

The Truth About Married Priests

Shane Schaezel / June 16, 2019June 12, 2022 / Apologetics, Renewal, Social Commentary



Before I begin this essay, allow me to give full disclosure. First, I am not a priest. Second, I am married. Third, I don't want to be a priest — ever. Fourth, I will probably never be a priest and that's just fine with me. Truth be told, I enjoy my freedom as a Catholic layman, maybe just a little too much, and I couldn't see my life any other way. I disclose this because I'm frequently accused of wanting to be a priest when I state my position on this issue. It's a false presumption that should be dispelled before we begin.

There is much talk in the Church right now about the possibility of Pope Francis opening up the priesthood to married men following the "Pan-Amazon Synod" in Rome later this year (October of 2019). This comes much to the chagrin of many traditional Catholics who don't want to see the eight-hundred-year-old celibacy mandate changed, and much to the joy of modernists who see this as a step toward women priests and blessing homosexuality.

As for me, I have my position on the matter and it's been unchanged since I joined the Catholic Church back in 2000. While I see no problem with some married men in the priesthood, the whole issue of mandated priestly celibacy has never been a "deal-breaker" for me, namely because I don't want to be a

priest, and I do believe that most priests really should be celibate. I think the Church benefits when this is the case. Now, let's talk about priestly celibacy. Namely, what it is and isn't.

The concept of priestly celibacy is Biblical, and comes straight from the words of Jesus Christ and St. Paul the Apostle. After teaching on marriage and divorce, Jesus said:

Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Matthew 19:11-12

Here, we see that Jesus Christ, who was himself a celibate man, encouraged those entering ministry (for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake), to follow his example of celibacy, if they are able. Jesus, of course, acknowledges that this is not possible for everyone who wants to enter ministry, but he encourages it as the best possible thing, both for the ministry and the minister himself. This idea was nothing new in Jesus' time. Many devout and pious Jews refused to marry for the same reason. We see this play out with the Prophet Jeremiah, who was instructed by God not to take a wife (Jeremiah 16:1-2). So the principle laid out in the Old Testament, and by Jesus Christ himself in the New Testament, is that while a married man in ministry is permissible, the best possible scenario is for the minister to remain unmarried and celibate.

We also see that St Paul, the Apostle, was a celibate man, and he indicated this in his own writings (1 Corinthians 7:8). He, like Jesus Christ, recommended that other ministers of the gospel do the same thing, but Paul was a bit more long-winded about it (thankfully), and explained the reason why...

But I desire to have you to be free from cares. He who is unmarried is concerned for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife. There is also a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. This I say for your own profit; not that I may ensnare you, but for that which is appropriate, and that you may attend to the Lord without distraction. But if any man thinks that he is behaving inappropriately toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of her age, and if need so requires, let him do what he desires. He doesn't sin. Let them marry.

1 Corinthians 7:32-36

This gist of St Paul's teaching is consistent with the teaching of Jesus Christ, but Paul has elaborated...

1. Marriage is good and it's always okay to be married.
2. Married priests (presbyters or ministers) are permitted, but not preferred.
3. Celibate priests (presbyters or ministers) are always preferred but not always possible.
4. Celibate laymen (monks or religious brothers) are always preferred but not always possible.
5. Celibate laywomen (nuns or religious sisters) are always preferred but not always possible.

This is the Biblical foundation for celibacy in the priesthood (ministry), and nobody can deny this. Catholicism often receives great criticism from some Protestants (particularly Evangelicals), for its emphasis on celibacy, but such criticism is misguided and unwarranted. Catholics are standing on solid Biblical ground here and non-Catholics have no right to criticize. Jesus Christ himself, along with St Paul and the Prophet Jeremiah, stand in staunch opposition to anyone who criticizes the Catholic Church on her preference for celibate clergy.

Now, the next thing we need to make a distinction on is the difference between doctrine and discipline. A doctrine is a teaching of the Church, which can never contradict Scripture and can never change. A discipline is a rule of the Church, which can never contradict doctrine, but may go beyond it in a more strict way, and it can be loosened or changed, so long as it doesn't contradict doctrine. The Catholic Church has both doctrines and disciplines, and this is not unusual. All Christian organizations have them, even the most free-wheeling Evangelical churches. Typically, Evangelical churches might record their doctrines on a page or booklet. While their disciplines are usually encoded in their articles of incorporation, or a booklet of rules and bylaws. The Catholic Church does something similar, but on a much bigger scale, with its doctrines recorded in the Catechism, and its disciplines recorded in the Code of Canon Law.

Remember, doctrines cannot change, but disciplines can change.

In the early years of Christianity, Church discipline held that all clergy (bishops, presbyters and deacons) may be married, but that celibacy was preferred (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:5-6). That discipline was changed rather quickly, probably in less than 100 years, after more celibate men became priests and rose through the hierarchy. It was decided in this early time period, while Christians were still under persecution by the Roman Empire, that only celibate priests may be made bishops, because of the great responsibilities they have, and example they must show. This has been the case in the Catholic Church ever since, and Eastern Orthodox Christians also keep this discipline.

By the fourth century AD, there are examples of regional synods, the equivalent of modern national bishops conferences, forbidding all married men from entering the priesthood and diaconate. By this time in Church history, celibate men were becoming more common and a much more reliable pool to draw upon for ministry. As a result, some regional bishops saw no reason to continue to ordain married men, and as a result they forbade married men from entering the priesthood and diaconate. But these were regional synods (Elvira in AD 305, and Carthage in AD 390). They were not the rule of the entire Catholic Church. It should be noted here that the Synod of Elvira took place in what is now southern Spain, before the ascent of Constantine to the imperial throne, and the bishops who took part were still under Roman persecution of Diocletian. So we have one synod when the Church was still under persecution (Elvira, AD 305) and another when it was well on its way to becoming the state religion (Carthage, AD 390). Both prohibited marital relations between clergy and their wives. In the case of Elvira, marriage for clergy was itself prohibited. While this may have been the case in these local synods, we have no indication of this being the case throughout the entire Catholic Church.

During the middle ages, celibacy gradually became the norm for all clergy in Western Europe. There were exceptions of course, as Scripture permits, but for the most part, the average priest was usually celibate. In Eastern Europe, the Near East and Northern Africa, clerical celibacy took on a different form. In the East, celibacy was required of monastic priests (priests who live in monasteries), while secular priests (priests who lived in parish rectories) could be married. As a result, bishops were usually chosen from among the monastic priests.

In all cases, East and West, when a priest is married, it's always because he was married before he was ordained. As a general rule, whatever you enter the priesthood as, you remain. If you entered it as a married man, you became a married priest. If you entered it as a single man, you became a celibate priest. There is no significant evidence in antiquity of priests being permitted to marry after being ordained. It was possible for celibate priests to take a wife only after renouncing the clerical state. In such cases, they would need to ask the bishop and the bishop would then relieve them of their clerical responsibilities and status. They could then freely marry, but they would not be allowed to return to the priestly life.

As in the case of most things, rules are usually made because of abuse. The rule of mandated celibacy for all clerics in the Western Europe came about in the early 12th century, during the First Lateran Council (AD 1123) and Second Lateran Council (AD 1139). There were various reasons for this, the chief of which was financial. Under civil law at the time, all property had to have a single owner. The idea of corporate ownership was not well defined at this time. So the parish priest was usually the legal owner of the chapel, rectory and all parish property. Upon his death, he would sometimes will all his earthly possessions to his wife and children. You can imagine what kind of problems this would create. The wife and daughters cannot become priests, and the sons may not want to. Now we have a chapel, rectory and parish property owned and operated by people who are not obligated to the bishop's authority. Anything can happen to the property. It can be sold, renovated, or rented out. Furthermore, when a bishop assigned a new priest to that parish, he might have no place to live, as the wife and children of the previous priest are still in legal possession of the rectory. Under modern law, these things are easily remedied, and never need become a problem. But under medieval law, such remedies weren't so simple. The solution of the Lateran councils was to simply bar all clergy from marriage: deacons, presbyters (priests), and bishops.

Now as it turns out, the celibacy mandate came in handy after the discovery of the New World (North and South America) in AD 1492. With thousands of celibate priests in Europe, the Catholic Church was able to throw missionaries at the two new continents with no trouble. Having no wives and children to hold them back, these brave men brought the gospel to the Native American populations of both continents. One of the little known facts of history is that both continents had been largely evangelized by Catholic missionaries long before the Protestant English arrived to the North American East Coast in the 17th century, over a hundred years after the Catholic Spanish, Portuguese and French. The celibacy mandate provided plenty of missionaries, who made all of South and Central America Catholic, as well as parts of North America, which remained Catholic in spite of Protestant-English settlement and expansion. The celibacy mandate also allowed Catholic missionaries to go, unencumbered by family, into Africa, Asia, Oceania and even Japan, well into the 20th century.

So today, as of 2019, the celibacy mandate in the Catholic Church has been in force for 896 years. It has been modified in recent times, and only applies to Catholic men of the Roman Rite (Latin Rite). Catholic men in one of the Eastern rites (Byzantine, Maronite, Coptic, etc.) may be married before ordination, and then serve as married Catholic priests. So there are a number of married Catholic priests, especially in Eastern Catholic rites. We just don't see them very often in the West. Usually, only two or three Eastern Catholic priests (with their wives and children) can be found in large Western cities. Likewise, Rome has made exception to the celibacy mandate for Protestant clergy (Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, etc.) who covert to become Catholics and want to serve as Catholic priests. These married men may be ordained to the Catholic priesthood on a case-by-case basis. Currently, quite a number of them now serve in the Ordinariates of English Patrimony.

Again, it should be stressed that no man is a prisoner of the celibate priesthood. Any celibate priest can be relieved of his priestly duties, and be given special permission by the pope, to marry and start a family. I say this because some Evangelicals have misused Scripture to attack the Catholic Church's discipline on priestly celibacy. The Scripture in question reads as follows...

*But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men who speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; **forbidding marriage** and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

1 Timothy 4:1-3

This reference to “forbidding marriage” is misused as a reference to the celibacy mandate for priests in the Roman Rite (Latin Rite) of the Catholic Church. Such an interpretation is shallow and ignorant. The Catholic Church has not, and never will, forbid marriage. Anyone can be married in the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church even blesses matrimony as a sacrament. These Evangelicals are suggesting that the Catholic Church has banned one of its own sacraments! Any lay person can get married. A married man can become a deacon under the current code of canon law. A married man can become a priest in the Roman Rite (Latin Rite) by special permission. And a celibate priest can obtain special permission to leave the priesthood and become a married man, if he so desires. Marriage is by no means “forbidden” in the Catholic Church. However, this same verse is also misused to attack the Catholic discipline of abstaining from mammal meat during Lent. Once again, meat is not forbidden. Fish and non-mammal meat is permitted, along with eggs and milk products. This is only done during Lent as a spiritual discipline, and once again, there are exceptions. The word “forbidden” means “forbidden,” which means no exceptions. This Scripture reference is a passage that pertains to some future practice, toward the end of the world, wherein people will simply not be allowed to get married, and vegetarianism will be enforced. We don’t know if this will come in the form of some global cult, or as a result of secular legislation, but this in no way refers to spiritual disciplines in the Catholic Church, wherein nothing but sin is “forbidden.”

The controversy that surrounds us today is what Pope Francis might do following the Pan-Amazon Synod in Rome this coming October of 2019. Regardless of the findings of the synod, the pope usually waits some time before making any changes to canon law. It’s reasonable to assume he may wait until late winter to early summer of 2020 before doing anything, if he does anything at all. What seems to be on the table is the prospect of revoking the celibacy mandate from the current code of canon law.

If Pope Francis should decide to do this, it’s likely to be a very conservative revision. I suspect he will simply allow married men to apply to the priesthood, just as the Church currently allows the same for applicants to the permanent diaconate. I don’t think he will allow celibate priests to marry. Furthermore, I suspect he’s going to turn this over to local bishops conferences to decide if it will be allowed in their countries, and if that is in the affirmative, then it will be decided by each local bishop whether or not to allow it in his own diocese or jurisdiction. In other words, I don’t think Francis is just going to reverse the mandate. I think, instead, if he does anything, he’s just going to allow the matter to be decided at a more local level, as it was in the early centuries of the Church.

I think the primary candidates for married priests will not be young men with small children. I think it’s far more likely that the pope and bishops will prefer to ordain older married men, whose children are grown or near grown, and demonstrate the characteristics of godly people. It’s hard to discern such things when a man has a young wife with young children. It’s much easier to discern them when everyone is older. The word “elder” is translated from the Greek word *presbyteros* (πρεσβύτερος), which is where we get our word presbyter (the office of priests), often implying an older man.

I left you in Crete for this reason, that you would set in order the things that were lacking, and appoint elders [presbyters] in every city, as I directed you; if anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, who are not accused of loose or unruly behavior.

Titus 1:5-6

I don’t have a problem with married priests, but I’m no liberal or modernist either. I simply recognize that this is how the Western Catholic Church did things up until the 12th century, and the Eastern Catholic churches still do it this way today. Even the Western Catholic Church makes exceptions for ministers who convert from other Christian denominations. So if Pope Francis wants to open this up to various bishops conferences, and ultimately to various bishops, at their own discretion, then it’s no skin

off my back. I happen to already have a married priest, because I'm a member of the Ordinariate of English Patrimony, and he seems like a fine priest to me. So with the exception of special jurisdictions, like the ordinariates, the ordination of married men into the priesthood should always be the exception to the norm in the Roman Rite. That's because the preference for celibate priests has always been the norm in the Roman Rite, and there is no good reason why it should be any different. Jesus preferred it. St Paul preferred it. The Roman Rite of the Catholic Church can too.

Many traditional Catholics may object to this, and one of the common reasons given is this. If we allow married men to become priests, what next? Women priests? Blessings for homosexuality? It's understandable why many traditional Catholics think this way. It's not because these things have anything in common. They don't. Rather, it's because the liberals and modernists in the Church frequently lump these things together too, and they have a history of getting what they want through relentless incremental steps.

The truth, however, is the truth, and no modernist can change it. Married men in the priesthood have always been allowed in the Catholic Church, in one way or another, whereas women priests have never been allowed and homosexual acts are sin. We know what the modernists want. They want total deconstruction of the Catholic faith, and they're foolish enough to believe that if Rome simply allows what Jesus Christ and St Paul allowed, they can get the other things too. This is illogical and irrational thinking. Yet to modernists, logic and reason are rarely employed. Traditional Catholics shouldn't fall into the modernist trap. If they can get traditional Catholics to resist something that doesn't really defy tradition, like married priests for example, then they'll succeed in making traditionalists look like nothing more than snooty obstructionists. The wiser thing to do is accept the possibility of married priests, in the limited form that is consistent with the Roman Rite and the Biblical text. Then stand firm against those things that the Roman Rite has never allowed and the Bible calls sin. The latter has nothing in common with the former. Women priests have nothing to do with married priests, and none of this has anything to do with homosexual acts. We must point out the fallacy for what it is, a "slippery slope" fallacy. Many traditional Catholics use this fallacy to argue against allowing married priests. It doesn't work. It's better to accept the possibility of married priests, in a limited way, and reject the women priests and homosexual acts entirely. This is a much stronger position against the modernists, because it's based on history, tradition and scripture.

Other Catholics will object to married men in the priesthood based entirely on money. They say wives and children cost money, and we don't want to have to support a priest's family in our parishes, so we shouldn't have married priests.

Really?

They don't want married priests because of... what shall we call it... I don't know... Maybe... GREED.

Seriously, if a Catholic parish can't support a single Catholic family, especially one where the father is providing so much service to that parish, then one has to ask where the priorities of that parish are. What's more important to that parish? Is it the building? Or is it the property? Or is it all the carnivals it puts on every year? I don't know. My point is that Eastern Catholic parishes have done it for two millennia. While some ordinariate parishes in the West have been doing it for over 30 years. None of these parishes seem to be suffering or struggling for lack of funds, because the children needed braces, and the wife had to buy some extra groceries. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Priests with families often benefit from the generosity of their parishioners all the time. It certainly gives the parishioners more opportunities to be generous. I simply don't understand the "it's too expensive" objection, and I think it reflects poorly on those who make it.

The weakest argument against married priests is a fairly common one. It's the whole "sex is dirty" idea that some uncatechized Catholics take. They falsely believe there is something wrong with married sexual relations, and insist that even when the Church allows priests to be married, she still demands they remain celibate. This is categorically false. While some ancient documents may allude to this in some local areas, or at certain times in history, this is not the case in today's canon law, and hasn't been the case as long as anyone can remember. Marital sex is not dirty, and being celibate doesn't make you more holy. Celibacy is about freeing a person from marital responsibilities, so he/she can have more time to serve God. It doesn't turn one into an icon of purity. Children are celibate. That doesn't mean they're always little angels. The elderly are often celibate as well. That doesn't mean they're always saints.

The best possible argument to put forward against married priests is simply the claim that we don't need them. That may be true in some places. It certainly was true during the Middle Ages, when scores of men and women were willing to forsake marriage for the Kingdom of Heaven. God bless them! Truly, we are the barbarians living in the ruins of a superior civilization. Perhaps someday we'll get there again. For now, however, I think it's hit and miss, especially in the West. Certainly, we can find some dioceses that are producing a large number of vocations right now. These dioceses probably don't need married men in the priesthood. Still yet, other dioceses aren't doing so well in vocations. They might benefit from some married men for a while, at least until a larger number of unmarried men are willing to step up. At which time the local bishop can then say: "Okay, we don't need married men anymore, so there will no longer be a need to ordain them in this diocese." That's pretty much how the Church has always run throughout history, especially in the West. Use married priests only when you need them, then go back to celibate priests as soon as there are enough to fill all the assignments.

Please note that my opinions on this are strictly my own. They do not reflect the position of the ordinariate, of which I am a member, because the clergy of the ordinariate wish to stay out of this discussion. I've been told that in no uncertain terms.

It remains to be seen what Pope Francis will actually do following the Pan-Amazon Synod in Rome later this year. There is nothing we can do but wait and see. We should keep in mind, however, what the truth is about married priests in the Catholic Church. We already have them, we've had them for 2,000 years, and if the pope does anything at all, he will only expand what already exists.

We also need to understand that the homosexual lobby in Rome will do what they always do. They'll make a pitch for accepting homosexuality at the next synod. They never give up. The feminists will demonstrate for female priests outside the Vatican walls, probably topless while making lewd gestures. Again, how can we expect it to be otherwise? Modernists have got to be modernists. They just gotta do what they always do. And we just have to get comfortable with saying "no" to them, over and over again, while resisting every advance they attempt to make within the Church.

The good news is that Pope Francis does not approve of the LGBT message. He's spoken very forcefully against gender theory and transsexualism, and he's shown no indication of giving in to the homosexualist agenda. As for women priests; Pope Francis isn't even entertaining the idea. The best the feminists can hope for is more research on the topic of female deacons, which has not produced the desired result they craved. At best, the so-called female diaconate of ancient times was a lay position, similar to what many religious sisters do for the local parish today. So as much as the advocates for female priests and homosexuality might put themselves on parade at the Pan-Amazon Synod, I don't see Pope Francis making any extreme changes in this regard. If any changes are going to happen, it's most likely going to be a revocation of the celibacy mandate in canon law, turning the matter over to the national bishops conferences, and the local bishops. I just don't think he'll go any further than that. Maybe I'm wrong, but time will tell, and since there's nothing I can do but wait and see, that's what I'll

be doing. I think that's a reasonable approach. Yes, pray. Pray hard, actually, because we should. Yes, make your opinions known. Our bishops do occasionally read them. But beyond that, all we can do is wait and see.

[#Ecclesiology](#), [#History](#), [#In the News](#), [#Marriage](#), [#Sacraments](#)

Published by Shane Schaetzel

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35 Comments

1. [aiello01](#) says:[June 16, 2019 at 4:17 pm](#)

I think that the use of vows to enforce celibacy is a problem. They have become substitutes for the fruit of the Spirit temperance. Vows are not as effective, as we can see.

2. [russhaley](#) says:[June 17, 2019 at 12:02 am](#)

Once again, my father used to explain to me all the time that the church has always had married priests, but married priests usually wound up out in a little backwoods diocese where they wouldn't cause a stir and they cannot become Bishops. I am also a member of the Ordinariate and don't see any reason why married priests can't be an integral part of the western church where we are struggling to find good priests.

However, I don't think married priests are going to be the panacea that we are hoping for because you need to have practicing catholic men that WANT to become priests. Married or not, practicing catholic men below the age of sixty are few and far between now.

There are more of us men in the Ordinariate and the TLM communities that I see, but the pull of consumerism and free sexuality is still draining the pews [1]. I see this changing in the next ten years as the left ramps up the crazy and people start to realize the toll that licentiousness takes on the individual. I didn't come back to my faith because I was having a great time in the secular world; I came back because of the pain I caused myself and everyone around me. I think we Catholics need to get out of the church and start proselytizing again because many of the other christian denominations have shown their true nature and bent to modern whimsy (but you've already expounded on that haven't you Shane!). In my opinion, that's what it's going to take to get the vocations going back up.

[1] Interestingly I went to a United Church service a few weeks back and I was literally the only adult male below the age of sixty. A few women had brought their elementary school age kids, maybe 4 or 5? But not one father with children was there (other than me).

1. [Pat H](#) says:[July 3, 2019 at 7:12 am](#)

“Married or not, practicing catholic men below the age of sixty are few and far between now.”

Not where I am in the Rocky Mountain West. And to add to that, practicing Catholics below age 30 are not only numerous, but highly conservative, traditional, and knowledgeable about their faiths in ways that the Baby Boomer generation never was nor will be. Indeed, what I tend to see if Boomers irritating Catholics in their teens, twenties and thirties by attempting to make parishes suitable by youth by which they mean their own views from when they were that age.

And, fwiw, I was in a Byzantine Catholic parish a couple of weeks ago and it was absolutely packed with young people, right down to infants. They were the majority by far at that Sunday Divine Liturgy.

3. **Dennis Hickey** says:[June 18, 2019 at 12:15 pm](#)

Hi Shane, I believe that now is the time to integrate married men into the priesthood for two reasons:

1. An acute shortage of straight men willing to take up the cross. Also, those priests leaving the priesthood must be replaced. One shocker was Fr Jonathon Morris, Fox news contributor and priest for 20+ years leaves the priesthood, doesn't give any particular reason and has no plans for his future employment. WTH ?

2. The priesthood unfortunately has become a hideout for homosexuals and pederastics. Today's young men see a celibate life as a non-starter for them given what the msm has presented as the good and worldly life he will give up in return for a perhaps lonely life as a priest.

So I believe older, married men who have a calling to serve the Church as a priest should be given the chance.

4. **ken** says:[June 20, 2019 at 9:59 am](#)

Are protestant groups thriving with married clergy?

1.  **Shane Schaezel** says:[June 20, 2019 at 10:11 am](#)

They always have, and as of late, the Evangelicals are thriving beyond measure. That being said, this is still not the ideal. Our Lord and St. Paul explicitly stated that celibacy is preferred, though married clergy are permitted as a concession.

5. **ken** says:[June 20, 2019 at 10:47 am](#)

I don't think we should move to married clergy. My point about the protestants is that if we look at them having married clergy hasn't aided to their vitality; just as it hasn't limited their own sexual abuse scandals. With the decline of mainline protestants I'm willing to bet their vocations are shrinking. As for evangelicals, I have a hard time viewing their leaders as clergy.

6. **aiello01** says:[June 21, 2019 at 5:24 am](#)

If there is a shortage of vocations, then add those who are the husbands of one wife (Titus 1:5-6).

7. **Pat H** says:[July 3, 2019 at 7:29 am](#)

I'm a cradle and very conservative Catholic, and I'm 100% for opening the Priesthood up to married men for a variety of reasons.

I'll leave most of those out, but the main reason I'd do it is because times do change and the original reason for the rule on celibate priests, avoiding an inherited class of priests from the nobility, has passed. And what has also passed is an era in which economics meant that the priesthood was attractive to average, but serious, Catholic men, as the costs and burdens of marriage were so high. Now society is so much wealthier that the type of devotion to the well being of a family that was routine up into the late 1940s is not there to the same degree and those same men will tend to marry.

As that's occurred, the priesthood has frankly become less manly. And that's a problem. If you want to attract and retain average men to the church, you have to have men that average men can relate to. In recent years in my parish that's tended to be African priests rather than the native born, and they're a minority. The native born have been often quite holy and dedicated, but nearly impossible for an average man to relate to. Married priests would be bring in a different culture.

1. **Fr Khouri** says:[July 5, 2019 at 10:59 am](#)

Great article, full of balanced truth and well written.

Thank you, Shane! Bless you for your love of the Church

8. **Steve B.** says:[July 5, 2019 at 10:44 am](#)

Celibate priesthood needs to be maintained. Bad enough archdioceses are going bankrupt because of homosexual clergy – are you going to give even more to support a priest and his family? There is no guarantee that married clergy is going to better the church, we already see this in the orthodox church where their clergy can marry.

9. **Fr Khouri** says:[July 5, 2019 at 10:57 am](#)

Steve, it's not about money!

This argument, as Shane says, is reduced to greed. What we don't need is big, old unused churches. Sell them for money to help married priests. Ordain retired married men in the Diaconate who have sufficient income to serve as priests, who would not be a drain on a parish. Are the Sacraments and the ministry of a priest worth the sacrifice of giving more to a parish to sustain a married priest?

You're argument is superficial.

And by the way the Orthodox in the central and western part of the USA are thriving. Some priestly families might struggle financially but the many I know serve with joy and their wives with them.

10. **Donald Link** says:[July 5, 2019 at 1:04 pm](#)

A few minor points. Well written though a bit longer than necessary to get to the essential point. We are actually concerned about re-establishing a married priesthood but more attuned to the present time. As noted but possibly not fully understood, this would not in any way diminish the value of a celibate clergy. There needs to be more understanding that the priesthood, in addition to being a calling, is also a profession and should be treated as such. This would mean a revamping of salary scales and benefits. This is one area we can learn from the experiences of the protestants. Finally, in trying fudge the issue as proposed in the Amazonia agenda, with all sorts of conditions, qualifiers and other factors, simplicity in whatever decision is finally made should be the goal.

11. **C-Marie** says:[July 5, 2019 at 3:57 pm](#)

Regarding this sentence from your writing: "Before I begin this essay, allow me to give full disclosure. First, I am not a priest. Second, I am married. Third, I don't want to be a priest — ever. Fourth, I will probably never be a priest and that's just fine with me", perhaps you do not have a vocation to be a priest, and that would be why you don't want to be a priest?? Or maybe the call from God to His priesthood, to you is buried under your enjoyment of freedom?? Or maybe He has not called you.

Anyway, There is a total, complete neglect in your writing concerning that God Himself chose a married man to be His first priest and to be the first Pope. Also, James and others were married as noted by Paul.

Plus, by having married priests, not all necessarily of course, God our Father created a place for women's influence as led of by God's Spirit in the things of His Church.

And, How much understanding of marriage did Paul have, that he made the blanket statement that husbands and wives were more busy about themselves and the world than having a full life with God. How little he knew of marriage.

God bless, C-Marie

1. R.C. says: [July 6, 2019 at 6:29 pm](#)

C-Marie,

You say, "God Himself chose a married man to be His first priest and to be the first Pope."

Be careful, please: God Himself chose a *widower* to be the first pope. Notice that it was Peter's *mother-in-law* who was living in his house and who, as soon as she was healed of sickness, immediately hopped up and started serving lasagna and breadsticks (or the Judean equivalent) to all the visitors. Unless she, too, was ill, this would normally have been the role of Peter's *wife*, who is not mentioned. I think we can assume (with all the fathers and doctors of the Church) that she was *deceased*, not laying unnoticed and unhealed in a corner.

Let's also remember that the only priests these Jewish apostles had yet encountered were those of the Aaronic priesthood, who were married, but who always abstained from normal conjugal relations for a time, whenever they were serving at the altar. It would be natural for the apostles to assume that they must follow the same practice.

Now this is difficult, especially for younger men. And of course caring for children and one's spouse properly requires a lot of attention.

Consequently Paul says that it is better to remain unmarried, and those apostles who couldn't cook worth a darn seem to have been accompanied by a "sister" (i.e., a woman, probably a widow, who could attend to their household needs). The earliest traditions of the Church do *not* interpret this "sister" as having been an actual wife. In fact, traditions of both East and West from the earliest days required that any married priest must renounce conjugal relations with his wife permanently in order to become a bishop, and for that reason the permission of the wife was a requirement for ordination!

Anyway, that's the ancient Christian norm.

When you say, "And, How much understanding of marriage did Paul have[?]" implying that he had very little, I feel myself wincing: We can presume he had less understanding than a widower like Peter, but no-one can hear confessions for very long without getting a pretty good understanding of human nature.

When you add, "[Paul] made the blanket statement that husbands and wives were more busy about themselves and the world than having a full life with God," I think you're being unfair to Paul. The passage in question is 1 Corinthians 7:32-35:

"32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious

about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”

Now Paul is not making a *blanket statement* (in the sense of asserting that the description applies to the same degree to all married couples in all places in times); he is making a *generalization*. He’s saying that, in varying degrees, this kind of thing happens more often than not.

He’s saying that it’s a bit tougher on the married priest with a sick child to know whether he should be home with his sick child or visiting hospital beds with dying parishoners all night. The unmarried priest has no such divided duty. Paul’s saying that an unmarried priest doesn’t cause hardship to his (non-existent) homeschooling wife by travelling around the country for six weeks preaching parish missions...but the married priest with six kids had better not do that kind of thing! Surely that’s reasonable?

I’m just trying to reply in a friendly way, C-Marie, and heaven knows I don’t want to sound like I’m scolding or lecturing or anything. (If it does sound that way, please forgive me and chalk it up to the difficulty of conveying tone-of-voice in writing.)

Anyway, it seems imprudent to treat a *passage in Holy Scripture* as being prompted by *rank ignorance* rather than, say, a mix of human prudential reasoning and *divine inspiration*. The latter interpretation seems to accord better with how the Church treats the Bible. So, I felt I should comment in reply.

1. **C-Marie** says:[July 6, 2019 at 7:53 pm](#)

I highly recommend that you read the following:

“Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?”

1 Corinthians 9: 5.

God bless, C-Marie

2. **aiello01** says:[July 6, 2019 at 9:24 pm](#)

I think that it would simplify things if the Church went back to the New Testament instructions for bishops, deacons, and elders or presbyters that they be the husbands of one wife. See 1Timothy 3:2,12 and Titus 1:5-6. This would end a lot of needless speculation.

3. **C-Marie** says:[July 6, 2019 at 10:35 pm](#)

Well said!!! Plus, the Greek word in 1 Corinthians 9:5 and elsewhere, can be translated woman or wife, usually woman, and the word woman can mean woman, wife, spouse in hebraic usage....Jesus called His mother, woman, twice that we are told of...once at the wedding at Cana and once from His Cross when committing her to John’s care....John’s mom was also at the Cross...but that is not usually mentioned....also Hebrews often used the word woman to mean wife, woman, spouse....see Jesus talking about lusting after a woman.....or see Song of Solomon....etc.

But yours is also simplest, that married priests were chosen at the beginning of the Church.....and no reason to assume that St. Peter was a widower.....

God bless, C-Marie

4. **R.C. says:**[July 7, 2019 at 12:42 pm](#)

C-Marie:

In reply to my last, you say, “I highly recommend that you read the following...,” and cite 1 Corinthians 9:5.

Actually, I had read it, and had already paraphrased it in my last note to you! It was with that verse in mind that I wrote my prior note.

Here’s your translation: “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” – 1 Corinthians 9: 5

This is an English translation, and based upon a misleading premise.

The term in Greek is not “believing wife”; it is “sister wife.”

Now it’s easy to see why a 21st century American might assume that “sister” meant “sister-in-Christ” and thus was to be understood as synonymous with “believing.”

But that’s an anachronistic reading. The earliest Christian testimony about bishops describes them as, if married, giving up normal conjugal relations when they became bishops. They agreed to live in a Josephite state — i.e., as “brother and sister” — after consecration. And they claimed this was an apostolic tradition.

Following this understanding, most early commentators have taken “sister wife” either to mean:

(a.) a woman to whom one is validly married with whom one previously had normal conjugal relations, but with whom one now relates in a brother-sister kind of way, for the sake of the kingdom; or,

(b.) a woman to whom one is not married, probably a widow so as to avoid scandal, who is a “sister in Christ,” and who cares for one’s meals and housekeeping details.

Protestant-influenced translations usually shy away from this view, for the usual reasons: (a.) they try to avoid giving interpretative weight to the Church Fathers when those same Church Fathers were so obviously *Catholic* in their other views of Scripture; and (b.) Protestant church pastors see themselves as the modern equivalent of bishops, and have no desire to renounce normal marital relations for the sake of the Kingdom.

Anyway, I’m sorry that I didn’t make it clearer that I was referencing 1 Corinthians 9:5 when using the term “sister” in my prior post.

5. **Fr Khouri says:**[July 7, 2019 at 4:15 pm](#)

It seems according to St. Cyril of Alexandria, that St. Peter did not dump his wife to follow the Lord.

“When the blessed Peter saw his own wife led out to die, he rejoiced because of her summons and her return home, and called to her very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, and saying, ‘Remember the Lord.’ Such was the marriage of the blessed, and their perfect disposition toward those dearest to them.” (Full text at Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII, 11.)

What about St Gregory the Elder? Father of Gregory Nazianzen

He was converted by the influence of his wife, Nonna; and soon after his conversion was consecrated to the bishopric of Nazianzus [p.187, Prolegomena, Sect. 1, Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7]

Note that, There are two lines in his poem of St Gregory Nazianzen on his own life which seem to indicate clearly that his birth took place after his father's elevation to the Episcopate... [p.188, Prolegomena, Sect. 1, Vol 7].

St. Basil left and returned to Cappadocia; and as soon as he could follow he went to Constantinople, where he met his brother, who had just come there to practice and return with his brother to Nazianzus.

They found their parents still living and their father occupying the Episcopal Throne. [p.191, Prolegomena, Sect. 1, Vol. 7].

St John Chrysostom teaches, 'A Bishop then,' he says, 'must be blameless the husband of one wife.' This he does not lay down as a rule, as if he must not be without one, but as prohibiting his having more than one. [p.438, First Series, Vol. 13, St John Chrysostom, Homily X, Homilies on Timothy]

According to what is said in Sacred Scripture there is nothing banning married clergy from relations with their spouses...if there is please provide the citation.

"Sexual fasting" before offering the Sacrifice became common, it is still practiced by some Orthodox priests today with permission of his wife. This is not because of the view of some of the Western writers that sex makes one "unclean" but that the priest may properly prepare himself to offer the Sacrifice with no distractions.

6. **aiello01** says:[July 7, 2019 at 4:45 pm](#)

The vow of celibacy may be the thing that is unscriptural.

7. **C-Marie** says:[July 7, 2019 at 4:58 pm](#)

Thank you, Father Khouri! This information is so very much appreciated along with the scripture verses given in an earlier reply.

12. **Sheila Conrads** says:[July 6, 2019 at 2:58 pm](#)

I am the ex-wife of an Episcopal priest – he left me for his secretary – this happened long ago – but I am for celibacy – a good priest is seldom available for time with the family – I basically raised our children by myself most of the time.

1. **russhaley** says:[July 6, 2019 at 4:16 pm](#)

@Shiela, I think this is the best argument for celibate priests. Thanks for your honesty. I could never be totally dedicated to my family if I was trying to 'raise a church' too.

2. **C-Marie** says:[July 7, 2019 at 5:01 pm](#)

I am sorry for your tremendous difficulties, and I am so glad that God saw you and is seeing you through. God bless, C-Marie

1. **Fr Khouri** says:[July 8, 2019 at 12:55 pm](#)

Shelia,

I am sorry to hear that your husband was an unfaithful man.

However, I believe that there are married priests with wives who both live and believe that the priesthood and being the wife of a priest are valid and sustainable vocations as is witnessed most times on Orthodoxy.

Clerical couples struggle with unique issues but love, faith and the bond and grace of the Sacrament of Marriage have seen them through.

Given what you experienced your ex did not view his Episcopal ministry in this way and marriage can never be one sided.

May God help you through the betrayal you experienced...I cannot imagine what it must have been and is like.

13. **R.C. says:**[July 6, 2019 at 6:00 pm](#)

Actually, there's earlier precedent than the New Testament examples you give!

Please remember that the *Aaronic* priesthood were required to be *sexually continent* whenever they were serving their weeks in the temple. There was a special precinct around the Temple where they'd live during that period. After they finished their time of priestly duties, they could return to their families *and resume normal conjugal relations*.

It seems to me that the following would be a salutary way to handle the married priesthood:

1. A married priest may perform all the normal priestly duties of a parochial vicar, but may not preside at Mass or participate in consecrating the Eucharist unless he is temporarily abstaining from normal conjugal relations with his spouse. A married priest who is not abstaining is limited at Mass to the same duties and roles as a deacon. Outside the sanctuary, he has all the usual faculties of a priest to hear confessions, etc.
2. A married priest who wishes to participate at Mass in a fully-priestly way (consecration, presiding) must cease from conjugal relations three days prior to the first Mass at which he so participates, consecrating himself to a state of continence, identifying with the example of Christ.
3. This state of continence will become public knowledge as soon as the married priest publicly presides at Mass, so the state of the married priest during entire period of continence (including the three preparatory days) is hereafter referred to as a "state of continence," but the period after the priest first consecrates/presides is hereafter referred to as a "state of public continence."
4. A married priest in a state of public continence may participate at many Masses, according to the needs of the Church, continues to abstain and does not make himself ineligible for any other reason.
5. For the good of the marital bond, periods of abstention must be for a limited time. Consequently, no married priest shall exercise his full priestly ministry for more than twelve consecutive days, after which, his state of public continence shall conclude.
6. No married priest shall re-enter a state of public continence until a full month has elapsed since the end of his previous state of public continence.
7. No married priest shall enter a state of public continence more than seven times in any calendar year.

8. All the above uses of the term “married priest” refer to a Catholic man who is validly married to a Catholic woman and is a validly-ordained Catholic priest, who lives with his wife with recourse to normal conjugal relations. Special circumstances wherein the priest is away from his wife for many days (e.g. serving as a military chaplain on board ship), or wherein normal conjugal relations are impossible or inadvisable due to infirmity, may, at the discretion of the ordinary, allow the married priest to remain in a public state of continence for longer periods, and therein continue to exercise his full priestly ministry.

That should do it.

Of course the difficulty for the married priest is that he goes home to his wife at the end of the day, and as his twelve consecutive days wind on, she starts looking prettier and prettier.

I think that could be handled by arranging for a place to crash at the rectory when needed. But I don't think I want to add a rule that the married priest has to *live* or *sleep* at the rectory during his time of service. That would just make life that much harder on the wife, to be without her husband's help.

14. **Donald Link** says: [July 7, 2019 at 7:32 pm](#)

It would seem a number of writers want to get deep into the weeds on the issue. The issue however is quite simple: should there be a wider ordination of married men in the Latin rite? Once that answer is determined, hopefully on the basis of need, then procedures for suitability and choices can be examined. The Church has never stood still but on the other hand it does seem that it does take a considerable effort to make needed changes at times.

15. **C-Marie** says: [July 7, 2019 at 11:28 pm](#)

Thank you! There are true facts and there is information that is at times used as facts when the actual might not be apparent or known or?

With the facts of Scripture, we know there were married Apostles, disciples, Bishops, and more. Perhaps instead of continuing on with the Holy Spirit discernment given to the Church at the beginning, man's wisdom took over somewhat when all appeared easier to handle things with unmarried men.

I have yet to read where it was declared with Holy Spirit authority that God our Father revealed that He desired a change to His set-up of His church with married and unmarried men, to only unmarried men.

The Scripture cited, of Jesus teaching His Apostles concerning divorce, can also be read that only those to whom it has been given to follow the law of staying with one's wife, can accept Christ's teaching in which He includes Genesis.....especially with the fact that some listening exclaimed that it would be better to not be married than to have to live what Jesus had just said, to stay with one's wife.

16. **waterandthespiritapologetics** says: [July 8, 2019 at 2:29 am](#)

1 Cor 7:32 “I should like you to have your minds free from all worry. The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs and to how he can please the Lord;
33 but the man who is married gives his mind to the affairs of this world and to how he can please his wife, and he is divided in mind.”

That seems pretty clear to me.

Jesus spells this out in Matt 19:11-12 “ But he replied, ‘It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted.

12 There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

Let anyone accept this who can. Obviously not everyone is called to do this. A few verses later Jesus says: "26 Jesus gazed at them. 'By human resources', he told them, 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.'"

The thing that matters is not what we think, what would solve our problems in human terms, but what God wills. If we do this will of his, he will do the rest.

1.  **Shane Schaetzel** says:[July 8, 2019 at 9:08 am](#)

God's will is pretty clear, if we use the Scriptures as our guide. Celibate clergy are always preferred, but married clergy are allowed as a concession.

17. **C-Marie** says:[July 8, 2019 at 4:01 pm](#)

If Scripture is followed, the clarity is that Scripture not only fully supports married priests, but that God our Father set up His Church with married and unmarried Apostles.

True, Paul preferred, and here he was writing to men who were yet virgins, unmarried, to remain unmarried, but his reasoning was due to "...the present distress..." :

" I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is." 1 Corinthians 7: 26.

So the present distress that he was most probably writing about, was the persecution and martyrdom that the followers of Christ Jesus were suffering, and undertaking a marriage during that time could be seen as fraught with difficulties, especially if the husband or wife was not a fully committed Christian spouse and so did not understand the difficulties the Christian was undergoing.

But also, Paul leaves out writing about the call of God to those to whom He was giving the vocation of marriage. Why he does not write of that? Do we know? Or is he saying that God is not giving that vocation at that time??

Paul seems to base marriage only on physical attraction instead of the wholeness of life that a marriage in Christ is. We have a few thousand years or so to look back upon, to peruse, to examine if one will, the Christian marriages throughout so much time, and we can see the fullness of life in Christ which is the fruit of marriage for committed Christians.

So, if we grant that he was writing of the distress, persecutions, martyrdoms, of that time, which is reasonable to think, then the unmarried state would appear reasonable to him, also perhaps, because there would be no children to have worries about regarding them being martyred or with just keeping the children safe. Paul does not mention at all the beautiful fruit of marriage in this way, the children.

If we, God's people, live God's call on our lives, we will have both married and unmarried people, fulfilling God's vocation for their own selves. All would even out as God would have it be. And, granted, the economy of finances and more in the Catholic Church would be rather chaotic for a time, as all was worked out as God our Father would have it be.

And one other thing which is rarely mentioned. Jesus was/is fully human and fully divine. He is the Word of God made flesh, the only begotten Son of God, Who in John's gospel, created all things and without Him nothing was made. And so, He would not have married those whom He created.

Perhaps I am not quite using the just right theological way of explaining....but I believe the sense of what I just wrote can be understood.

And so to the Gift of Celibacy, which means, unmarried and does not mean virginal, to the Catholic Church, there is no Scripture supporting this.. Rather, there was an abundance of married priests and Bishops, especially due to the honors given to marriage within Judaism, so that the new Jewish Christians were probably, very nearly, all married.

God bless, C-Marie

1. [waterandthespiritapologetics](#) says: [July 9, 2019 at 6:23 am](#)

I repeat: 1 Cor 7:32 "I should like you to have your minds free from all worry. The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs and to how he can please the Lord; 33 but the man who is married gives his mind to the affairs of this world and to how he can please his wife, and he is divided in mind."

That seems pretty clear to me.

1. [C-Marie](#) says: [July 9, 2019 at 8:56 pm](#)

Taking bits of Scripture to fit one's mindset, can be, and often is, done. Paul clearly said "I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is." 1 Corinthians 7: 26. Which meant, if married, stay married; but if unmarried, stay in that state...." ...in view of the present distress."

And, Paul's summation of the state of married peoples' lives in Christ, shows little experience by him with them, or else the ones he knew, were perhaps not so fervent in their life with Christ. Priscilla and Aquila are excellent examples of living for Jesus.

So, that is it. One might do well to read or to re-read all of the responses and scriptures....

God bless, C-Marie

2. [waterandthespiritapologetics](#) says: [July 14, 2019 at 3:34 am](#)

You said it.

Comments are closed.