and of denying Catholic tradition. Such accusations are ad hominem, because scripture and Catholic tradition cannot be separated. Catholics are taught about the Bible's importance but are instructed to consult the Catechism for explanations of our first traditions (history), or to consult our priests for answers that will lead to the complete truth. They alone, we are taught, are divinely ordained by God to teach the infallible Gospel of Christ without error. Catholics are not permitted to challenge Church teaching. Today, Church explanations of mandatory celibacy pose a great problem because it is acknowledged by all that apostles and priests during the earliest generations were married. More to the point, in the New Testament St. Paul specifically required bishops and deacons be married fathers, "capable of managing their families" (1Timothy 3). Even more damaging to the idea of a required vow of celibacy, St. Paul specifically preached against newly converted Christian-Gnostics who brought with them a belief that all priests must reject desires of the flesh in order to successfully mediate between God and man. This ascetic and dualistic belief of conflict between flesh and soul was first taught by Plato c.428BC and spread across the western world with Alexander the Great before 300BC. By Christ's time it had made its way into all religions' beliefs other than Orthodox Judaism and Christianity, who were unique among all beliefs. In defense of married priests St. Paul confronted this new Christian-Gnostic belief. He strongly condemned mandatory celibacy and his teaching was continually supported by later popes who excommunicated Christian-Gnostic converts for their persistent support of mandatory celibacy. "The Spirit has explicitly said that during the last times there will be some who will desert the faith and choose to listen to deceitful spirits and doctrines that come from devils; and the cause of this will be lies told by hypocrites...they will say marriage is forbidden, and lay down rules about abstaining from food which God has created to be accepted with thanksgiving by all who believe and who know the truth." (1Timothy 4:1). It is important here for Catholics to understand that all New Testament scripture such as this, from either Jesus or His Apostles, are declared by the Church to be the "Deposit of Faith", which ended c.98AD. These teachings are unchangeable, immutable, and any "new doctrine" that would change the Deposit of Faith after that time is forbidden. In theological speak the Deposit of Faith is the original Ordinary and Universal Magisterium. (Kasomo D.,2011).

4. Celibacy is a Late Entry

Evidence is abundant that mandatory celibacy was a late entry into Christianity, and did not exist in the second or third centuries. As a matter of fact, the Church today acknowledges that "no law of celibacy as we know it today existed in the beginning". More enlightening, we have witness in ancient Church literature from Apostolic Fathers such as Bishops St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna, they were 'hearers' of St. John the apostle. As married bishops and disciples of St. John, they realized that Jesus permitted men to remain celibate if they freely chose to do so, but viewed them with caution. Priests of the time were married men who also worked to support their families when celibate pagan converts began to appear in large cities, often resulting in conflict. Many celibate priests believed their ascetic chastity elevated them spiritually in the eyes of God to a superior spiritual plane, even superior to married bishops. In his letter, 110AD, Ignatius asks Polycarp to instruct priests and their wives thusly: "Speak to my sisters [wives] that they love the Lord and be content with their husbands [priests] both in the flesh and in soul. In like manner exhort my brothers [priests] in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives as the Lord loved the Church. If anyone is able to remain celibate...let him remain so without boasting. If he boasts about it he is undone, and if he seeks to be more esteemed than the bishop he is corrupted." This was an important event in the second century. From such ancient records we find that after the Deposit of Faith, as it was left by Jesus and His apostles, priests continued to choose either marriage or celibacy and that mandatory celibacy did not exist. So, when and how did things change?

5. Second Century

An examination of ancient changes in Church teaching during the second and third centuries reveals similar changes in Jesus' original teachings also began to appear in some areas as Christianity quickly spread throughout the Roman world. Many brilliant scholars and philosophers from pagan religions became fascinated with the resurrected Christ and converted, becoming influential Christian teachers who believed priests should not despoil themselves with sex. These converts are known as Patristic Fathers, and while they were good and pious men they also brought with them non-Christian philosophies that would forever affect the relationship of men and women, and marriage. Little did they understand that Christianity initially expanded via House-churches, with priests supported by their wives as teachers (1Corinthians 16:19). Defeating paganism and gaining pagan converts were important goals for the growing Christian Church. This is where the story of mandatory celibacy really begins. It is a story of change shrouded in the midst of a time before 350AD, when pseudo-Christian writings were considered to be a legitimate source of Christian scripture, and popes were unchallengeable when claiming to speak ad hoc for Christ. For this reason Christianity's first tradition of married priests was quite

different from what the Church teaches today. The first 14 popes were married men, but to understand later changes denying clerical marriage we must again return to the beginning.

6. New Secret Knowledge

By 135AD Rome had decimated Jerusalem and its great Jewish Temple, causing both Jews and Christians to flee into the Roman world where Gnostic-Christian beliefs had already begun to appear. New pseudo-Christian writings claimed Gnosis (New, secret, knowledge) of Jesus and His apostles, knowledge not contained in the Deposit of Faith that ended the previous century. For example, writings such as the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas and stories upon which the Da Vinci Code is based are Gnostic. Gnostic attempts to promote the superiority of celibacy and explain away the apostles' wives that St. Paul spoke of (1 Corinthians 9-5), when he complained that he too should marry "just like the other apostles and Jesus' brothers", a myth was created, a myth that had no place in Christianity. This legend was first introduced in apocryphal writings proposing the apostles had abandoned sex with their wives in order to imitate Jesus. Before 200AD these writings supported the new teaching of Patristic Fathers such as St. Justin, St. Clement of Alexandria, and Anti-Pope Hippolytus. All were celibate pagans before converting. But priests continued to marry until things began to change the following century when popes would come to see an advantage in supporting this new celibacy movement, believing it would somehow diminish the esteem of celibate pagan priests who remained highly revered across the Roman Empire. These new apocryphal Gnostic stories suggesting Jesus' apostles embraced the 'discipline' of marital continence then became a powerful influence for change. In 306AD the first recorded attempt by a local Church Council to mandate celibacy for priests occurred in the far western reaches of Christianity, in Elvira, Spain - three hundred years after Jesus. Failing in that attempt these Spanish Gnostic-Christians continued to promote their celibacy movement 19 years later at Constantine's great Council of Nicaea in 325AD, but failed once more. They were defeated when bishops agreed that "Too heavy a yoke ought not to be laid upon the clergy; that marriage and married intercourse are of themselves honorable and undefiled." The issue was settled, priest could freely choose either marriage or celibacy. But the celibacy movement did not die. Only 40 years later, c.366AD, two popes, Damasus and Siricius, would again cite these apocryphal stories of apostles ceasing marital intercourse. Pope Damasus, the son of a priest, then introduced for the first time in Catholic history a new term, the Rule of Continence. According to this new rule priests were required to cease carnal intercourse with their wives, but no vow was sought as it is today – it was demanded. Damasus' successor Siricius, a married bishop who abandoned his wife and children to assume the papacy continued to institute this new

rule. Tragically, these popes failed to recognize that denial of sex by either spouse violates the Sacrament of Matrimony as taught by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 7:3-6). Today all married Catholics know they must accept intercourse for a valid marriage to exist. Fortunately, Rome did not exercise authority over all dioceses across the Empire in those days and other areas continued to allow priestly marriage throughout the medieval period.

7. Papal Elections

For more than 700 years after Constantine, Roman Emperors and later European monarchs controlled papal elections and personally appointed bishops and abbots who served at their discretion, not the Pope's. Monasteries and dioceses brought great wealth to these secular lords through Simony, although little accrued to Rome. During all that time bishops and priests were married and Churches became Sacramental filling stations owned by mercenary clerics who willed them to family heirs, who then often bought and sold these valuable offices. The Church had a strong need to curb priestly heirs' power and corruption, and this problem was solved when Popes submitted to the Emperor's secular authority, with agreement that Cardinals alone would elect future popes. Finally, after a 700 year struggle, and desiring to eliminate future loss of wealth and control over married clerics, mandatory celibacy laws preventing future heirs were finally instituted. Again, no vow was sought as it is today, it was demanded. Failed Vatican efforts to end priestly marriage had continued sporadically until 139AD and Pope Innocent II's desire to seize clerical wealth and property. Then, asserting that apostolic continence was the first priestly tradition, Innocent II reached back 700 years to Popes Damasus' and Siricius' use of Gnostic-Christian legend in support of his new effort to subdue the priesthood. Previously, three councils in the 11th century had failed to end priestly marriage by selling wives and children of priests into slavery, with proceeds accruing to the Vatican treasury. St. Bernard of Clairvaux correctly prophesied in 1135AD, "Take from the Church an honorable marriage bed, and do you not fill it with concubineage, incest, homosexuality, and every kind of uncleanness?" But Pope Gregory VII stated, "The Church cannot escape from the laity unless priests first escape the clutches of their wives."

8. Justification

To justify modern papal demands for priestly celibacy the Church today denies celibacy is a Church doctrine, claiming it is merely an ancient discipline freely initiated by the apostles. This defense arose only after Vatican Council I in 1870 when the Church infallibly declared that "some new doctrine" may not be added to the Deposit of Faith. Prior to that time the law was taught as a doctrine because all Church teachings that are claimed to be from the apostles are

doctrines. But, in order to retain control over the priesthood the Church now denies the law of mandatory celibacy is a Church doctrine that changes Christ's Sacramental doctrine of priestly matrimony, thus denying the Sacramental grace of matrimony originally given to them by Jesus. This new terminology was necessary in order to obscure the reality that mandatory celibacy actually alters Jesus' teaching.

At this point it is important for Catholics to understand the Church's definition of 'heretic': "One who, having accepted the faith of Christ, corrupts its Doctrine." Today Christ's original doctrine, allowing priests to marry and propagate, has been changed. All popes from Innocent II until Benedictine XVI have knowingly supported this law and are therefore partakers of heresy. Today St. Peter could not become a priest, because he was married. The 'discipline' of apostolic continence is historically false. There is absolutely no evidence from the Deposit of Faith, none. Church authorities today can produce no legitimate evidence of its truth. It is myth disguised as doctrine. It is a doctrinal impediment that intentionally alters Christ's infallible teaching, it denies a Sacramental grace from God, a sanctifying grace given to Christians by the Son of God, and thus voids all Church claims of infallible teaching authority.

9. A Cause for Concern

Our problem today is not new and the Church knows it. From the earliest days of Christianity celibate priests have been a cause for concern by men such as St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp. Before the New Testament was written, a Christian book of instruction, the Didache, stated "Thou shall not seduce young boys." In 306 the Council of Elvira, Spain, declared, "To defilers of boys, communion is not to be given even at death." In 1049 St. Peter Damian's Book of Gomorrah recorded a debauched and failing priesthood similar to today's and pleaded with Pope Leo IX to excommunicate priests guilty of "Incestuous relations with their spiritual children." Other councils issued similar anathemas for abuse of women, and securing abortions, and absolving themselves of mortal sin. These sins of the flesh are repeatedly forgiven today, but commit matrimony only once and a priest is out. Think of Miami, FL priest, Fr. Alberto Cutie. Former Benedictine Monk and retired psychologist, Richard Sipe, is a therapist who taught at two seminaries and during a period of 30 years treated over 1,500 sexually dysfunctional priests and their victims; all were referred to him by Church authorities for treatment. He and his colleagues provide the following estimates of priestly formation today. His credentials are impeccable.

10. Second Lateran Council

It was not until the Middle Ages, at the Second Lateran Council in 1139, that celibacy was made mandatory for all Roman Catholic clergy -- a reform bracing clerical laxity and

eliminating inheritance issues from church property. But because the requirement of celibacy is so extreme, it had to be mystified as sacrificial -- "a more perfect way" to God. Monastic orders of both males and females had indeed discovered in such sexual sublimation a mode of holiness, but that presumed its being both freely chosen and lived out in a nurturing community. (Religious orders continue to this day with the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a proven structure of service and contemplation. The vows of such orders are a separate question.) But when the monastic discipline of "chastity" was imposed on all priests as "celibacy," something went awry. The system broke down during the Renaissance and the Reformation, with the Counter-Reformation hierarchy more attached to it than ever (Hugh Connolly, 1995). Not sex, but power was the issue. The imposition of sexual abstinence was a mode of control over the interior lives of clergy, since submission in radical abstinence required an extraordinary abandonment of the will. In theory, the abandonment was to God; in practice, it was to the "superior." The stakes were infinite, since sexual desire marked the threshold of hell. The normally human was, for priests, the occasion of bad faith. Obsessive sexual moralism, along with that bad faith, spilled out of pulpits. The confessional booth became a cockpit for screening "mortal sins," with birth control emerging as the key control mechanism over the laity. If they were willing to abide by this intrusion and its burdens, it was only because the celibate priest could be seen to have made an even greater sacrifice. They were subject to an even greater control. As is suggested by the contemporary hierarchy's apparent equanimity about the exodus of tens of thousands of priests, and the crisis of ministry it has caused, church authorities will pay any price to maintain a vestige of that control. That is why bishops have exchanged their once ample influence on matters of social justice for a strident single-issue obsession with abortion, a last-ditch effort to control the intimate sexual decisions of laypeople. When it comes to their clergy, the single-issue obsession remains celibacy. This nearly changed at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), when the bishops prepared to reconsider both birth control and celibacy. Until then, an insufficiently historically minded church had regarded such contingent questions as God-given absolutes. What was the point of even discussing them, since change was out of the question? But change was suddenly in the air. What? St. Peter was married? Even before the council acted, the myth that these disciplines were eternally willed by God was broken. The conservative wing of the hierarchy panicked. Pope Paul VI astonished the council fathers, and the Catholic world, by making two extraordinary interventions that violated the letter and the spirit of the council. In late 1964, just as the fathers were about to debate the question of "responsible parenthood," the pope ordered them not to take up the question of "artificial contraception." Snap! Birth control was "removed from the competence of the council." But there was every sign that the council fathers, when they inevitably took up the subject of the priesthood, were still going to discuss celibacy, as if

change were possible there. Yet it was politically unthinkable that the church could maintain the prohibition of birth control, the burden belonging to the laity, while letting clergy off the sexual hook by lifting the celibacy rule. Therefore, in late 1965, Paul VI made his second extraordinary intervention to forbid any discussion of priestly celibacy. A council had initiated the discipline, but a council was now not qualified even to discuss it. (Rose, Michael S., 2002). The power play was so blatant as to lay bare power itself as the issue. And just like that, Catholics had reason to suspect that celibacy was being maintained as a requirement of the priesthood because of internal church politics, not because of any spiritual motive. God was not the issue; the pope was. The abrupt elimination of the mystical dimension of vowed sexual abstinence left it an intolerable and inhuman way to live, which sent men streaming out of the priesthood, and stirred in many who remained a profound, and still unresolved, crisis of identity. Paul VI sought to settle the celibacy question with his 1967 encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, which proved to be a classic instance of the disease calling itself the cure. The celibacy encyclical, maintaining the weight of "sacrifice" on clergy, prepared the way for the laity-crushing *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, with its re-condemnation of birth control. In response to the pope's initial removal of birth control from the "competence" of the council, one of its leading figures, Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens of Belgium, rose immediately with a warning; "I beg you, my brother bishops, let us avoid a new 'Galileo affair.' One is enough for the church." Galileo was famously forced to renounce what he had seen through his telescope, an imposition of dishonesty. ("And yet it moves," he was reported to have muttered under his breath.) Paul VI's twin re-impositions of the contraception and celibacy rules plunged the whole church into a culture of dishonesty. Catholic laypeople ignore the birth control mandate. Catholic priests find ways around the celibacy rule, some in meaningful relationships with secret lovers, some in exploitive relationships with the vulnerable, and some in criminal acts with minors. If a majority of priests are able to observe the letter of their vow, how many do so at savage personal cost? Well-adjusted priests may live happily as celibates, but how many regard the broad discipline as healthy? Insisting that celibacy is the church's "brilliant jewel," in Paul VI's phrase, defines the deceit that has corrupted the Catholic soul. But the most damaging consequence of mandatory celibacy lies in its character as the pulse of clericalism. The repressively psychotic nature of this inbred culture of power has shown itself in the still festering abuse scandal. Lies, denial, arrogance, selfishness and cowardice -- such are the notes of the structure within which Catholic priests now live, however individually virtuous many of them nevertheless remain. Celibacy is that structure's central pillar and must be made optional. The Catholic people see this clearly. It is time for us to say so.

11. Common Knowledge

Only ten percent of all priests and bishops successfully abstain from sex during their priesthood. Ninety percent engage in sex, 50 percent continuously and 40 percent periodically. Of those, 30-50 percent are homosexually oriented and their sexual activity is comparable to heterosexual priests and bishops. Similar studies from Spain, Switzerland, South Africa, and the Philippines produced similar numbers. In areas of South America and Africa more than half of all priests have wives/mistresses. A major problem that goes unreported by the media is priestly sex abuse of women and young girls. Female abuse statistics are comparable to male pedophilia abuse. This is the sad state of our priesthood today.

12. Conclusions

Like all Catholics, I gratefully depend on the faithful ministry of the many good priests who serve the church. Yet I offer a broad critique of something central to their lives and identities -- the rule of celibacy. Many priests will recognize the truth of what I describe. I write from inside the question, having lived as a celibate seminarian and priest for more than a decade when I was young. In the glory days, celibacy was essential to the mystique that set priests apart from other clergy, the Roman collar an "Open sesame!" to respect and status. From a secular perspective, the celibate man or, in the case of nuns, woman made an impression simply by sexual unavailability. But from a religious perspective, the impact came from celibacy's character as an all-or-nothing bet on the existence of God. The Catholic clergy lived in absolutism, which carried a magnetic pull. The magnet is dead. Celibacy cuts to the heart of what is wrong in the church today. Despite denials from Rome, there will be no halting, much less recovering from, the mass destruction caused by the priest sex abuse scandal without reforms centered on the abandonment of celibacy as a near-universal prerequisite for ordination to the Latin-rite priesthood. No, celibacy does not "cause" the sex abuse of minors, and yes, abusers of children come from many walks of life. Indeed, most abuse occurs within families or circles of close acquaintance. But the ongoing Catholic scandal has laid bare an essential pathology that is unique to the culture of clericalism, and mandatory celibacy is essential to it. A special problem arises when, on the one hand, homosexuality is demonized as a matter of doctrine, while, on the other, the banishment of women leaves the priest living in a homophilic world. In some men, both straight and gay, the stresses of such contradictions lead to irrepressible urges that can be indulged only by exploitation of the vulnerable and available, objects of desire who in many cases are boys, whether prepubescent or adolescent. I merely advocate for optional celibacy as Jesus did. Celibacy is an issue that simply won't go away. In spite of signals from the Vatican discouraging even discussions of obligatory celibacy for Catholic priests, the almost 1,000-year-old rule is under the microscope. And it will be for decades to come. Here's why. In the Catholic

tradition, even though sex is cast as sinful unless expressed in the conjugal embrace of husband and wife, it is held as fundamentally good, a part of God's creation. The church even holds that marriage (including spousal lovemaking). To preserve itself, the Roman Catholic Church has to be much more careful not to let men with "deviations in their affections" enter the priesthood. I also re-affirm the Church's rule on celibacy, saying it should not be seen as a "useless" imposition but a vital part of a tradition in which the priest offers himself unconditionally to God.

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