

# Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

## Chapter XIV Celibacy



This is the continuation of Dr. Boettner's book, *Roman Catholicism* and the next chapter after [Chapter XIII Ritualism](#)

### **1. Definition and Presuppositions**

By celibacy, in the present discussion, is meant the sectarian requirement of the Roman Catholic Church that its priests, monks, and nuns abstain from marriage. It is not to be confused with the vow of chastity, which is also taken by the members of these groups, and which means abstention from sexual relations.

According to Canon Law the vow of celibacy is broken if the priest marries, but not if he engages in sexual relations. Pardon for sexual relations can be had easily at any time by confession to any fellow priest. But absolution for any priest who marries can be obtained only from the pope, with accompanying severe penalties. And to obtain such pardon it is required that he forsake his wife.

The requirement for celibacy, as we shall see shortly, is entirely without Scriptural warrant, and was not generally enforced in the Roman Church until more than 1,000 years after the time of Christ.

Protestant clergy may marry, and most of them do. Eastern Orthodox priests also may marry, provided they do so before they are ordained, and most of them are married men. They are not allowed to marry after ordination. Nor if they are married can they become bishops. Bishops are chosen from among the celibate priests. Jewish rabbis, too, may be and usually are married men.

By a strange inconsistency the Church of Rome holds that marriage is a sacrament, that is, something regarded as in a special sense sacred or holy, yet she denies marriage to her priests, monks, and nuns, who supposedly are the most holy people. She holds that celibacy is a state superior to marriage, and the Council of Trent even pronounced anathema against all who teach that the married state is preferable to that of virginity or celibacy. Thus on the one hand she exalts marriage, while on the other she degrades it.

In the eyes of Rome there is something unclean about marriage. The boy who enters a monastery to study for the priesthood and the girl who enters a convent are taught, not that sex is the normal reproductive instinct found in every healthy person and animal, but that these romantic desires are sinful,

something to be ashamed of. Under the misleading name of "virginity" the Church of Rome has promoted the notion that the instinct of procreation is in itself a foe to spiritual advancement and that it should be suppressed. L. H. Lehmann says concerning the seminary training of those who are being prepared for the priesthood:

"Young men thus kept apart from the ordinary mode of life of the people, of necessity fall short of full sympathy with the people and of intimate understanding of the needs of common folk. During the years of their blossoming youth they are immured in closely-guarded seminaries. Every indication of the adolescent urgings, which in other young men find healthful expression in the practical affairs of life and in romantic response to sweet and wholesome affection, are crushed out at their inception. The promptings of such urges to affectionate companionship are even taught to be regarded as sinful. A cold, stoical, and indifferent attitude toward the life that other men and women lead, is cultivated in them as of the highest virtue and as essential for the exalted position which they are to occupy as priests.

"As a safeguard for the celibate life imposed upon them they are counseled to harden themselves against the tenderness of domestic happiness enjoyed by ordinary men with loving wife and growing children. Although they are commissioned as guides and counsellors, especially in the confessional, in everything that concerns the relations between the sexes priests personally must abhor the tender glances of women as an instrument of the Devil's guile to lead them into sin" (*The Soul of a Priest*, p. 152).

To the same effect Emmett McLoughlin writes concerning an event that occurred after he left the priesthood:

"The announcement of my marriage brought out another facet of the Roman Catholic mind, both clerical and lay—its preoccupation with sex. Of the thousands of letters that I received, the majority even from married Catholics, spoke of matrimony as if physical glorification were its only purpose. And they wrote of natural love as a deplorable, filthy, unnatural thing" (*People's Padre*, p. 194).

Mr. McLoughlin says concerning his own seminary training that a compendium of Roman Catholic moral theology that they used, which was merely a summary of the several volumes studied, contained thirty-two pages devoted to the infinitesimal details of the multiplicity of sexual sins, while only twelve pages were required to set forth the hierarchy's teachings on assault, suicide, murder, dueling, capital punishment, the relations among nations, and the morality of war from the stone age to the atomic era. He also quotes Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, after his exhaustive studies in the field of sex, as having said that the largest collection of books in the world on the subject of sex is in the Vatican Library in Rome.

In opposition to that attitude we hold that the sex urge is a gift imparted to man by the Creator Himself, and that consequently there is nothing unclean or sordid about it. Men and women have been so created that they are instinctively drawn to someone of the opposite sex. This natural attraction of one sex toward the other is God's way of assuring the propagation of the

race. It is as wholesome as the forces which operate in seedtime and harvest. The natural instinct of every normal man and woman is to give expression to the romantic side of his or her nature, to marry, and to have a family. God planned it that way. All through Scripture the blessing and dignity of parenthood is extolled and exalted, and the refusal to assume the responsibilities and blessings of parenthood are vigorously condemned. The disposition of some people to surround sex with impure associations is a travesty on life as God meant it to be. Historically, celibacy had its roots in the Gnostic and Manichaeian heresies of the second and third century which taught that matter was inherently evil and that salvation consisted in resisting and overcoming it.

## **2 The Monastic System**

In order to understand the Roman Catholic position regarding the grouping of men and women in monasteries and convents we must understand the basic viewpoint which underlies that system. During the Middle Ages the idea developed in Roman theology that man's work was to be divided into the natural (i.e., the secular) and the spiritual. Only the spiritual was thought to be pleasing to God. Consequently, while the natural man might be satisfied with the common virtues of daily life, the ideal was that of the mystic who in deep contemplation reached out for the spiritual. In achieving this higher life the natural was thought of not as a help but as a hindrance. The life of the monk and the nun who withdrew from society and from the workaday life of the world and retired into the quiet of the cloisters, thus losing themselves in mystic contemplation, was thought to be the higher life. There, in seclusion from the world, the image of God, which had been lost in the fall, was to be restored in its beauty. The monastic system is thus based on two false principles, namely, that celibacy is a holier state than matrimony, and that total withdrawal from the social intercourse and business life of the world is conducive to true religion.

That type of thinking remains a part of the Roman system even to the present day and is particularly prominent in two different aspects:

1. The vow of celibacy which is required of the priests, and the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are required of the monks and nuns in the different monastic and convent orders.
2. The ceremony that is performed before anything can be used for sacred purposes. All such things must undergo a ceremony of purification and consecration, the prominent part of which is sprinkling with holy water. All priests and clergy, as well as churches, crosses, images, garments, bells, cemeteries, etc., must be sprinkled with holy water and consecrated.

The ascetic viewed the natural world as in itself sinful, a sphere to be avoided as much as possible. Consequently he developed a contempt for the things of the world and sought to withdraw from it in order that he might practice the heavenly virtues. The most effective way to do that was to seek the seclusion of the cloister. Hence the rise of monasteries and convents, and the unmarried state of the priests and nuns.

But the Reformation swept away all such erroneous views for Protestants. In contrast with Romanism, Protestantism looks upon all phases of life, the secular as well as the ecclesiastical, as sacred, all as a part of God's plan and so to be lived under His blessing and to His glory. Whether in the church, or in science, politics, art, or the various professions, whether married and in the life of the family or in the single state, the Protestant is to serve God not by withdrawing from the world but by going out into the world, ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of the people, and by using his time and talents efficiently in his chosen occupation. Whatever his work, he is to perform it to the glory of God, and so to have a part in the advancement of the kingdom of God.

The Protestant holds that the world, though fallen, has been in principle redeemed through the work of Christ, that this is our Father's world, that it does not belong to the Devil although he has usurped much authority, and that our duty is to live so as to recapture it for our Lord who is the rightful King over the redeemed creation. This view casts a sacredness over all of life, and stimulates the natural virtues such as industry, fidelity, loyalty and order, and so remakes people and nations. Only as we see this contrast between Romanism and Protestantism shall we be able to understand why the Roman Church establishes monasteries and convents, and why Protestantism has no use for them.

The New Testament makes it clear that Christ was no monk. He did not withdraw Himself from the world, nor did He teach His disciples to do so. He prayed for His disciples, not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil one (John 17:15). True Christian service is manifested most efficiently by going out into the world and ministering to its needy men and women, not by withdrawing into a monastery or convent and donning funereal garments which tend only to keep one in bondage. The risen Lazarus is not to wear grave clothes, and the born again Christian is not to be a recluse.

The inmates of monasteries are unmarried men, whose interests by training and profession are alien not only to the family and society, but to the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of the country. Convents too promote an abnormal type of life. The many monasteries that sprang up in Europe during the Middle Ages often accumulated such wealth and encouraged such idlesome and luxurious living among the monks that the church at large was brought into disrepute.

No doubt some monasteries did much good in keeping alive the lamp of learning during the dark centuries. We hold, however, that the Roman Church was in large measure responsible for the darkness of that era in that it withheld the Bible from the people. It may at least be questioned whether the well-intentioned monks and nuns might not have done much more to promote the church and to uplift society had they gone out to evangelize a rude world instead of withdrawing from it. In any event the monastic system represented a far different spirit and practice from that found in first century Christianity.

As a matter of historical interest, the most prominent orders, the Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit, arose during the later Middle Ages. St. Dominic and

St. Francis of Assisi lived around A.D. 1200. The Jesuit order was founded by Ignatius Loyola, a Spanish soldier priest, in 1534. The Jesuit order was suppressed throughout Roman Catholic Europe by Pope Clement XIV, in 1773, but survived in Russia where the pope's authority did not reach, and finally was re-established in 1814 by Pope Pius VII. The monastic orders within Roman Catholicism probably have been as numerous as the major denominations within Protestantism, and oftentimes they have differed as sharply as ever did the Protestant denominations. Witness for instance the prolonged and often bitter rivalries between the Dominican and Franciscan orders, and particularly the rivalries between both of these and the Jesuit order. Protestant churches often unite, but who can imagine a union between the Dominicans and Franciscans, or between either of these orders and the Jesuits? There are various orders of nuns, although rivalry between them to a considerable extent is kept down since they are under the control of the bishops. At the present time the Jesuits, although not so numerous, are the most powerful order, and for more than a century they have dominated the papacy, much to the chagrin of the other orders. One of their goals has been the strengthening of the papacy while weakening the powers of the bishops. And in that they have been eminently successful.

### **3 Imposed Celibacy a Hindrance to Personal Sanctity**

Voluntary celibacy on the part of those who are dedicated to a great cause and who have what we may term "the gift of celibacy," can be a real blessing. The Bible commends such practice. But celibacy enforced indiscriminately against whole groups of men and women is shown by its fruits to be not only difficult and irksome but productive of untold evils. The quite uniform testimony of those who have experienced it and who are free to talk is that it does not suppress desire, but on the contrary increases and heightens it. Priests and nuns are not superhuman, as has so often been represented, nor are they even normally human, but because of the unnatural laws under which they live they are particularly susceptible to temptation. Both groups are denied normal family life. Both groups therefore live in contravention of the deepest cravings of their nature, and are subject to needless temptations. God has said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). And that also means that it is not good for a woman to be alone. The practical effects of the monastic system down through the ages show clearly that the forced and unnecessary restrictions are a hindrance, not a help, to personal sanctity.

Celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church is, of course, merely a church regulation, not a command of Scripture. But this fact is cleverly concealed from the submissive Roman Catholic people. They refuse to believe that their clergy are following anything other than a divinely instituted role. Nor will they believe without the most explicit proof that the apostle Peter was a married man, although that fact is recorded three times in the New Testament (Matthew 8:14, Luke 4:38, 1 Corinthians 9:5).

Dr. Charles Hodge has well said:

"It is only in the married state that some of the purest, most disinterested and most elevated principles of our nature are called into exercise. All that

concerns filial piety, and parental and especially maternal affection, depends on marriage for its very existence. It is in the bosom of the family that there is a constant call for acts of kindness, of self-denial, of forbearance, and of love. The family, therefore, is the sphere the best adapted for the development of all the social virtues; and it may be safely said that there is far more of moral excellence and of true religion to be found in Christian households, than in the desolate homes of priests, or in the gloomy cells of monks and nuns" (*Systematic Theology*, III, p. 371).

L. H. Lehmann repeatedly referred to the bitter disappointment and broken lives of the priests under the monastic system. Said he:

"The saddest experiences of my years as a priest are the evidences I found everywhere of the broken hopes and crushed ideals of priests, young and old, the same in every country that I visited. Imposed celibacy is the primary cause of the failure of which priests themselves are most fully conscious. Not that the physical implications of celibacy are a matter of great moment; it should never have been made a matter of importance. Had it not been imposed to serve the ends of the papal power, but left to free, voluntary choice, priestly celibacy might have been a real service. Instead it has been made the cause of scandal and shame to the Christian church. Forced as it is by human and not divine law, it has perverted any good that otherwise might come from it. It has had the effect of belittling the sanctity of the marriage relation; for the only object which it can attain is the denial to priests of legal marriage rights, not abstention from sexual indulgence. The pope alone can absolve a priest who avails himself of civil sanction to contract a legal marriage relation; private sexual aberrations can be either concealed, or absolved by recourse to an ordinary confessor.

"But the real evil consequent upon forced clerical celibacy is its enervating effect upon the bodily and mental faculties. It saps all the vigor of manhood from those who must employ the continual force of mind and will against the natural bodily urge. Its victims have to confess that, far from freeing them from the sexual urge, it actually breeds a very ferment of impurity in the mind. It is the boast of the Roman Catholic Church that priestly celibacy makes its clergy something more than men—that it makes them supernatural, almost angelic. The simple people readily believe this. In truth it makes them something less than men.

"It is almost impossible for the laity to understand to what extent Roman Catholic priests fail to live up to the celibate state imposed upon them. ... The general public today knows enough about sex, and the part it plays in the lives of all normal men and women, to judge for themselves. If priests were as celibate as they appear, then the conviction of the simple Irish about them must be more than an induced pious belief, namely, that priests are especially endowed with a kind of angelic continence at their ordination ceremony.

"Totally at variance with that induced pious belief of the Irish about their priests, which I had shared from my youth, were my findings among them during my ministry upon three continents. Not one in a hundred was free from a tense bodily and mental struggle with the sex urge.

"Among the priests in the United States who became my co-workers were many companions of my seminary days in Ireland and in Rome. Of the religious enthusiasm, the intense Christian idealism, even the personal sanctity, which had possessed them, little remained. The soul-destroying process which I had seen working in my brother-priests in other lands, had also been at work in these others from whom I had been separated by thousands of miles of ocean. All without exception groaned out their confession of disillusionment. Invariably they expressed their desire to escape from the bondage, to go far away to some place where they could forget that they ever had been priests.

"Not that these young men had become bad. They were just sick, tired, and disappointed; once imbued with a saintly, self-sacrificing Christian idealism, worthy indeed to serve a better cause than that of Roman Church propaganda in modern countries, they had succumbed to a state of indifferent lethargy. They could see no recognized, respectable retreat out of it. They had therefore submitted to the loyal soldier's rule: "Theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die"" (*The Soul of a Priest*, pp. 120-124).

To the same general effect is the testimony of Emmett McLoughlin, who writes of present day conditions in the United States:

"The life of a priest is an extremely lonely one. If he lives in a large rectory, he is still lonely. Other priests are not interested in him or in his doubts and scruples. If he is the only priest in a solitary parish or desert mission, he is still more alone.

"As his years slip by and the memories of seminary and its rigidity fade away, the realization may dawn that his life is not supernatural but a complete mental and physical frustration. He sees in his parish and his community the normal life from which he has been cut off. He sees the spontaneous childhood which he was denied. He sees the innocent normal companionship of adolescence which for him never existed. He performs the rites of matrimony, as starry-eyed young men and women pledge to each other the most natural rights and pleasures. He stands alone and lonely at the altar, as they turn from him and confidently, recklessly, happily step into their future home, family, work, and troubles and the uses of a normal life.

"More than anything else, he seeks companionship, the companionship of normal people, not frustrated, disillusioned victims like himself. He wants the company of men and women, young and old, through whom he may at least vicariously take part in a relationship with others that has been denied him and for which, at least subconsciously, the dept of his nature craves.

"No priest who has heard priests' confessions and has any respect for the truth will deny that sexual affairs are extremely common among the clergy. The principal concern of the hierarchy seems to be that priests should keep such cases quiet and refrain from marriage. ...

"The number who rebel against the frustration and unnaturalness of this form of life is far greater than anyone realizes. No one knows how many priests have quit the Roman Catholic Church in America. I know of approximately one hundred. Most ex-priests do not reveal their identity for fear of persecution

by the hierarchy. There are no official records as far as I know. The bishops and the orders are so jealous of one another that they do not reveal the 'defections' in their areas" (*People's Padre*, pp. 93-94).

The subject of birth control has aroused much debate in recent years. The priests profess to be strongly opposed to all mechanical and medical methods, while at the same time they violate the principle which they profess to hold by approving the rhythm method which supposedly accomplishes the same result through "natural" methods. The absurdity of a celibate, bachelor priesthood, the members of which have not even the ordinary man's understanding of the complexity of woman, presuming to dictate the practices of married couples in regard to their sex life and family arrangements is well set forth in the following paragraphs by Mr. McLoughlin, who himself married after leaving the priesthood. He says:

"The Roman Catholic priest is supposed to teach his parishioners how to live in marriage, when marital relations should or should not be had, how to solve the big and little problems of conjugal life. His word is final, above that of the trained counselor, the family physician, or the psychologist.

"But the Roman Catholic priest can no better teach or counsel people about marriage than the paint salesman can advise the artist, or a stone cutter guide the sculptor. The blind cannot teach art. Those born deaf cannot conduct symphonies.

"The Roman Catholic priest actually knows nothing about marriage except that sex is involved and lots of little Catholics are its desired results. The priest, in his thinking, contrasts celibacy with marriage. Celibacy means simply the inhibition of sex. Marriage, to him, means the satisfaction of its urge—little more.

"Many things happen in marriage besides the act that leads to procreation, but the Roman Catholic priest's ignorance makes him unequipped to advise others about them. He has no concept of the softer, enduring, satisfying, non-sexual aspects of marriage, such as the intellectual complement between two people, the emotional balancing between a man and a woman" (*People's Padre*, p. 91).

## **4 History of the Doctrine of Celibacy**

The practice of celibacy had a gradual development. An unnatural asceticism was manifesting itself even in the days of St. Paul, and was condemned by him: "...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats" (1 Timothy 4:3); and again: "Why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances? ... Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Colossians 2:20,23). Such practices were present in the East, and were strongly developed especially in Buddhism which had its monks and nuns long before the Christian era.

Asceticism was practiced by individuals of both sexes, who dedicated themselves to God through vows of perfect obedience. This was promoted by the



heresy of justification by human efforts, human suffering, and so-called merits. The practice of withdrawing from society, or from "the world," seems to have originated in southern Egypt, where various ones established themselves in warm desert abodes. Around such hermits, especially around those who were considered saints, there often gathered a group of disciples. This was considered the highest form of Christian piety. One of the earliest of the hermits was St. Paul of Thebes. Around there developed a community of monks who imitated him. His famous disciple, St. Anthony, about the year 270 placed his sister in a "convent." Originally the movement was confined to Egypt, then spread to Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor. St. Basil of Cappadocia (329-379), who refused to recognize the primacy of the church in Rome, and who is regarded as the founder of eastern monasticism, drew up a reform code for monasteries, including a novitiate trial period, and limited monasteries to groups of from 30 to 40.

From the fourth century asceticism was more widely practiced, and in spite of vigorous protest, it came to be the rule for the clergy. The Spanish council of Elvira, in 305, enacted decrees against the marriage of the clergy. These decrees however, were of limited extent, and no serious effort was made to enforce them. St. Patrick of Ireland, for instance (died 461), declared that his grandfather was a priest. But the Roman Church was persistent in requiring a celibate priesthood. In the year 1079, under the strong hand of Hildebrand, known as Pope Gregory VII, the celibacy of the priesthood was again decreed and was made reasonably effective, although Gregory could not curb all of the abuses. Popes Urban II (1088-1099) and Calixtus II (1119-1124) made a determined fight against clerical concubinage. The decree of the First Lateran Council (1123) declared the marriage of all in sacred orders invalid, and the Council of Trent (1545) made strict pronouncements concerning the celibacy of the clergy. According to those decrees a priest who married incurred excommunication, and was debarred from all spiritual functions. A married man who wanted to become a priest was required to leave his wife, and his wife was also required to take the vow of chastity or he could not be ordained. The Council decreed:

"Whoever shall affirm that the conjugal state is to be preferred to a life of virginity or celibacy, and that it is not better and more conducive to happiness to remain in virginity or celibacy, than to be married, let him be accursed" (Canon 10).

Thus during the first centuries of the Christian era the clergy were permitted to marry and have families, and for more than a thousand years after the time of Christ, the Roman priesthood, without too much opposition, exercised the privilege.

The immorality of the priests was the special target of the reformers who appeared from time to time, such as William of Occam, John Wycliffe, John Huss, Savonarola, and especially Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox, at the time of the Reformation. The churches of the Reformation restored the liberty of marriage to the clergy, citing in particular Paul's injunction to Timothy: "The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2).

It is easy to see why the pope and the hierarchy are so insistent on enforcing the law of celibacy against the priests, monks, and nuns. The reasons are both ecclesiastical and economic. In the first place it gives the pope and his prelates a higher degree of control over the priests and nuns, so that, not having wives or husbands or families which must be consulted in making their plans, they are more responsive to the orders of the hierarchy and can be transferred more readily from one parish to another or to different points around the world. And secondly, property owned by the priests, which in some cases is quite considerable, and which if they were married would go to their families, either automatically falls to the church or likely will be left to it by choice in much larger proportion. Thus the pope has secured for himself an army readily available to carry out his commands. That in accomplishing this purpose the priests and nuns are doomed to a life of celibacy, oftentimes to a life of misery in contending against nature, appears to be of little concern to the hierarchy.

A curious situation has arisen in the Roman Church in that several Uniat churches, Eastern Rites, which permit a married clergy, are united with the Roman Church under the pope. There are about nine million Catholics in those, divided into seventeen sects, with somewhat different doctrines and practices. They are located primarily in the Near East, but are not connected with the Eastern Orthodox Church. For the most part they are dissident groups which have broken with the Eastern Church. Most prominent among them is the old church in Lebanon, making that country about 55 percent Christian, and about 45 percent Mohammedan. The most striking difference between them and the Western Church is that their priests may be married men. Also, their services are conducted in their native tongues rather than in Latin, they have no images, in the eucharist the communicants receive both the bread and the wine, and baptism is by immersion. Priests from those churches and Roman Catholic priests may exchange places in conducting church services, or may transfer from one church to another. Even in the United States there are a few Roman Catholic priests who have come in through those churches and who still are permitted to retain their married status and to have families—showing that in reality the celibacy of the priesthood is nothing but an arbitrary church regulation which the pope can modify or abolish any time he pleases. The one thing required of the Uniat churches is that they acknowledge the authority of the pope.

## **5 Scripture Teaching**

Christ imposed no rule against the marriage of Christian ministers, nor did any of the apostles. On the contrary, Peter was a married man, and his wife accompanied him on his missionary journeys. The same is true of the other apostles, and of the brothers of Jesus. This information we have from the writings of Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 9:5 says: "Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" The Confraternity Version reads: "Have we not a right to take about with us a woman, a sister, as do the other apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" But in the Greek the word is *gune*, wife, not *adelphē*, her.

Moreover, Peter continued in the married state for at least 25 years. Early in His public ministry Jesus had healed Peter's wife's mother, who was sick with a fever (Matthew 8:14-15). Hence Peter was a married man at that time, and therefore at the time Jesus addressed to him the words which Rome says constituted his appointment as pope (Matthew 16:18). And Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, just quoted, was written about the year A.D. 58. Hence Peter was a married man during a considerable part of the time that the Roman Church says that he was a pope in Rome (A.D. 42-67); and his wife was there with him. But as we have indicated earlier, we think Peter never was in Rome at all, that instead his ministry, which was primarily to the Jews, took him to the provinces of Asia Minor and to the East, as far as Babylon (1 Peter 1:1, 5:13).

Rome claims that she never changes. But the popes are all single men, therefore Peter was no pope, certainly not in the sense that the present day head of the Roman Church is a pope. It would indeed be a first rate scandal if the pope were to get married. We can scarcely imagine anything more revolutionary. Yet if he were to do so he would merely be following the example of Peter. If celibacy properly has the place that is given to it in the Roman Church, it is incredible that Christ would have chosen as the foundation stone and first pope a man who was married.

The fact is that when Christ established His church He took no account at all of celibacy, but instead chose for the apostolic college men who were married. In the verse that we have just quoted Paul defended his own right to have a wife and to take her with him on his missionary journeys if he chose to do so. In this same verse he tells us that "the rest of the apostles," and "the brethren of the Lord," also were married men, and that their wives accompanied them on their missionary journeys. That ought to settle forever the question as to whether or not it is permissible, yes, and advisable, for the clergy to marry.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul says that a bishop should be "the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded... one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (3:2,4). Likewise the elders (Titus 1:5-6) and the deacons (1 Timothy 3:12) should each be the husband of one wife, "ruling their children and their own houses well." In the light of those statements, what right has the Roman Church to infer that the apostles were single men and that the single state is holier than the married state? Certainly no Roman Catholic wrote those verses!

The patriarchs, prophets, and priests of the Old Testament era were for the most part married men. During that period marriage for the priests was practically obligatory, since the priesthood was hereditary, that is, perpetuated by the descendants of the priests. It is assumed by many that Paul too had been married, and that his wife had died. At any rate, in telling of his persecution of the Christians before the time of his conversion he said: "And when they were put to death I gave my vote against them" (Acts 26:10)—which vote presumably was cast as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, one of the requirements for membership in that body being that the person should be a married man.

If celibate priests are more holy, or more industrious, or if they set a better example in the community, why did not Jesus choose unmarried men for that apostolic group upon which such great responsibility was to rest? All the excellencies and advantages that Roman Catholic writers ascribe when they try to show the need for the celibate state would have been equally applicable for the patriarchs, prophets, and priests of the old dispensation. But we know that such was not the case, that the very opposite was true. We may even say that Christ apparently chose married men to be the first ministers and missionaries of the church by way of example of what the later clergy should be, and as a safeguard against the very scandals and abuses that have been so common in the Roman priesthood.

It is true, of course, that in certain ministries under the old covenant the priests were to dedicate themselves exclusively to spiritual activities, separated from all fleshly intercourse and from all worldly affairs. But those were only temporary parentheses in their matrimonial life, accepted as such and blessed of God. Likewise under the new covenant there are special situations in which an unmarried person may render more efficient service, or in which it may be temporarily inexpedient to marry. Both Christ and Paul made exceptions for such cases. But they did not make them the rule, and there is no reason to believe that they expected any large number of Christians to refrain from marriage for those purposes. To conclude from the exceptions that lifelong continence is a necessity is to make a baseless assumption.

Continence, said Jesus, is for those to whom the capacity has been given to receive it. "For there are eunuchs, that were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, that were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:12). And Paul said, "If they have not continency, let them marry" (1 Corinthians 7:9). Continency is a gift, even as are certain talents and skills (1 Corinthians 7:7). But it is not given to all men, nor to all women. Hence no church should make it compulsory on those to whom it has not been given. And it is evident that it has not been given to all the priests, for not all of them understand it, nor are all of them able to practice it consistently.

There is nothing sinful about marriage in itself. Instead, God instituted marriage as a holy ordinance: "And Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him. ... Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:18,24); "The bishop [and, we may also say, the priest] therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2); "Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

The Holy Spirit uses marriage as a type of that most sacred of all relationships, the union of the church and the believer with his Lord (Ephesians 5:23-33). Yet many Roman authorities extol the celibate state as peculiarly holy, and the Roman Church presumes to teach that the marriage of clergy is "a pollution and a sacrilege." But if marriage is a sacrament, as the Roman Church teaches, it is difficult to see why it should be considered

the worst kind of sin and a most abominable thing for a priest to have a legitimate wife.

Dr. Charles Hodge has given an excellent summary of this whole teaching in the following paragraphs:

"The very fact that God created man, male and female, declaring that it was not good for either to be alone, and constituted marriage in paradise, should be decisive on this subject. The doctrine which degrades marriage by making it a less holy state, has its foundations in Manichaeism or Gnosticism. It assumes that evil is essentially connected with matter; that sin has its seat and source in the body; that holiness is attainable only through asceticism and 'neglecting of the body'; that because the 'vita angelica' is a higher form of life than that of men here on earth, therefore marriage is a degradation. The doctrine of the Romish Church on this subject, therefore, is strongly anti-Christian. It rests on principles derived from the philosophy of the heathen. It presupposes that God is not the author of matter; and that He did not make man pure, when He invested him with a body.

"Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures marriage is presented as the normal state of man. The command to our first parents before the fall was, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.' without marriage the purpose of God in regard to our world could not be carried out; it is therefore, contradictory to the Scriptures to assume that marriage is less holy, or less acceptable to God than celibacy. To be unmarried was regarded under the old dispensation as a calamity and a disgrace (Judges 11:37; Psalm 78:63; Isaiah 4:1, 13:12). The highest earthly destiny of a woman, according to the Old Testament Scripture, which is the Word of God, was not to be a nun, but to be the mistress of a family, and a mother of children (Genesis 30:1; Psalm 113:9, 127:3, 128:3-4; Proverbs 18:22, 31:10,28). The same high estimate of marriage characterizes the teachings of the New Testament. Marriage is declared to be 'honorable in all' (Hebrews 13:4). Paul says, 'Let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband' (1 Corinthians 7:2). In 1 Timothy 5:14, he says, 'I will that the younger women marry.' In 1 Timothy 4:3, 'forbidding to marry' is included among the doctrines of devils. As the truth comes from the Holy Spirit, so false doctrines, according to the Apostle's mode of thinking, come from Satan, and his agents, the demons; they are the 'seducing spirits' spoken of in the same verse. Our Lord more than once (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7) quotes and enforces the original law given in Genesis 2:24, that a man shall 'leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.' The same passage is quoted by the Apostle as containing a great and symbolical truth (Ephesians 5:31). It is thus taught that the marriage relation is the most intimate and sacred that can exist on earth, to which all other human relations must be sacrificed. We accordingly find that from the beginning, with rare exceptions, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, confessors, and martyrs, have been married men. If marriage was not a degradation to them, surely it cannot be to monks and priests" (Systematic Theology, III, p. 368-370).

## 6 Immorality Often a Result of Celibate Restrictions

A charge that the Roman Church has had to contend with down through the ages is that of immorality in the monasteries and convents, and between some of the priests and certain of their parishioners. Undoubtedly in the United States, where the Roman Church is in competition with Protestantism, and where restrictions are more severe, there is comparatively little of such practice. But even here the church authorities constantly warn priests and nuns against scandal. There is, of course, no way of knowing how many priests and nuns violate the vows of chastity.

But it is revealing to read what struggles the great saints of the Roman Church, themselves unmarried, have endured in order to keep themselves pure. There is no difference, of course, between the human nature of priests and nuns and that of laymen and laywomen, and certainly the temptations in the modern world are many and deceptive.

Forced celibacy and auricular confession are by their very nature conducive to sex perversion. To all outward appearances, and, we believe, in reality, the behavior of the Roman Catholic clergy in the United States is far superior to that of their counterpart in Italy, Spain, France, and Latin America. But there is abundant evidence that in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries, particularly during the Middle Ages, the monasteries and convents sometimes became cesspools of iniquity.

L. H. Lehmann, after saying that the primary purpose for which the custom of celibacy has been retained is (1) to maintain the principle of centralized power, and (2) to retain property for the church that otherwise would go to the priest's family, says:

"It is not for spiritual reasons that the Roman Catholic Church has for so many centuries denied legitimate marriage to its priests. Those in power have always known that it is only the legality of the marriage relation that can be denied them, and that the custom of clerical concubinage, with resultant generations of illegitimate offspring, has always taken its place. Loss of centralized power and property titles, disruption of its authoritarian system of government, would have been the result if these generations of priests' children in the past had been legalized. Clerical concubinage has thus been tolerated in preference to this loss of undisputed power centered in Rome.

"The children of a priest in the past had the right to call him 'Father' only in the spiritual sense of the word. The illegitimate sons of popes, cardinals and bishops, however, were often enabled to rise to high positions in the church and state. Several popes were themselves sons and grandsons of other popes and high church dignitaries. My researches among the collection of papal bulls reveals that concubinage among the clergy of Europe was so prevalent that it was necessary to regulate the practice by law—less clerical concubinage itself should ever become a legal right" (*Out of the Labyrinth*, pp. 99-100).

In the ninth century, an age in which ignorance and superstition were prevalent even among the clergy, the emperor Charlemagne, in an attempt to

suppress vice among ecclesiastics, issued this edict:

"We have been informed to our great horror that many monks are addicted to debauchery and all sorts of vile abominations, even to unnatural sins. We forbid all such practices and command the monks to cease wandering over the country" (T. Demetrius, *Catholicism and Protestantism*, p. 26).

The Irish historian, William Lecky says:

"An Italian bishop of the tenth century described the morals of his time, saying that if he were to enforce the canons against unchaste persons administering ecclesiastical rites, no one would be left in the Church except the boys. A tax was systematically levied on princes and clergymen for license to keep concubines" (*History of European Morals*).

Bernard of Clairvaux protested against enforcing celibacy on the clergy as contrary to human nature and divine law, saying:

"Deprive the Church of honorable marriage, and you fill her with concubinage, incest, and all manner of nameless vices and uncleanness."

John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, inveighed with all the power of his vast learning and all the passion of his scorn against the papal requirement of celibacy. Said he:

"In one instance, they are too rigorous and inflexible, that is, in not permitting priests to marry. With what impunity fornication rages among them, it is unnecessary to remark. Emboldened by their polluted celibacy, they have become hardened to every crime. This prohibition has not only deprived the Church of upright and able pastors, but has formed a horrible gulf of enormities, and precipitated many souls into the abyss of despair. ... Christ has been pleased to put such honor upon marriage as to make it an image of his sacred union with the Church. What could be said more, in commendation of the dignity of marriage?" (IV, Ch. 12, sections 23-24).

Henry VIII of England, in 1536, appointed commissioners to inspect all monasteries and nunneries in the land, and so terrible were the cruelties and corruptions uncovered that a cry went up from the nation that all such houses without exception should be destroyed. The fall of the monasteries was attributed to "the monstrous lives of the monks, the friars, and the nuns." This suppression of the monasteries undoubtedly did much to widen the gap between the Roman Church and this British monarch who had already declared his independence of the pope.

Henry Bamford Parkes, in his *A History of Mexico*, says:

"Clerical concubinage was the rule rather than the exception, and friars openly roamed the streets of cities with women on their arms. Many of the priests were ignorant and tyrannical, whose chief interest in their parishioners was the exaction of marriage, baptism, and funeral fees, and who were apt to abuse the confessional."

Many more such testimonials might be given. The widespread looseness of

domestic manners in European and Latin American countries where that system has prevailed has been a disgrace to religion and a scandal to Christendom. It is extremely difficult to bring a priest into a civil court for punishment because the Roman Church forbids all Roman Catholics to testify against a priest. And most such crimes have been committed against their own people—another evidence that the Roman Catholic people are themselves the first and primary victims of their own church.

Numerous Roman Catholic historians have acknowledged that the law of celibacy for priests and the vows of chastity for monks are historical failures. What we are most concerned to criticize is not the sins of individual men, but the system as imposed by the Roman Church which leads to and tolerates such abuses. When will the Roman Catholic people throughout the world open their eyes and see that the boasted holiness of their church and of their priests is a pure fiction?

## **7 Nuns and Convents**

There are some 177,000 Roman Catholic nuns in the United States alone, according, to *The Official Catholic Directory*. All of these are under strict vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in their various orders, and constitute a vast pool of unpaid labor with which the Roman Church operates the thousands of parochial schools, hospitals, orphanages, and in some instances commercial establishments, which are under her control. This army of obedient, self-sacrificing nuns gives the Roman Church an immense advantage over establishments which pay their employees regular salaries or wages. To keep this labor force is of vital importance to the Roman Church, and to that end the priests usually are promoted by their bishops on two counts—first, the amount of money they turn in to the diocese; and second, the number of “vocations” (commitments to church service) they muster.

We have little criticism of the nuns as a class, except for their blind, unreasoning submission to orders from the priestly caste. As a rule they are kind, gentle, courteous, sincerely trying to practice their professions. They are far more human, less religious, and much less happy than the people of their own church, or others for that matter, are led to believe. While we regard the system as evil, we regard the nuns as primarily its victims, not its instigators.

The nuns have to fight a hard battle to crush out the natural and maternal instincts, to give up all prospects of marriage and family, which means so much to a woman, in order to enter the stoical convent system. The burden assumed by them is far heavier than is generally realized. In most cases the nuns are so helpless, so fearful of the persecution, ostracism, and other consequences which they have been led to believe will be visited upon them if they leave the convent, and so poorly prepared to make their way in the outside world, that they have no choice but to stay where they are. The course of convent training is purposely planned to fit them only for the work that the church has for them, deliberately excluding those courses that might be of value to a girl if she decided to leave the convent and turn to some other occupation.



In the normal course of life, marriage is a woman's natural, God-given privilege. Playing on this matrimonial instinct, the church deceives the nun with the fiction that she is the "bride of Christ," or "wife of Christ." She is even given a "wedding" ring, which she wears as a symbol of her union with Christ. Furthermore, the priests have imposed on the nuns a medieval church garb consisting of a long, black dress, the very symbol of grief and death, and a grotesque headgear which is awkward to wear and which is totally unfit for either hot or cold weather. We say the priests are to blame for this form of dress, for they are the real masters and rulers in the Roman Church, and the nuns obey them. Convent orders are subject to the bishop of the diocese. The distinctive garb keeps, and is designed to keep, both priests and nuns constantly aware of the fact that they are committed totally to the service of the church, and places an impassable gulf between them and the world. The pope in Rome has the supreme and final authority over all nuns, and could relieve their hardships if he chose to do so.

The testimony of Emmett McLoughlin concerning the place of the nun in the Roman Church is very enlightening. He writes:

"The nun is one of the most remarkable products of the Roman Catholic Church. She is an absolute slave; one whose willingness to offer her life should fill Communist leaders with jealousy; one from whom the hierarchy conceals her slavery by the wedding ring on her finger; one who believes that in shining the bishop's shoes, waiting on his table, or scrubbing the floor, she is gathering herself 'treasure in heaven.' She is the one who makes possible the Church's hundreds of hospitals; the one who teaches in its thousands of parochial schools and orphanages; the one who (with her 156,695 sisters in 1952) does the drudgery behind the scenes in the hierarchy's drive to 'make America Catholic.' She is also a woman, with all the desires, instincts, loyalties, and hatreds of which a woman is capable; subservient to her 'man' through her indoctrination of her 'wedding' to Christ; often catty and gossipy toward her sister nuns and hospital nurses; maternal in her hoverings over priests and children; matriarchal in her petty policies for the control of her hospital or convent; and magnificent in her spirit of abasement, poverty, and self-annihilation in behalf of God and the Roman Catholic Church.

"In many seminaries in the United States, nuns—living in walled-off sections to prevent contact with the priests or seminarians—spend their lives performing the domestic services of cooking, laundry, and cleaning. During the persecutions of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico in recent decades, many nuns sought refuge in the United States. The Bishop of Tucson, the Most Rev. Daniel J. Gercke, offered some of them refuge in his episcopal mansion. He dispensed with his servants. The Mexican nuns took over all the household duties. If he merely rang a bell, a nun stepped in with bowed head to receive his orders, and on bended knee kissed his episcopal ring in appreciation of the privilege. As a dinner guest in his home, I personally witnessed this scene" (*People's Padre*, pp. 107, 108).

The position of the cloistered nuns, those committed to certain convents for life, is quite different from that of the regular nuns. They usually have gone into this seclusion because of some great sorrow or disappointment. Dr.

Montano says concerning them:

"There are 100,000 nuns in the world living in strict seclusion in convents. Subsisting in these retreats are nuns who have retired behind closed doors for life. Young women who accept the vows of the cloistered nuns renounce their homes, their loved ones, their families, never to see them again. They will stay behind bars for the rest of their lives, shut away from the world.

"These unfortunate souls have cloistered themselves thinking that the fact they are not in touch with the world will save them from temptations. But again and again, throughout my lifetime, some of the most prominent nuns and monks have confessed to me that it is precisely behind the walls of these convents and monasteries that temptation has tortured them more than it ever did when they lived in the world. Here temptation has beset them until they have finally succumbed, because of the unnatural life they lead. Many poor souls have become tools of Satan, victims of the most monstrous sins.

"Severe discipline is inflicted upon these nuns by the Mother Superior, and flagellation and mortification of the body is practiced. Self-inflicted suffering is for the purpose of gaining indulgences by works, a striving to achieve salvation by merits. These poor souls are taught that they are putting treasures in the bank of indulgences. ...

"The psychological disturbances that have resulted from this type of existence are such that not a few of these poor creatures have had to live out their days within the walls of mental institutions. To confirm this, Father More, of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., states: 'Insanity among priests and nuns (compared with a general population ratio of 595 per 100,000)... among sisters who were cloistered rather than active showed a rate of 1,034, nearly twice the general population ratio.'

"Father Bief, president of the American Catholic Psychiatric Association, writes:

'Schizophrenia is by far the most frequent disorder among institutionalized priests and religious.'"

Dr. Montano adds:

"Of all the devices that Satan has employed to mislead souls who desire to serve God, this is the most perverted and institutionalized program in existence. That it should have been permitted to continue in a land of freedom, where governmental agencies have more and more reached a protective arm into all institutions to defend the physical and spiritual well-being of its sons and daughters, is most astonishing" (*Christian Heritage*, September, 1959).

## **8 Entering the Convent**

Why do girls enter convents? The large majority of girls have no desire to become nuns, and few would do so if left to their own choice. They instinctively shrink from the prospect of a long life spent within the walls

of a convent. The fact is that in recent years the Church of Rome in the United States has found it increasingly difficult to secure enough American Catholic girls to staff her schools, hospitals, churches, etc., and has been obliged to import sisters from Europe. So serious has become this shortage that in some areas plans have been considered for dropping part of the lower grades in parochial schools in order to concentrate on the upper grades.

Why do girls enter convents? Let Helen Conroy, an ex-nun, give the answer:

"The truth is that girls go into convents because they are recruited. They are recruited for the convents and nunneries because the Church of Rome must have an unlimited number of pauper laborers to insure a fair return on the billions of dollars she has invested in 'charitable' institutions, such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, and laundries" (*Forgotten Women in Convents*, p. 32).

In the setup of the Roman Catholic Church it is the confessional box that feeds the nunneries. The ground work is done on the Catholic girl in the parochial school, where the nun is made an object of holy glamour, almost a replica of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The institution of the confessional makes it easy for the priests to find the ones they want, and of course they try to select the very choicest ones. That, in brief, is the reason the young nuns, as a rule, are above average in beauty, personality, and ability.

Ordinarily confessions begin at the age of seven. Through this means the priests come to know the very hearts and souls of those who confess before them, which would be desirable in the service of the church and which would not, which can be persuaded and which cannot. "Vocations" is the term euphemistically applied to the pressure that is put upon adolescent girls, with the object of persuading them to become nuns.

At this most susceptible age, when a girl's kaleidoscopic enthusiasm for becoming now a nurse, now a nun, now a stewardess, is at its height, it is easy for a trained priest to seize upon a passing fancy and blow it up into a full scale vocation. Once the victim has been chosen, pressure is applied directly and indirectly until the battle is won. Appeals are made to the girl's Christian sense of duty. Visits may be arranged on the part of those who already are nuns, or who are in training. Weekend retreats may be arranged at convents where she is royally entertained. Special favors and even flattery may also be used. The girl's natural reluctance to enter such a life is pictured as the evil influence of the world, or more directly of the Devil, attempting to hold her back from her divine calling, and she is warned that those who refuse their vocations quite possibly will be lost. She is told that within the convent she will be secluded from the evil influences of the world, and assured of everlasting happiness in heaven.

There is a sharp contrast between the exhortation Rome gives to her masses, to raise large families, and that given to the girl who is a prospect for the convent. To the latter, virginity is held up as the perfect state and as more pleasing to God. Marriage and motherhood are spoken of disparagingly, as a lower form of morality, designed for the less perfect. The girl who may be matrimonially inclined is warned of the problems of home, childbearing, care

of children, problems of in-laws, annoyances of all kinds. She is told that if she turns down this offer of "marriage" to Christ, she will be committing a terrible sin and will have to take the consequences.

Usually the most opportune time for persuading a girl to enter the convent comes just after she has been disappointed in love. Blighted romance often affords the priest his most valuable opportunity. Says Helen Conroy:

"A jilted girl, in the first rush of shame and agony at the shattering of her romance, is an easy victim of any priest. Knowing that such intense grief cannot last long, the girl is urged to go into a convent at once. The poor girl sees in it a chance to get away from an embarrassing situation, and this, coupled with the fact that she is assured she can leave any time she wishes, has led thousands to rush headlong into the convent" (*Ibid.*, p. 3).

Often the priest can count on the support of the girl's family, which stands to gain social prestige and other favors in the Catholic community by giving a nun to the church. The deference which the Church of Rome teaches the people to pay to the priests and nuns extends itself to the families from which the priests and nuns come. Families of such are often showered with social and financial favors through which Rome cleverly makes them her allies. Should any boy or girl renounce his or her profession, that becomes a reflection on the family, and many a family that has owed its prosperity to the influence of the church has marked its decline from the day a son or daughter abandoned the religious life, particularly so if the parents sympathized with them and helped them to that end.

For parents who resist the idea that a son or daughter should enter the religious life, the Church of Rome also has a word. In a book, *The Parents' Role in Vocations*, by Poage and Treacy, parents are encouraged to do what they can toward furthering such vocations. "Parents who without just cause prevent a child from entering a religious state," they are told, cannot be excused from mortal sin" (ch. 10). Thus the threat of mortal sin, which to a Roman Catholic means the loss of salvation, is held over the heads of any parents who seek to keep a boy or girl from becoming an inmate of a monastery or convent!

The practice of the Roman Church is to persuade boys to enter monasteries and girls to enter convents at an early age. Rome well knows the value of this early training. In the book just referred to, the question is asked: "Which is preferable, entering a convent after high school or after college?" and the authors reply: "The Church recommends that the entrance be made as soon as possible." The Council of Toledo laid down the rule that, "As soon as a child has arrived at adolescence, that is to say, at the age of twelve for girls and fourteen for boys, they may freely dispose of themselves by entering religion." Thus the uninformed, inexperienced, immature mind is molded toward the religious vocation before it has a chance to develop independent ways of thinking and acting.

The normal practice in convent training is that during the first two years a girl may leave any time she pleases. Some do leave. Others are sent home because they are not found satisfactory. Following that period, the girl

takes a vow for one year. If she first entered a convent near her home, she probably now will be sent to one some distance away. Even then she still can leave if she is unhappy or wants to leave. At the end of the third year the permanent vow is taken. This commits one for life.

Some, however, refuse to commit themselves permanently, and will renew the vow for only one year at a time. The Roman Church does not like this practice, but, when pressed for teachers or nurses, often has no choice but to tolerate it. The nuns who commit themselves only for one year at a time usually do about as they please.

The Church of Rome well knows the influence that strong family ties can have on the nun, pulling her back to an independent life. Consequently a determined effort is made to break all her ties with home and relatives.

The first step in that program is to change her identity. This is done at one stroke by dropping her real name and giving her a fictitious one, usually the name of some obscure saint. Thenceforth she is known as Sister So-and-so, symbolical of the fact that she now is a new person and that she is breaking all ties with the old life. Experience proves, however, that the man or woman who finds it necessary to use an assumed name loses self-respect, and with it courage and initiative. The mere use of a false name tends to make one feel that he can escape obligations. And by what authority does the Church of Rome arrogate to herself the right to change the names of her members without recourse to civil law? Photographs, even of the girl's mother and father are taken away from her. For photographs are strong reminders of the old life and tend to make "dying to the world" harder and slower by prolonging the agony. Even the memory of her parents pulls her back to the old life, and so must be obliterated as far as possible. Her incoming and outgoing mail is censored by the Mother Superior, and may be mutilated or withheld if it contains unfavorable comments about the convent or convent life. Again, by what authority does the Church of Rome tamper with the mail? Why, by the authority of the pope, of course. He is a law unto himself and above all civil law. He is the representative of God on earth, and is not to be hampered by the civil laws of the various nations!

Concerning the matter of breaking relations with home and family Liguori, the most noted moral theologian in the Church of Rome, utterly perverting the true sense of Scripture, says:

"If attachment to relatives were not productive of great mischief, Jesus Christ would not have so strenuously exhorted us to estrangement from them. 'If,' He says, 'any man comes to me, and hates not his father and mother, and brethren and sisters, he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26). And again, 'I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother' (Matthew 10:35)."

We point out, however, that the true explanation of Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:35 is found in Matthew 10:37, where we read: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:35, in which our obligation to Christ as compared with that to our closest relatives and

friends is stated negatively, and Matthew 10:37, in which it is stated positively, simply mean that we are not to put any other person before Him. They do not mean that we are not to continue to have a proper love and regard for our relatives and friends as such.

Liguori continues:

"But why does the Redeemer insist so strongly on alienation from relatives? Why does He take so much pains to separate us from them? He, Himself, assigns the reason: it is because 'A man's enemies shall be those of his own household' (Matthew 10:36). Relatives are the worst enemies of the sanctification of Christians, and particularly of religious; because they are, according to St. Thomas [Aquinas], the greatest obstacle to achievement of virtue. 'Frequently,' says the Holy Doctor, 'carnal friends oppose the progress of the spirit; for in the affairs of salvation, the nearest of kin are not friends, but enemies' (p. 189).

"The truth of this assertion is fully established by experience. ... He who desires to walk in the way of perfection must fly from relatives, must abstain from taking part in their affairs, and when they are at a distance, must not even inquire about them. The religious who tells her parents, and her brothers, and her sisters, that she knows them not, is the True Spouse of Christ."

To the same effect St. Jerome says:

"It is a great advantage to forget your parents; for then 'the King shall greatly desire your beauty.'"

And again:

"How many monks have by compassion towards their father and mother, lost their own souls! A religious who is attached to her relatives has not yet left the world."

And St. Teresa, who is held up as a model for nuns, says:

"For my part, I cannot conceive what consolation a nun can find in her relatives."

But to such reasoning Helen Conroy gives this devastating reply:

"This infamous system, not satisfied with getting the girl away from her parents, poisons the mind and heart of the girl against the mother who bore her, as well as against the father, sisters, and brothers. Of all the crimes committed in the name of religion, this forcing of hatred of parents is the blackest. Siva (a Hindu deity) may have been the Great Destroyer, but Rome is the Great Dehumanizer. This doctrine of hatred of parents by nuns and sisters fully explains why a girl is not allowed to dispose of her property until sixty days before she is to take the veil and the vows. The church fully expects that by that time the girl will have learned the hymn of hate, and refuse to leave them anything" (*Forgotten Women in Convents*, p. 82).

We have mentioned the fact that a girl entering a convent takes solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The vow of poverty reduces those who take it to the status of paupers. Giving up all property rights, the girl thenceforth has in common with the other members of the Order only what is given them by the mother superior. Canon Laws 568 and 569 relate to any property that the novitiate may have, and provide that must all be given up. Liguori says:

“All the money, furniture, clothes, and whatever species of property you possess, all that you receive from your parents or relatives, or the fruit of your industry, belong, not to you, but to the convent. You have only the use of what the superior gives you. Hence, if you dispose of anything without her leave you are guilty of theft, by violating the vow of poverty” (*The True Spouse of Christ*, p. 159).

The prospective nun is forbidden to dispose of her property before she enters, or at the time she enters, the convent. Instead, she must wait until within sixty days of the time she is to make her solemn, permanent profession. The reason behind this rule is that it is assumed that by that time she will be sufficiently alienated from her family, and sufficiently committed to the convent, that she will give her property, in large amount at least, to the convent. These two rulings are of great importance to the Roman Church, for through them a great amount of property falls into her hands.

There is a widespread belief among Protestants, and even among Roman Catholics, that the convents are financed by the Roman Church, so that those who wish may retire from the world and spend their lives in seclusion. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Canon Law requires that the girl bring with her a specified amount of money or property, depending on her status in life, which money is known as “the dowry,” or marriage portion of the spouse of Christ. This money is invested, and if for any reason she leaves the convent, it must be returned to her, but not the interest that may have been derived from it. There are exceptions, however, in which no dowry is required, in which other considerations prevail, such as education, special talents, the church’s need for teachers, nurses, etc. But one of the usual considerations in selecting a girl who is to be urged to become a nun is that she come from a family in which she will have some inheritance.

Those who on entering the convent bring money, or education, or special talents, are known as “choir sisters”; those who bring neither money, nor education, nor special talents are known as “lay sisters,” and may be assigned to menial work such as cooking, sweeping, scrubbing, waiting on the choir sisters, etc. No girl lacking good health will be accepted. If the novitiate breaks down, she is promptly returned to her family. The Church of Rome has no intention of spending money on a nun who is not a good investment. Thus in the Roman Church even the privilege of working for one’s salvation has a price tag on it—and oftentimes it is a very high price tag. Going to heaven via the Roman route calls for money first, last, and all the time. Money is the golden key that most effectively unlocks the pearly gates.

## 9 Convent Life

The Roman Church seeks to convey the idea that a nun is the happiest of women, and that a convent is the most holy, delightful, and peaceful place of abode. "No girl can be a nun or stay a nun unless she herself desires it," says Charles F. X. Dolan, in a Roman Catholic Questionnaire. "Nobody," he continues, "can make her stay in the convent. Convent walls are not to keep the nuns in, but to keep the world out." On the strength of such promises many a poor, deluded girl has sought shelter in a convent. But quite a different picture is presented by some of those who have left the convents through the regular procedures, or who have escaped from them. For instance, Helen Conroy says:

"The fact is that the average convent is a hornet's nest of intrigue. In them are cliques and factions, and many an ambitious sister gets to be superior, the most coveted position in a convent, not by an honest election, but by crushing all opposition ruthlessly, and by catering to the priest. ... The convent system is honeycombed with spies, who are known by the name of 'discretes.' They are the G-men, the undercover agents. They are seldom known. This is what makes real friendship among sisters and nuns an impossibility" (*Ibid.*, p. 56).

Conditions in convents in the United States, where the Roman Church is subject to restraining influences from Protestantism, and where abuses are more likely to be publicized, are far better than in the Roman Catholic countries where restraints are at a minimum and where the ecclesiastical, governmental, and police power are all under Roman domination. A majority of the nuns here undoubtedly are sincere, hard-working, well-meaning women. Those who are engaged in teaching and nursing still have some contact with the outside world, but they too are carefully restricted in their social contacts, their reading, travel, living quarters, etc. There is no reason to believe that immorality in any appreciable degree exists in these convents. But the basic principles of convent life are the same everywhere, and the convents here have many of the undesirable characteristics that are commonly found in such institutions.

The best analysis of convent life that we have seen is given by Dee Smith, formerly a layman in the Roman Church. He divides the nuns into four distinct groups. Concerning these he says:

(1) "It must not be supposed that all nuns are unhappy and wish to leave the convent. Temperaments differ inside the convent as well as outside of it. Some nuns enjoy communal life and find all the fulfillment their natures require in doing the work they love. I believe these to be a fairly large minority."

He then divides the remaining majority into three groups as follows:

(2) "The largest group consists of those who are disillusioned with convent life, depressed by the spite, petty politics, and lack of charity within the convent walls. But they have lost none of their faith in the Roman Catholic Church, believing it their duty to stay on and endure. They are totally



unaware that their lives are being worse than wasted—used in fact as a commodity to keep unscrupulous men in power. These sad, empty-hearted, betrayed souls sincerely believe they are serving God.

(3) “Next comes the group who are not only disillusioned with the convent but wish to leave it. They do not, however contemplate leaving the church nor do they attach any blame to convent life, believing themselves simply to have misjudged their ‘vocation.’ What are their chances of getting out? If they come from influential families sufficiently broadminded to support their plea for release and to welcome them back with understanding, their chances are good. While leaving the convent is not a common event, no few individuals have done so, and have lived a normal life within the Roman Catholic fold afterward.

“If, however, the nun comes from the superstitious and fanatical type of Catholic family which supplies most of the church’s vocations, she may find her family itself opposing her release, and her superiors, mindful of the impending loss of a trained drudge, will not be slow to take advantage of this. She will find her Mother Superior and her Confessor both pleading the dangers of a vocation relinquishment.

“Under the circumstances the nun gives up hope of getting out. What else can she do? She has no money, no clothes except her convent garb, no means of communicating with the outside world since her mail is censored, nowhere to go if she did get out. When Catholics say that any nun can leave the convent at any time she wishes, they are simply talking nonsense. Many a nun who would love to get out is spending her life within convent walls because she has no alternative and is making the best of it.

(4) “The nun in the last group is the one who has the least chance of all to find freedom. She is almost hopelessly incarcerated. These are the alert, intelligent women who have seen through the whole scheme and have been injudicious enough to say so. They want not only to get out of the convent but out of the Roman Church. Their families seldom support their stand, but if they seem likely to, communication between the family and the recalcitrant is shut off. At first the usual pleas and admonitions are used on them, but if these fail to impress, a Roman Catholic doctor or psychologist obligingly examines them and they disappear forever into a Catholic mental institution.

“The only way this type of individual ever frees herself from the convent is by shrewdness and diplomacy, by withholding all criticism of church and convent and concentrating on concern over her vocation. If sufficiently convincing she may sometimes be able to secure her release. Once outside, these are among the most valiant fighters against Roman tyranny.”

Dee Smith then concludes:

“The convent has its full quota of hard, malicious characters who take out their frustrations on the gentler and more sweet-tempered of their associates. If these women have ability they quite often become Superiors, as they are usually endowed with a capacity for driving others” (Christian Heritage, December, 1958).

With particular reference to cloistered nuns Dr. Montano says:

"Having been won to the cloister by the promise of being wedded to Christ she takes part in the binding. After the organ music is silenced, after the congratulations of loved ones have died away, alone in her cell the poor victim awakens to the sad reality that the mirage which drew her behind these walls has faded. She finds herself on the lonely road between life and death. What of her future? To remain there, shut away from human experience, human fellowship, human love, human service. She finds herself surrounded by utter disillusionment as her eyes are opened to the petty jealousies, enmities, cruelties, and the spiritual unbalance. In her vows she has pronounced the words, 'until death.' She is chained behind the walls of the convent until she dies.

"Any visitor to those cloistered must be appointed by Roman Catholic dignitaries. Only the priests of the monasteries have access to these cloistered nuns. They go to inspect the convent, to attend a sick nun, or to hear their confessions. Secular justice has no entree behind the barred doors and windows of the cloisters. No one from the outside can reach inside these walls to help free these souls, nor can those within escape unless, as a few have done, they manage to flee by risking their lives" (*Christian Heritage*, September, 1959).

Throughout the world there are some 100,000 cloistered nuns. Speaking of one of the more extreme orders, and quoting the regulations under which they live, Dr. Montano says:

"The discalced (barefoot) Carmelite sisters, for example, neither teach, nor nurse, nor care for the old, the orphans, the infirm. They take a vow of silence—complete silence.

"At 5:30 A.M. the nuns arise from their pallets, which are wooden boards across saw-horses, covered with a straw-filled tick—for they have also taken a vow of poverty.

"At 8:30 A.M. they eat a slice of bread and drink one cup of black coffee. The table is set with plain wooden utensils and a covered water pitcher. The mask of death, a skull, is on the table, to symbolize thoughts of death, that we are mortal beings, soon to pass into the unknown.

"Their main meal may be of fish and vegetables, and their evening meal is soup and bread. Their day ends at 11 P.M., when they silently return to their cells furnished with only pallet, table and chair" (*Christian Heritage*, September, 1959)

How, then, are these pitiable souls to be reached? That is indeed a very difficult, and in most cases an impossible, task. Civil governments are extremely reluctant to interfere in church affairs. And even the communities in which convents are located usually know practically nothing about what goes on behind convent walls.

Fortunately the working nuns are not bound so tightly by their convent

regulations. But their case is difficult enough. Many a young, impressionable girl has gotten worked up into an enthusiastic hysteria, has been swept off her feet, and has taken the veil. By the time she sobers down and regrets her decision, she finds herself so deeply involved that it is next to impossible to retrace her steps. Perhaps she entered the convent against the protest of her parents, who wanted her to think it over a while longer. Now she regrets her unwise haste. What is she to do?

Probably her property commitments are so binding that she cannot renounce them, for she has signed legal documents that in most cases turn her property over to the convent. She finds that the course of training that she has received has been designed to fit her only for the work of the church. She has been left completely unequipped to meet the problems of everyday living in the world. She is told that if she turns back she will be branding herself a traitor to God and to her church, and that public opinion will be strongly against her—which in most cases is not true. The stigma that the Roman Church in Catholic communities attaches to those who abandon convent life is another powerful reason why she feels that, happy or unhappy, she must remain where she is. Furthermore, her vows of service were made to the pope, and official release from them must be obtained from him—a procedure which may involve endless red tape. Under such circumstances many a girl has felt completely helpless and has concluded that she had no choice but to continue in the convent.

In regard to the problems that a nun who leaves the convent has in re-establishing herself in life, listen to the testimony of Helen Conroy:

"I shrink at the memory of the awful struggle back to normalcy which I, in common with every other ex-nun, went through. With no business training, no knowledge of homemaking, no sense of values without which any life is a failure; with no decision, a prey to a thousand terrors, afraid of myself and everyone else; timid, cringing, physically emancipated, but mentally chained, the unfortunate ex-nun in too many cases returns to her cell voluntarily, because, 'there are no decisions to be made.' Rome clips the wings of her victims so that they cannot fly, then tells the believing world that they stay because they like it" (*Forgotten Women in Convents*, p. 109).

And Daniel March says:

"The vows of a nun are fetters of brass. Around the nun is an invisible wall so high she cannot scale it, so strong she cannot pierce it. If she abandons the convent she abandons the only friends she knows. The years she has spent in the convent, far from fitting her to cope with reality, have made her a creature without a will of her own.

"In this connection it is interesting to read that the Roman Catholic Teresa Foundation recently made application to establish a convent for Carmelite (cloistered) nuns in Glumslov, Sweden. No Roman Catholic convents have been permitted in Sweden since the Reformation. The Swedish Advisory Council is opposed to the move, and has declared that "if permission is granted" it will be only "in consideration of personal freedom" for the women who have taken the vows, and that they must have permission to "leave the convent if they

wish without fear of punishment."

What a pity it is that in the United States, in this fabled "land of the free," we do not have a requirement that convents can exist on our soil only if the nuns are assured "personal freedom," and only if they may "leave the convent if they wish without fear of punishment."

## 10 Conclusion

Freeborn Protestant women can have little idea of the spiritual, mental, and physical slavery in which their unfortunate Roman Catholic sisters in some instances have been held and still are held by that church. Even in the United States thousands of broken-hearted convent girls and women are shut away from parents, friends, and homes, forbidden to appear alone in public, forbidden even to carry on an ordinary conversation with other people. That this slavery is in many cases voluntary or semi-voluntary does not make it any less real. Those who have lost the sense of freedom, or the desire for freedom, or who never had it in the first place, do not know what it is. Rome claims some 177,000 nuns in the United States, and many more thousands throughout the world. Keep the girls and women from the confessional box and take them out of the convents, and Romanism will wither. It is well known that in the confessional the priests do not make one tenth the progress with men that they do with women, nor do they waste much time attempting it.

Christ established no convents, no nunneries. In the true Christian church there are no high stone walls, no locked doors and barred windows such as so often have been a part of the Roman convent system. Instead, the convent system is of pagan origin. Practically every Buddhist temple in India has its "virgins" consecrated to the service of the god worshipped there, complete with holy water, holy ashes, charms, bones, bells, and pictures, all blessed by the priests. The historical fact is that the Buddhist convent system antedated the Roman Catholic system of pious slavery of women by more than 500 years.

What, then, must be our conclusion regarding the convent system? That it is abominably cruel, unnatural, un-American, and unscriptural, and that it should be abolished by law. In our own country the so-called "sanctity" of those institutions is honored, so that secular justice and the protective agencies of government have no entrance. If there is a convent in your community, ask the sheriff what he knows about the things that go on inside those walls. He will have to acknowledge that he knows practically nothing about how many people are there, who they are, what they do, how they are treated, or whether or not they are there of their own volition. The government of the United States should give the women in American convents a new status, based not on Roman Catholic Canon Law, but on the Constitution of the United States.

In her book, *Forgotten Women in Convents*, Helen Conroy suggests an eleven-point program for convent reform. It is as follows:

1. "It should be made illegal to accept into any convent or monastic institution of any kind any boy or girl under eighteen years of age, with or

without the consent of their parents.

2. "No person should be allowed to make vows until twenty-one years of age. This would end the exploitation of mere children in the name of religion.
3. "Every state where monastic institutions exist should have on file a sworn statement of the exact number of inmates in the house. This list should be kept up to date.
4. "All arrivals and departures of members of these colonies should be reported (even hotels and motels are required to keep a record of their guests).
5. "The state should have a certified list of the real names of the inmates, together with the names and addresses of their parents, or of their nearest kin.
6. "Since the act of entering a monastic institution is, to all intents and purposes, a renunciation of the rights of citizenship, for no man can serve two masters (the pope and the state), members of monastic communities are no longer free citizens and should be debarred from voting in any election, state, county, or national, and from teaching in public schools.
7. "Members of religious orders entering the country should be required to take out citizenship papers within the time specified by law. Do they all stay in the convents? No one knows.
8. "All persons entering a monastic institution should be required to make a will and file the same. The renunciation which the Church of Rome forces all religious to make sixty days before profession should be null and void.
9. "The use of special regalia should be confined to the premises.
10. "The board of public health should have full control of monastic institutions, and should make regular visits to them.
11. "Death certificates of all persons dying in monastic institutions should be signed by a non-Catholic doctor as well as by a Catholic doctor" (pp. 119-120). To these suggestions we would add the further provision that inmates of such institutions should be free to leave at any time without fear of punishment. Surely the adoption of these recommendations would go far toward eliminating the most objectionable features of the convent system. There is considerable restlessness in the Roman Catholic Church concerning the matter of clerical celibacy. Some of the bishops wanted to place this subject on the agenda at the last session of the Vatican Council in 1965 and had prepared documents to be introduced. But Pope Paul issued a statement in which he strongly defended the practice, and forbade the Council even to discuss the subject. But debate continues in the church at large, and Roman Catholic sources acknowledge that thousands of petitions from priests and nuns asking to be dispensed from that requirement are now pending at the Vatican.

(Continued in [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XV Marriage.](#))

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