

CELIBACY

“It is good for a man not to marry, but since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:1, 2)

Some years ago I interviewed an Episcopal cleric over radio station KOBC in Joplin. He had wanted to be a Roman Catholic priest but could not get permission to get married, and therefore changed churches. “I wish”, he said, “that the Church would be honest about celibacy. The primary reason for it involves property, not morality”.

There is a great deal of truth in what he said. The Roman Catholic Church has been very wealthy for many centuries. Albert Henry Newman, in his *Manual of Church History* (Vol. 1, pages 461 - 462) provides this insight: *“As feudalism had added vastly to the territorial possessions of the church the Crusades confirmed the opportunity for acquiring enormous additional wealth. Many an enthusiastic crusader, to make his salvation doubly sure, bequeathed his entire estate to the church in case of his failure to return. Many in starting needed ready money, which the church was prepared to furnish on good security. Thus the church came to possess about 1/3 of the real property of Europe.”*

While the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church was increasing, their spirituality was decreasing. At one point the morals of clergymen were so low that historians call that period of history, the “midnight of the Dark Ages” or the “pornocracy”. Philip Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church* (Vol. V, p. 806) quotes Jacob de Vitry: *“Fornication among clergymen was considered no sin. Loose women paraded the streets and, as it were by force, drew them to their lodgings. And if they refused, the women pointed the finger at them, crying ‘Sodomites’ “.*

Even many of the popes kept mistresses and fathered illegitimate children. As long as there was no legal marriage, however, there were no legal heirs and their vast holdings remained the property of the church. The December 1969 *Reader’s Digest* speaks to this issue in an article titled “Why Priests Marry” by Edward B. Fiske. *“In the early church, marriage was the normal state for clergy. St Peter was married, as were almost all of his fellow apostles, and about 40 of the early popes. In Eastern Orthodox churches - as in Eastern Rite Roman Catholic churches - priests have always been permitted to marry before ordination. From the beginning, however, celibacy was an honored ideal . . . (and) in the year 1139 it was made a binding law. The creation of a celibate class provided assurance that church land, often held by priests in their own names during the Middle Ages, would not pass into the hands of their relatives . . . “*

Thus, a system that is neither biblical, nor practical, was adopted by the church to keep its wealth. When Martin Luther got married he had to leave the priesthood. He could have remained a Roman Catholic priest, however, if he had slept with the same woman, and fathered the same six children, but not gotten married. He would have had to pay a fine, but would not have been forced to leave the priesthood.

Before taking a vow not to marry, it is wise to remember the warning of Jesus that not all men are not so gifted (See Matt. 19:11, 12). We should also listen to Paul, who was not married. By inspiration, he associated “forbidding to marry” with the doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1 - 3). He also wrote that marriage was one way God ordained to avoid immorality, and said: *“It is better to marry than to burn”* (1 Cor. 7:1 - 9).

Today we need to be in special prayer for our friends in the Roman Catholic Church. The long standing allegations of clerical immorality have finally made the front page. Let us not only pray for the victims whose lives have been shattered by a trust betrayed, let us also pray for the priests themselves who are caught in the web of a system designed for failure. Rottenness thrives in the darkness, but is sanitized by the light. Let us pray that the sunlight of truth, which initially brings embarrassment and pain, will ultimately bring healing and health.

Remember, there is nothing wrong with being single, but since there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.