

The Celibacy of the Clergy



This is chapter XI of a book written in 1941 entitled, "[Our Priceless Heritage Christian Doctrine In Contrast With Romanism](#)" by Henry M. Woods, D.D, LL.D.

According to the Word of God, does holiness inhere in any outward condition or state, as of marriage or celibacy?

According to Holy Scripture, holiness does not inhere in any outward state or condition. Holiness is a matter of the heart, which is renewed by the Holy Spirit and is wholly yielded to God to do His will. There are many holy men and women in the marriage state, like John Wesley's father and mother, and there are many *unholy men and women who are celibate*. I Sam. 16:7, Matt. 5:8, Eph. 4:23, 24, I Peter 3:15.

What is the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning marriage?

Scripture declares that marriage, though not a sacrament, was originally *ordained by God at the creation*. Gen. 2:18, 24; also that "marriage is honorable in all." Heb. 13:4, Ps. 128:1, 3, 6. The Holy Spirit uses marriage as a type of that most sacred of all relations, the union of the Church and the believer with their Lord. Eph. 5: 23-33.

What does the papal Church teach regarding the marriage of Churchmen?

The papal Church presumes to assert "that the marriage of Churchmen is a *"pollution and a sacrilege!"* It makes celibacy compulsory for all clergy, monks and nuns. Bellarmine, *De Monach*, 2:30. *Decret-Gratian*, 82. Many Roman writers extol the celibate state as peculiarly holy.

What warrant from God's Word does the Church of Rome give for this opinion?

No warrant can be given, for God's Word clearly opposes this whole conception. For centuries celibacy was not practiced by the Christian

ministry. St. Patrick of Ireland (died 469) said his father and his grandfather were *both ministers of the Church*. Celibacy did not become a fixed law of the Church until the Dark Ages—the *eleventh century*. Hildebrand, pope Gregory VII, *compelled* the Church to adopt it, in order to establish his autocratic power over the clergy and religious Orders.

GRAVE ERRORS WERE TAUGHT IN CONNECTION WITH CELIBACY

What other dogmas does the Church of Rome teach in connection with celibacy, which are directly contrary to Holy Scripture?

1. The Church of Rome teaches “that vows may be made to the saints.” Bellarmine, *De cult, Sanct.*, 3:9.

On the other hand, the Bible teaches that vows like prayer, should be made to God alone. There is *not one instance in Scripture of vows being made to a saint!*

“Unto Thee (God), shall the vow be performed.” Ps. 65:1.

“Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.” Ps. 76:11.

Bellarmino contradicts himself by confessing that a vow is “a promise made to God”; then it should be paid to God, and not to a saint.

2. The Church of Rome teaches “that children may make vows, and perform them, *without the consent of their parents.*” Bellarmine, *De Monach.*, 2:36.

This precept is a direct violation of the Fifth Commandment, as given in Colossians 3:20: “Children obey your parents *in all things*; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”

It is also a violation of the Fifth Commandment, as explained in Numb. 30:3-5. If Jewish children might not perform vows which God approved, without the consent of their parents, how much more should children not perform vows which God does *not approve*, without the consent of their parents!

3. “That to enter a cloister, it is permitted to *break the bonds of marriage.*” Council of Trent, sess. 24:6, 8. Bellarmine, *De Monach.*, 2:37, 38. *De Matrimon.*, 1:14.

This dogma is a *shameful violation of God’s command*, “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Matt. 19:6. The Roman Church thus dares to sanction what God has expressly forbidden,—a mark of apostasy!

4. “That mendicant (or begging) friars are in a state of perfection.” Bellarmine, *De Monach.*, 2:20, 45.

God’s Word declares that *no man is in a state of perfection*. Eccles. 7:20, Phil. 3:12.

Also that *no Christian* should be *idle and beg*, but should work and “eat his own bread”; “for if any man will not work, neither should he eat.” II Thess. 3: 10-12.

The Church of Rome's grave error is that of *the heathen*, of Hindu and Buddhist devotees. Their "holy men" are celibates and beg, instead of working for an honest living. Rome's mistake is based on a wrong interpretation of Christ's words to the rich, young ruler, Matt. 19:21. Here our Lord was not teaching that there was holiness or perfection in poverty; He was showing the young man his besetting sin, viz.: that he loved his wealth more than he loved God, and therefore could not follow Christ and obtain salvation.

5. "That for those who have made the vow of celibacy (continence) it is worse to marry than to *commit immorality*" (literally to "abandon themselves to luxury"). Bellarmine, *De Monach.*, 2:30.

This grossly immoral teaching makes it better to be guilty of fornication than to abandon celibacy and be decently married! That is, rather than break rules which the popes have made, it is *better to break the law of Almighty God*! Is not this another mark of apostasy? Matt. 15:9.

The Attitude of Christ and His Apostles Toward Marriage

What was the attitude of Christ toward marriage?

He endorsed Marriage, declaring that it was of *divine institution* "from the beginning." Matt. 19: 4-6.

He showed His approval by attending the marriage feast at Cana. John 2:1, 2.

He chose *married men as apostles*. St. Peter was married; so also Philip the evangelist. Mark 1:30, 31, Acts 21:9. The holy prophets were married, as Noah, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. The high priest of the nation was a married man. Levit. 21:13-15.

In the pastoral epistles, written specially for ministers, St. Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote: "A bishop (Le. a presbyter or minister) must be blameless, the *husband of one wife*." I Tim. 3:2-5.

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife." I Tim. 3:12. The apostolic church evidently did not believe that celibacy was a holy state.

While St. Paul himself remained unmarried, it was *not* because he regarded celibacy as *holy*, and the marriage of Christian ministers as "a pollution and a sacrilege!" Paul declared plainly that it was lawful for him to marry (I Cor. 9:5, 6:12). But it was "not expedient," because he was constantly traveling, visiting churches, and because of the hardships and persecutions to which his family would be exposed. I Cor. 7:25.

Regarding his counsels, which seem to discourage marriage, he says plainly they were his personal opinions, and were *not the commandment of God*. I Cor. 7:6, 12, 25.

He sums up the matter thus:

"Tf thou marry, thou hast not sinned: and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned." I Cor. 7:28. Thus it is clear that the Church of Rome's position

regarding the celibacy of the clergy is *wholly wrong*: it is directly opposed to the doctrine of God's Word.

If without sanction in Scripture, why did the Roman Church make this unchristian law forbidding the clergy to marry? Pope Gregory VII made this law in order to have absolute control over the Roman clergy and religious Orders. Having been cut off from family and social ties, priests, monks and nuns, became entirely dependent on his will, so that the pope's interests and not God's service, became their chief concern. The pope thus obtained an army sworn to carry out his behests, and won the conflict which had been waged for centuries concerning the supreme authority in the Church; and also increased his temporal power over princes and states.

The Natural and Disastrous Effect of Enforced Celibacy

What was the result of enforcing this unnatural law forbidding the clergy and religious Orders to marry?

The result of the law enforcing celibacy was just what might have been expected, viz.: *unspeakable license and immorality*, which one would prefer to pass over in silence. Pope Eugenius III for his gross sins, after making the law, was accused by Cardinal Hugo Candidus of adultery and of procuring the murder of his predecessor, Alexander II, and was superseded by pope Clement III, whom he denounced as Antichrist! Gregory in turn was denounced by Cardinal Peter Damiani as "*Saint Satan*"! Dallmann's "*How Peter Became Pope*," Section V, pages 53, 54.

In the 9th Century immorality and vicious practices became so widespread and virulent, that the Emperor Charlemagne issued an edict to restrain the clergy and monastic Orders. He said, "We have been informed to our great horror that many monks are addicted to debauchery and to all sorts of vile abominations, even to unnatural sins. We forbid all such practices and command the monks to cease swarming over the country, and forbid nuns to *practice fornication and intoxication*. We shall not allow them any longer to be prostitutes, thieves and murderers, nor to spend their time in debauchery and singing improper songs. Also priests are forbidden to haunt taverns and market places for the purpose of *seducing mothers and daughters*." *Catholicism and Protestantism*, by J. Demetrius, p. 26.

An Italian bishop of the tenth century, describing the morals of his time, declared that if he were to enforce the canons against unchaste persons performing ecclesiastical rites, no one would be left in the Church except the boys; and if he were to observe the canon against bastards, these also must be excluded!

A tax was systematically levied by princes on clergymen for *license to keep concubines*. Lecky's *History of European Morals*.

During the eleventh century no less than *80 councils* were held in France, every one of which *denounced the simony and unchastity of the clergy*.

Bernard of Clairvaux vigorously protested against enforcing celibacy on the

priesthood, as contrary to reason and Divine law. He said, "*Deprive the Church of honorable marriage, and you fill her with concubinage, incest, and all manner of nameless vice and uncleanness.*"

Bernard severely reproved Pope Eugenius III for his gross sins. "Who art thou? You, who were ordained to be a shepherd of souls,— are better suited to be a shepherd of devils. You call yourselves servants of Christ: you are rather *servants of Antichrist!*"

Cardinal de Vitry declared the older monastic houses were not fit for a decent man or woman to live in! The clergy owned brothels. The papal authorities at Rome taxed the earnings of *prostitutes*. McCabe, page 71, 72.

The Dominican, Henry of Hereford, England, wrote in the 14th century that the clergy "traded the holy things of the Church for women and concubines, and dined for them." How Peter Became Pope, by William Dallmann, page 70. The German abbot, Wilham of Muenchen-Gladbach, made a similar declaration.

St. Catharine of Siena told pope Gregory XI that in Avignon there was "the stench of infernal vices." Of the monks she said, "Their God is their belly; during the night, when they ought to be chanting psalms, they have unfortunate women visit them; and the nuns have become public prostitutes. They who ought to bring life, bring death." Engert, 2:67. She denounced Pope Clement VII as Antichrist! Dallmann, page 73.

St. Teresa of Spain affirmed that many religious houses and convents were "a short cut to hell." "If young women will be wicked at home, their wickedness cannot long be hidden; but in monasteries such as I speak of, their wickedness can be completely covered up from every human eye. Many of them honestly wish to withdraw from the world, only to find themselves in ten times worse worlds of sensuality and devilry."

Do not these papal pronouncements requiring celibacy, with their grossly immoral results, fulfill the warnings of Scripture regarding Apostasy?

These papal pronouncements requiring celibacy *exactly fulfill the predictions* of Holy Scripture regarding false teachers forbidding marriage. "The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith (the Greek for 'depart' is 'apostatize') giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry," etc. I Tim. 4:1-3.

Here it is plainly declared that to forbid marriage, as the Church of Rome does to the clergy, is a mark of apostasy, a "doctrine of devils." These are not the words of erring man, but the infallible word of Almighty God, from whose all searching eye nothing is hid, and who will render to every man according to his works. Thus both Holy Scripture and history show the grievous sin of popes who presume to alter the Law of God; of attaching to the celibate state the notion of holiness, and of forcing on the clergy and on religious Orders an unnatural law which, sooner or later, was sure to produce disastrous results.

It was inevitable that in the loneliness and morbid condition which celibacy often induces, there should arise grave temptations to immorality which ordinary human beings were unable to resist; and as a result, multitudes of well-meaning, but misguided men and women have not only themselves fallen into a deep pit, but have also dragged down with them thousands of innocent souls to perdition. Most of them, perhaps, did not do wrong deliberately; they were victims of an *arbitrary and oppressive system* for which their “infallible” leaders were responsible! But God’s law is *eternally true*; men cannot break it with impunity.” “Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man (or Church) soweth, that shall he (or it) *also reap!*” Gal. 6:7.

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