

# Can A Priest Marry?

THE Holy Bible is quite positive in its answer about the marriage of priests. Over this issue the sea of the religious world would have known no turbulence if certain ecclesiastical leaders had not stubbornly maintained their unwholesome tendency of placing more value on men's traditions than on the Scriptures.

Historically, the state of being unmarried or remaining single and bound by the vow of chastity was observed as a religious practice in many civilizations. Among professed Christians the practice of celibacy had been a cause for much disagreement for many centuries. ‘

Now, it is generally known that in the Roman Catholic Church marriage is prohibited to the priests-mole precisely, to all clergy of the rank of subdeacon and upwards. According to A Catholic Dictionary, “this is a matter of discipline which rests on a positive enactment of ecclesiastical law, which is never dispensed, except in the case of a subdeacon or deacon who relinquishes his orders; all who are ordained subdeacon by that very fact take a solemn vow of perfect chastity”,

Many people have been asking to know where it is shown in the Bible that God forbids the marriage of priests and why. And this question is being pressed with greater vigour even by priests today!

We are going to consider in this Sermon, therefore, whether that “ecclesiastical law” which prohibits priests from marrying is in harmony with the Scriptures; and if it is not, whether any religious body is justified in enforcing such a law on its in its adherents in the name of Christ. The God's Kingdom Society does not countenance any doctrine or practice that is tainted with falsehood or ungodliness. Only in the degree or to the extent that any teaching has the support of the Scriptures must it be accepted by true Christians. So it was in the Apostolic age; when St. Paul preached to the people in Berea they believed only after: they had “searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so”.-Acts 17: 10-12; see also Galatians 1: 8, 9.

The Roman Catholic Church agrees that religious issues outside the Bible cannot be ascertained and they also agree that “for a Catholic the whole Bible is the word of God”. Pope John XXIII was said to have exhorted seminarians to “take the Book and devour it” -The Catholic Voice of March, 1960, page 45.

Any Christian is quite free to criticise the error of another. The God's Kingdom Society is often attacked by the Watchtower Society; and the Roman Catholic Church in its publications has been criticizing the Watchtower Society and other church groups. However, the value of any criticism depends on how much it is constructively based, not on personal opinions or prejudices, but on the word of God. It was Jesus Christ who said: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” – John 7:24.

## Heated Discussion

Up till now the subject of clerical celibacy is mostly a matter of heated discussions within Roman Catholicism.

Yet many more continue the struggle to free themselves from what 200 Catholic priests of late described as the “authoritarian and autocratic manner” in which the Vatican authorities rule the church.

Several priests have resigned to free themselves from what the Church has once described as a “heavy and sweet burden”.

One of the Strongest cases ever made in defence of the Roman Catholic church over this issue is that of James Cardinal Gibbons. But he could not cover the weakness of his argument which was against the truth. In his work *The Faith of Our Fathers*, he wrote: “Our Saviour and His Apostles, though recognizing matrimony as a holy state, have proclaimed the superior merits of voluntary contingency, particularly for those who consecrate their lives to the sacred ministry. There are eunuchs who have made themselves such for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. He who can take it, let him take it. Our Lord evidently recommends here the state of celibacy to such as feel themselves called to embrace it, in order to attain greater perfection.”

St. Paul gives the reason why our Saviour declares contingency to be a more suitable state for His ministers than that of matrimony: “He who is unmarried careth for the things of the Lord – how he may please God. But he who is married is solicitous about the things of the world- how he may please his wife – and he is divided.” (Page 327).

The words of Christ quoted by Cardinal Gibbons from Matthew 19:12, show that celibacy is a matter of one’s voluntary choice and desire and NOT of compulsion. Those whom Christ referred to were people who “made themselves eunuchs” for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. They were not compelled by law to be eunuchs. And Jesus added: “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” This shows that it is optional.

When St. Paul stated that the unmarried cared for the things of the Lord, (1st Corinthians 7:32, 33) he was not enacting a law in favour of celibacy as against the marriage of priests. In fact, his exhortation was not exclusively to priests but to all disciples irrespective of class who were having the faith and willingness to serve the Lord with such devotion. He made this quite clear in 1st Corinthians 7:29-38. And he himself also said: “It is better to marry than to be burnt.” (1st Corinthians 7:9; Douay Version) But why then has the Roman Catholic Church bluntly refused to allow those of its priests who have been burning – and crying aloud for it – to marry? No excuse for a flagrant violation of the apostle’s spirit-directed injunction can be justified.

## **Sexual Passion**

Many of the priests who appeared to be silent over this matter of marriage were merely being hypocritical. When they could no longer endure the burning in their hearts, they bade good-bye to their “holy orders” and sought occasions to give vent to their long pent up sexual passions.

Anyone who has read the book *Married Priests & Married Nuns* edited and with an introduction by James F. Colaianni, will know for certain that many Roman Catholic priests are not happy, and will appreciate the more why increasing numbers of priests, seminarians and nuns have abandoned their calling and publicly called into question the whole concept of priestly celibacy.

Rev. Father Cornelius Outcault was ordained a priest in 1959 and from May of that year to June, 1962, he was a parish priest at Our Lady of Miraculous Medal Church in Long Island. His last priestly assignment came in June, 1966, as a student counselor at Maria Regina High school in Uniondale (New York). In July 1966 he got married to a young girl who was coming to him to seek “counsel” and later resigned from his priestly ministry.

He wrote that of all the people who influenced his decision to leave the priesthood, one in particular stood out. The ex-priest (now Mr. Outcault) stated: “I met him two years after my ordination. He had been ordained at least ten years before me, was an accomplished Scripture

man, and an intelligent, sympathetic person. His favorite saying was 'To thine own self be true'. I was deeply moved when my friend decided to trust me with his most intimate secret: He was a homosexual. He had been in anguish over his secret for ten years, unable to find a single person he could trust to be sympathetic – a terrible indictment of the cold, impersonal, dehumanizing style of life into which his priesthood had propelled him. I could only blame myself and the whole system that mangled and tortured a human being this way. I felt frustrated, unproductive, uncreative – contributing to nothing."

Mr. Outcault wrote that the great joy of his life was Linda – the former student who flirted with him when she came to seek "counsel" from him when he was a counselor priest, the young girl whom he "counseled" until she became his wife. And he concluded by stating that he would always remind himself of his seventeen-year-old sister's greeting when she saw him after he had left the priesthood: "gee, you look good in a suit and tie."

Space will not permit us to go into details of the story of the marriage of Robert Eder, a Catholic parish priest in Brooklyn to Sister Joan who for 15 years was a teaching nun in the order of the Sisters of Mercy in Brooklyn. She is now Mrs. Frances Eder, and both she and Robert are enjoying their married life – a life much different from what Robert himself described as "sexual apartheid" in the Roman Catholic Ministry.

Mr. Robert Eder also wrote: "I suppose right from the very beginning of my ministry, I realized both intellectually and emotionally that celibacy was a denial of Christian humanistic values and, for me, an evisceration of my basic life attitude and personal spirituality." During his field work, he added, he "recognized that celibacy was a liability and a drag".

The foregoing instances are cited from the book Married Priests & Married Nuns.

When God instituted the priesthood in the days of Moses the prophet, and Aaron, and high priest, and his sons were consecrated THERE WAS NEVER A LAW THAT FORBADE PRIESTS FROM MARRYING. Rather they were allowed to marry but God made it a rule in those days that they should not marry a profane woman or a woman who was divorced or a widow whose former husband was not a priest. – Leviticus 21:7, 13, 14; Eze. 44:21, 22.

In the Christian era there is also no law prohibiting the marriage of priests or ministers of religion. Even St. Peter, one of the famous apostles of Jesus Christ, had a wife. And when Peter's mother-in-law was sick of fever Christ cured her. As it is written: "And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them." (Matthew, 8:14, 15) But why do the Roman Catholic priests not follow the example of St. Peter?

## **Major Factor**

The ability of a man to rule his wife and children well in the fear of God was a major factor in considering the ordination of ministers in the days of the early apostles of Christ. Writing to Timothy, St. Paul stated; "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach...One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)...And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.. .Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."-1 Timothy 3: 1-12.

We will not belabour ourselves to bring further proofs from the Scriptures to show that it is not a sin for a priest to marry. The Roman Catholic authorities themselves know for sure that their stringent law of celibacy is not derived from the Scriptures neither is it from God. In a monthly magazine of the Roman Catholic Church-The Catholic Voice-issue of May 1954, it was stated: "Catholic priests are forbidden to marry by the Jaw of the Church, NOT BY THE LAW OF GOD." (Page 75-Caps. ours).

And Cardinal Gibbons also stated: "ALTHOUGH CELIBACY IS NOT EXPRESSLY ENFORCED BY OUR SAVIOUR, it is, however, commended so strongly by Himself and His Apostles, both by word and example, that the Church felt it her duty to lay it down as a law." (The Faith Of Our Fathers-Caps. ours).

The Cardinal very well knew that the attitude of his Church in enforcing the law was irreconcilable with what he earlier stated to have been proclaimed by our Saviour and his apostles as of "voluntary continency". From the incessant incidents of defection and remonstrance by Roman Catholic priests over the issue of celibacy, it is evident that the law has not generated anything of spiritual value but has done more to breed hypocrites and malcontents. The Bible says that bishops, deacons or ministers of religion can and should marry. It is not a sin. Said St. Paul: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." – Hebrews 13: 4.

The burden of celibacy imposed upon certain priests is far from being "sweet"-it is in actual fact repressive and cruel. And since it has no basis in the Scriptures as already proved in this Sermon and has also been admitted by the Roman Catholic Church that it is not from God, any priest is therefore free to marry according to the dictate of his conscience. A priest who decides on his own to be a celibate does not offend against any law provided he abstains from indecent habits with those of the fair sex; and so too any priest who chooses to marry is perfectly in order. "It is better to marry than to be burnt" with sexual lust.