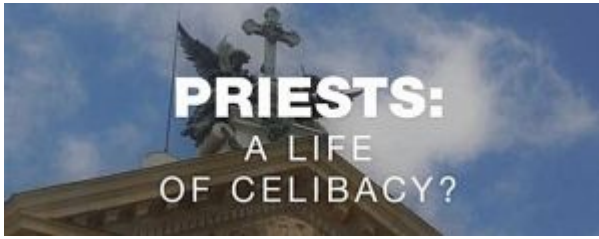


The Tyranny Of Priestly Celibacy



This article is from chapter 15 of “Out of the Labyrinth: The Conversion of a Roman Catholic Priest” by former Roman Catholic priest Leo Herbert Lehmann, first published in 1947 and made available online by The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry LutheranLibrary.org.

In this article you may learn something surprising like I did. A Catholic priest defines the word “celibacy” to only mean he cannot get legally married.

Quoted from the article:

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ONLY THOSE PRIESTS who leave the ranks of the Roman priesthood are free to speak their minds about celibacy. Many even then hesitate to do so, for fear of scandalizing those they left behind them. But some, such as Father Chiniquy, Père Hyacinthe and others, considered it a duty to prove how harmful to the cause of Christ has been this false position into which Roman Catholic priests are forced with regard to sex and marriage. In the first place it is unscriptural, for the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 4:3) warns against those who depart from the faith and give heed to “doctrines of devils,” by “forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats.” And in the preceding chapter he tells Timothy that even “a bishop must be a man of one wife.”

Père Hyacinthe, French priest and famed preacher of Notre Dame in Paris, after his conversion compared the wounds inflicted upon the Christian Church by the Roman papacy to the wounds in the crucified body of Christ. “Behold ye bishops,” he exclaimed, “the Bride of Christ pierced, like Him, by five wounds!” He likens the first wound in the right hand of Christ, the hand that carries the light of truth, to the darkening of the Word of God – the denial of the Gospel to the people. The wound in the left hand is the abuse of hierarchical power. But he calls the wound in the very heart of Christ’s Church the forced celibacy of the clergy, “suffered most by those (the priests themselves) who dare least to speak of it.”

I am breaking no confidences when I assert that it is sheer pretense to say that this forced celibacy contributes in any way to the personal sanctification of priests. The sole benefit to be had from it is the strengthening of the organizational structure of the Church. Hitler, in his *Mein Kampf*, was uncannily accurate in figuring out and stressing this. "This particular significance of celibacy," he says, "is not recognized by most people." Holding up the organization of the Roman Catholic Church as a model example for his Nazi followers, he goes on to say (p. 643):

"Here the Catholic Church can be looked upon as a model example. In the celibacy of its priests roots the compulsion to draw the future generations of the clergy, instead of from its own ranks, again and again from the broad masses of the people... It is the origin of the incredibly vigorous power that inhabits this age-old institution. This gigantic host of clerical dignitaries, by uninterruptedly supplementing itself from the lowest layers of the nations, preserves not only its instinctive bond with the people's world of sentiment, but it also assures itself of a sum of energy and active force which in such a form will forever be present only in the broad masses of the people. From this results the astounding youthfulness of this giant organism, its spiritual pliability and its steel-like will power."

This fulsome praise by Hitler of the unnatural law of priestly celibacy should reveal to Americans how insincere are the pious protestations of deep concern of Catholic spokesmen for the "sacredness of the individual personality." Hitler, whose *Mein Kampf* was ghost-written by a Roman Catholic priest, proves that the Catholic Church sacrifices the most natural human instincts of its own clergy to the strengthening of its "giant organism and its steel-like will power."

The real shame and tyranny of priestly celibacy, as Père Hyacinthe rightly remarks, is the necessity to which its victims are forced of hiding the real facts of it from the public. It is unnecessary for me to say how many priests fail to live up to the harsh requirements of this unnatural law. Priests as a group are little different from other men of like temperament and profession. Their weakness in sex matters is no less than those of other men of corresponding position and education. It may safely be said, in fact, that the sex urge in priests is even stronger because of the denial to them of the cleansing effects of legal marriage. Roman Catholic priests do not have the advantage of active business men, whose sex tendencies are generally normalized by physical absorption in daily labor, unremitting cares of family life and harassing financial affairs.. They lead a very sedentary life, are freely supplied with an exceptionally good table and other bodily comforts, and are officials of **a religion which does not prohibit indulgence in the copious use of alcoholic stimulants.**

Similar to so many other man-made regulations of the Roman Catholic Church, priestly celibacy entails many contradictions, much deceit, and often leads to complete spiritual shipwreck of its victims. In the first place, there is the convenient confusion between the words celibacy and chastity. To the ordinary people these are made to appear identical, and both Catholics and Protestants are led to believe that every Roman Catholic priest must take "vows of chastity" before ordination. This confusion serves as an easy

defense of the organization of the Catholic Church in more ways than one. In particular, it enables the defenders of the Church to cast a slur on priests who leave the priesthood and subsequently get married as having "broken their vows of chastity." This is pure fiction. Only the very small percentage of priests who belong to the religious orders take an explicit vow of chastity. Of the 40,000 Roman Catholic priests in the United States, fully 80 per cent are 'secular' priests who serve in parishes and who do not take any vow of chastity at ordination.

At ordination these secular priests merely signify that they accept the Church's condition for ordination that they will not get legally married. They take no vow of chastity, that is, they make no explicit promise to refrain from sexual relations. Cadets at West Point and Annapolis are bound by similar regulations. Much more, in fact, is said about chastity by a Protestant Episcopal bishop when ordaining ministers to that Church which permits them to marry as they please, either before or after ordination.

In other words, one can continue to be celibate without necessarily being chaste. A Roman Catholic priest ceases to be celibate in the eyes of his Church only by contracting marriage by permission of the Church. No amount of sexual relations will affect his celibacy. Sometimes it happens that a priest takes the law into his own hands and secretly contracts legal marriage before a Protestant minister or a civil judge. In such a case he would still be counted as celibate by the Catholic Church, since it does not recognize any power in a Protestant minister or a civil judge to join in matrimony those whom it has banned from marriage.

The absurd consequences of the Catholic Church's law of priestly celibacy may be seen from the regulations governing the pardon of priests who sin by sexual relationship without getting married, compared to those who flout the Church's law of celibacy and contract legal marriage before a Protestant minister or a civil judge. Pardon for sexual irregularities of priests outside marriage, whether adultery or fornication, can easily be had at any time by confession to any ordinary fellow-priest. On the other hand, absolution (with accompanying severe penalties) for a priest who gets legally married can be obtained for him only by recourse to the pope himself. Furthermore, to obtain such pardon a priest would be obliged to forsake his wife. What is regarded as the real crime in this latter case is not the actual marriage act, but the defiance of the law of celibacy.

Most dishonest of all is the use of the law of celibacy against priests who resign from the priesthood and subsequently get married. Against them is made the unfair accusation that they left just to get married, that they are so many 'Judases' who betray God and the Church merely to satisfy their base passions. The truth of the matter is, as is well known to all priests, that the priesthood provides a safe and convenient cloak for those who choose to lead an irregular sex life, whereas the restrictions and burdens of married life which an ex-priest chooses are a deterrent to such extra-marital sex irregularities. Nor do all priests who leave the priesthood get married afterwards. Many of them cannot afford to do so, and some are already past marriageable age.

Forced celibacy in any Christian Church is not only unscriptural but outmoded in democratic countries. The Roman Catholic Church was formerly admitted to be the sole law-maker for marriages of all Christians. But the will of the people in democratic countries has now placed that right in the hands of the civil authorities. The law of clerical celibacy, with its denial of legal marriage to priests, is now no longer binding. It has continued in the Roman Catholic Church only because its authorities have taken unfair advantage of the false idea it has fostered among the credulous people that priests are forbidden to marry by the law of God.

The fact is adroitly concealed from the submissive Catholic people that celibacy is merely a regulation of Church law, and that it is no sin or shame before God for a priest to get properly married. Roman Catholics will not believe that the apostle Peter had a wife, even though this fact is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. Neither will they believe that, when it was expedient to do so, the Catholic Church released large numbers of priests from this law. The Vatican's concordat with Napoleon, for instance, ratified the marriages of those priests who took the oath to the Constitution after the French Revolution of 1789, by which the legality of the marriages of priests was recognized. Talleyrand, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Autun who became Napoleon's great statesman, took the law into his own hands and got married. The pope was willing to ratify the bishop's marriage in return for other political concessions by Napoleon. Just because Napoleon did not consider it a good bargain for him, the pope spited him and withheld his permission for Talleyrand's marriage. Roman Catholic people also find it difficult to believe that in New York and other American cities today parish priests of the Ruthenian and other Greek Catholic rites have wives and families.

In my book, *The Soul of a Priest*, I have told of the sad spectacles I met, in all parts of the world in which I traveled as a priest, of the ruined lives of so many fine young priests who through no fault of their own were unable to bear up against this harsh law of celibacy. It has been well said that marriage cleanses a man, and these young priests would have been cleansed of the annoyance and frustration of sex by normal marriage relations. A loving wife and the joy of legitimate children in a happy home life would have filled them with vigor and spiritual zeal. Even more important, these would have saved them from the inevitable indulgence in alcoholic liquor to which many priests are driven as a poor substitute for their God-given, natural rights in marriage.

The bishops know this well. So does the pope and his Roman counselors. But they prefer to wreck the souls and bodies of the priests in order to sustain the "giant organism" and "steel-like will power" of its organization that Hitler so greatly admired and imitated. They take the fresh young man, the rough, uncut diamond, use him for the ends of their organization and then cast him aside when his usefulness is gone, and then begin again on others. The "particular significance of celibacy" in their regimented, Nazi-like organization, which Hitler discovered as "not recognized by most people," lies in the fact that the second and third generation of priests' children would threaten its totalitarian structure, as well as its enormous wealth and

secrets. To preserve these the individual souls of its priests are cruelly sacrificed.

There is an angle to this law of priestly celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church that does not make sense to Protestants, as it did to Hitler. The loss to Roman Catholic countries because of the prohibition of legal marriage to its priests has been clearly shown by men like Professor Albert Wigham of Columbia University in New York, and by Havelock Ellis in England. Their investigations prove that the children of Protestant clergymen in England, America and Evangelical countries of Europe are proportionately much superior in intellectual and scientific achievement than those of all other professions. Their tabulations show that one member out of every twenty families of Protestant clergymen is to be found listed in Who's Who compared to one out of every 800 families of farmers, and only one out of every 2,000 families of shopkeepers and tradesmen.

Priests and nuns are the cream of the Roman Catholic population in every country. Yet they leave no such superior progeny behind them as is to be found in Protestant countries. Even in the United States, the selection of the best youths for a celibate priesthood in the Catholic Church is sure to have harmful effects on future generations, especially if the number of Roman Catholics increases to any great extent.

It seems senseless, on the one hand, that the Roman Catholic Church insists on a tremendous increase of children among its poor and uneducated classes by unrelenting opposition to birth control, and, on the other hand, denies legal marriage and legitimate children to its millions of priests, nuns, monks and teaching brothers. These can produce children only surreptitiously – or employ the very methods of birth control which they are obliged to deny to the laity.

An absurd consequence of this denial of marriage to priests is the false idea, especially among Irish Catholics and the peasant peoples of southern Europe, that marriage and the priesthood are entirely incompatible. They believe that the priesthood eliminates in some miraculous way even the physical possibility of the marriage relation in one so endowed. A Protestant minister, of course, cannot be thus supernaturally affected, since he has no power of the priesthood. These credulous people scarcely allow their minds to think of their priests as having even the ordinary natural bodily functions of other men.

This was well illustrated to me by an Irish priest by the name of Frank Kelly in Capetown. He told the story purposely at his own father's expense to prove the super-physical picture that Irish people have in their minds of their priests. His father was a store keeper in Waterford in the south of Ireland and often engaged the local Protestant minister in theological discussions. One day the conversation turned on the question of the marriage of priests. "Sure an' that could never be," Mr. Kelly objected to the Protestant minister. "'Twould be against all law of God and man!"

"But my dear Mr. Kelly," the minister retorted, "in the Holy Bible Paul tells Timothy that even a bishop must be a man of one wife. Why then not also a

priest?"

"Faith an' bigorra," the priest's father indignantly answered, "that may be in your Bible, but 'tis sure not in mine!"

When the minister inquired if he had a Bible at home, Mr. Kelly heatedly replied: "Sure I have! We Catholics can have a Bible as well as Protestants."

They agreed to go to his house and find out if the passage in question was in the Catholic Bible. Arrived there, Mr. Kelly proudly took down the family Bible from a shelf, carefully dusted it and handed it to the Protestant minister confident that he would be disappointed in his search. The minister quickly turned to 1 Tim. 3:2 and read aloud: "A bishop must be the husband of one wife..." He then handed the book to Mr. Kelly who adjusted his spectacles and read the passage for himself. Suspicious of some trick on the part of the minister he turned to the flyleaf, to convince himself it was really his own Bible by the record of all the Kelly baptisms written on it. He then removed his spectacles, carefully wiped them, and again read the passage aloud for himself. Finally, convinced but still unbelieving, he closed the book with a snap, threw it on the table and exclaimed:

"Faith, an' 'tis Saint Paul ought to be ashamed of himself!"