

Controversy in Christendom: Celibacy and Reverend Fatherhood in Catholic Church

O. O. E. BALOGUN, I. K. OJELABI

Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria

Abstract. This question refers to Jesus's teaching found in the Gospel of St. Matthew, when He said, "Do not call anyone on earth your father. Only one is your Father, the One in heaven" (Mt 23:9). Taken literally, we would have to wonder why we do use this title "Father" when Jesus seems to forbid it. First, we must remember the context of the passage. Jesus is addressing the hypocrisy of the Scribes and the Pharisees the learned religious leaders of Judaism. Our Lord castigates them for not providing a good example; for creating onerous spiritual burdens for others with their various rules and regulations; for being haughty in exercising their office, and for promoting themselves by looking for places of honor, seeking marks of respect and wearing ostentatious symbols. Basically, the Scribes and the Pharisees had forgotten that they were called to serve the Lord and those entrusted to their care with humility and a generous spirit. Given that context, Jesus says not to call anyone on earth by the title "Rabbi," "Father," or "teacher," in the sense of arrogating to oneself an authority which rests with God and of forgetting the responsibility of the title. As Jesus said, only the heavenly Father is the true Father, and only the Messiah is the true teacher and rabbi. In a similar vein, Jesus said, "Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Mt 10:37).

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1. Introduction

Celibacy is typically used to refer to a voluntary decision to remain unmarried or to abstain from engaging in any sexual activity, usually for religious reasons. While the term celibacy is typically used in reference only to persons who choose to remain unmarried as a condition of sacred religious vows or convictions, it can also apply to the voluntary

abstinence from all sexual activity for any reason. While they are often used interchangeably, celibacy, abstinence, and chastity are not exactly the same. The concept of celibacy as a decision to remain unmarried applies to both traditional and same-sex marriage. Similarly, the lifestyle restrictions implied by the terms abstinence and chastity refer to both heterosexual and gay sexual activity. In the context of celibacy related to religion, some gay people choose to be celibate in keeping with their religion's teachings or doctrine on gay relationships.

In the context of religion, celibacy is practiced in different ways. Most familiar of these is the mandatory celibacy of male and female members of the active clergy and monastic devotees. While most female religious celibates today are Catholic nuns living in residential cloisters, there have been notable solitary celibate female figures, such the anchoress — a female hermit — Dame Julian of Norwich, born in 1342. In addition, religious celibacy is sometimes practiced by laypersons or clergy members in a faith not requiring it out of devotion or to allow them to perform certain religious services.

Matt. 23:9 – Jesus says, "call no man father." But Protestants use this verse in an attempt to prove that it is wrong for Catholics to call priests "father." This is an example of "eisegesis" (imposing one's views upon a passage) as opposed to "exegesis" (drawing out the meaning of the passage from its context). In this verse, Jesus was discouraging His followers from elevating the scribes and Pharisees to the titles of "fathers" and "rabbis" because they were hypocrites. Jesus warns us not to elevate anyone to the level of our heavenly Father. Matt. 23:8 – in this teaching, Jesus also says not to call anyone teacher or rabbi as well. But don't Protestants call their teachers "teacher?" What about this commandment of Jesus? When Protestants say "call no man father," they must also argue that we cannot call any man teacher either.

Since the earliest times of our Church, we have used the title "Father" for religious leaders. Bishops, who are the shepherds of the local Church community and the authentic teachers of the faith, were given the title "Father." Consequently, St. Peter may well have been addressed as "Father Peter," in that sense of spiritual father. The likelihood of this address is supported by St. Paul who identifies himself as a spiritual father. In writing to the Corinthians, he said, "I am writing you in this way not to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children. Granted you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you have only one father. It was I who begot you in Christ Jesus through my preaching of the Gospel. I beg you, then, be imitators of me. This is why I have sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful son in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:14-17).

Moreover, our Lord Himself used the title "father" for several characters in His parables: in of the parable of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, the rich man, cries out from the depths of Hell, "Father Abraham, have pity on me," and the usage of the title "father" occurs three times (cf. Lk 16:19-31). One has to wonder: if Jesus prohibited the use of the title "father," why does He instruct the people with a parable in which the characters use the title? To do so seems to be contradictory and actually misleading to the audience. The same is true in the parable of the Prodigal Son: The young prodigal son, upon his return, says, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you" (cf. Lk 15:11-32). Given the way our Lord used the title "father" in so many teachings, including when repeating the fourth commandment, our Lord did not intend to prohibit calling a father by the title "father"; rather, He prohibited misusing the title.

We do use these titles in our common parlance: We call those who instruct us and others "teacher"; our male parent, "father"; and Jewish religious leaders, "rabbi." Especially in a religious sense, those who serve the Lord and represent His authority, as a teacher, parent and especially a priest, must be mindful of exercising it diligently, humbly and courageously. To use this authority for self-aggrandizement is pure hypocrisy. Jesus said at the end of this passage, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, but whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

2. Celibacy

The single state, so understood, involves the obligation inherent in baptism and confirmation and the practice of celibacy. Though, a private vow of chastity is sometimes taken, this is not essential to the

state. Being "Single" or "Unmarried" is in itself a neutral circumstance and becomes commendable only when the freedom and opportunity that it assures are deserted to the realization of the Christian ideals. It is not simply making oneself a Eunuch (Mat. 19:12) or being without a wife (1 Cor. 7:12), but doing these for the kingdom of heaven, or an order to be concern about the things that belong to God that is commended, the essence of the single state as a Christian way of life consists therefore in a special dedication to the Christian ideal, moral, ethical etc. From the religious point of view, the basic hazard to the single state is the freedom from important Christian responsibilities. Those who seriously undertake it as a permanent condition compensate for it by a dedicated involvement in either the life of prayers or some apostolic activity. There in the example of Dr. Anthony Mary who was a medical doctor before he was later canonized a saint by the Church after his death. While he was still young, he had grown to love St. Paul greatly, has often read his life in the Acts of the Apostles and had meditated at length on his virtues.

During his first four years as a doctor, this saint used all his spare moments after his prayers to read and meditate on the letters of St. Paul. Hence, in meditation of the Apostles, he began to preach in the public squares and at religious meetings. He gathered children and instructed prisoners, the poor and pilgrims. He did nothing but repeated the words and phrases of the Apostle, explaining them with warmth and simplicity. As a result he kindled within himself a great desire for his own sanctification and for the salvation of others. Of course, he later became a priest. He founded an order of priests that the named Pauline. Today, however, they are better known as "Barnabites" since each of them consider himself another Barnabas in his study and love of St. Paul. With the help of the Countess, Ponelli, he also founded a monastery of nuns called "Apostolics". He named their convent "St. Paul the Apostle." After his death the name was changed to "St. Paul the Convert."

In modern life there is ample leisure and frequently surplus of funds to make this realizable. The single person more frequently can afford to take financial risks and follow institutions without having to obtain the consent of a superior; he can run the risk of making mistakes without comprising his order. The financially independent celibate can afford his services to the missions as teacher, social worker, physician or nurse. If he has the necessary funds, he can fund student centers or houses of study or engage in charitable works. With the approval of

ecclesiastical authority, if theologically trained, this can engage in ecumenical endeavors of any informal nature. His testimony would be more effective because he would not be suspected of acting under the orders of a religious superior.

In a normal vigorous person living the single life in a dedicated way, celibacy is a major consideration. Such people do not have the safeguards that are built into the circumstances of the religious, clerical or married lives. In conjunction with their choice of some special form of Christian dedication they might well look upon sex in their lives not as an unused faculty but as an opportunity for positive sacrifice. In itself, sex is of great human value - when used in accordance with the will of God. Its deliberate unfulfillment can be a sacrifice to God just as truly as the dedicated virginity of religious. This not only has the advantage of making this aspect of life spiritually fruitful but also proves helpful in keeping the one who lives the single state from becoming completely self-centered. The opportunities for the exercise of spiritual fatherhood and motherhood in befriending and helping others are as numerous as one's sympathies can encompass. For most people the matter of eating and sleeping and the business of making a living establish a certain amount of regiment in life. However, many find it beneficial to work out a more rigorous regime of their own or adopt a rule of life which is common, for example to members of third orders or the opiates, so that they do not become unreasonably indisciplined in life.

3. History of Religiously - Motivated Celibacy

Derived from the Latin word *caelibatus*, meaning "state of being unmarried," the concept of celibacy has been acknowledged by most major religions throughout history. However, not all religions have acknowledged it favorably.

Ancient Judaism strongly rejected celibacy. Similarly, early Roman polytheistic religions, practiced between about 295 B.C.E. and 608 C.E., held it to be an aberrant behavior and imposed severe fines against it. The emergence of Protestantism around 1517 CE saw a rise in the acceptance of celibacy, although the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church never adopted it. The attitudes of the Islamic religions regarding celibacy have also been mixed. While the Prophet Muhammad denounced celibacy and recommended marriage as a commendable deed, some Islamic sects embrace it today. In Buddhism, most ordained monks and nuns choose to live in

celibacy believing it to be one of the prerequisites to reaching enlightenment.

While most people associate religious celibacy with Catholicism, the Catholic Church actually imposed no requirement of celibacy on its clergy for the first 1,000 years of its history. Marriage remained a matter of choice for Catholic bishops, priests, and deacons until the Second Lateran Council of 1139 mandated celibacy for all members of the clergy. As a result of the Council's decree, married priests were required to give up either their marriage or their priesthood. Faced with this choice, many priests left the church.

While celibacy remains a requirement for Catholic clergy today, an estimated 20% of Catholic priests worldwide are believed to be legally married. Most married priests are found in the Catholic Churches of Eastern nations like the Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. While these churches recognize the authority of the Pope and the Vatican, their rituals and traditions more closely follow those of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which had never embraced celibacy.

4. Reasons for Religious Celibacy

How do religions justify mandatory celibacy? No matter what they are called in a given religion, the "priest" is exclusively trusted to perform the sacred function of communicating the needs of the people to God or other heavenly power. The efficacy of the priesthood is based on the congregation's trust that the priest is properly qualified and possesses the ritual purity necessary to speak to God on their behalf. Religions that require it of their clergy consider celibacy to be a prerequisite for such ritual purity. In this context, religious celibacy is likely to have been derived from ancient taboos that viewed sexual power as vying with religious power, and the sex act itself as having a polluting effect on priestly purity.

For many people who do so, choosing a celibate lifestyle has little or nothing to do with an organized religion. Some may feel that eliminating the demands of sexual relationships allows them to better focus on other important aspects of their lives, like career advancement or education. Others may have found their past sexual relationships to have been particularly unfulfilling, damaging, or even painful. Still others choose to abstain from sex out of their unique personal beliefs of what is "proper behavior." For example, some people may choose to adhere to the morality-based tradition of abstaining from sex outside of marriage.

Beyond personal beliefs, other celibates consider abstinence from sex to be the only absolute method of avoiding sexually-transmitted diseases or unplanned pregnancies. Outside of religious vows and obligations, celibacy or abstinence is a matter of personal choice. While some may consider a celibate lifestyle extreme, others may consider it liberating or empowering.

5. Celibacy is Church Practice, Not Dogma

Matt. 19:11-12 – Jesus says celibacy is a gift from God and whoever can bear it should bear it. Jesus praises and recommends celibacy for full-time ministers in the Church. Because celibacy is a gift from God, those who criticize the Church's practice of celibacy are criticizing God and this wonderful gift He bestows on His chosen ones. Matt. 19:29 – Jesus says that whoever gives up children for the sake of His name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life. Jesus praises celibacy when it is done for the sake of His kingdom.

Matt. 22:30 – Jesus explains that in heaven there are no marriages. To bring about Jesus' kingdom on earth, priests live the heavenly consecration to God by not taking a wife in marriage. This way, priests are able to focus exclusively on the spiritual family, and not have any additional pressures of the biological family (which is for the vocation of marriage). This also makes it easier for priests to be transferred to different parishes where they are most needed without having to worry about the impact of their transfer on wife and children. 1 Cor 7:1 – Paul teaches that it is well for a man not to touch a woman. This is the choice that the Catholic priests of the Roman rite freely make.

1 Cor. 7:7 – Paul also acknowledges that celibacy is a gift from God and wishes that all were celibate like he is. 1 Cor. 7:27 – Paul teaches men that they should not seek marriage. In Paul's opinion, marriage introduces worldly temptations that can interfere with one's relationship with God, specifically regarding those who will become full-time ministers in the Church. 1 Cor. 7:32-33, 38 – Paul recommends celibacy for full-time ministers in the Church so that they are able to focus entirely upon God and building up His kingdom. He "who refrains from marriage will do better."

1 Tim. 3:2 – Paul instructs that bishops must be married only once. Many Protestants use this verse to prove that the Church's celibacy law is in error. But they are mistaken because this verse refers to bishops that were widowers. Paul is instructing that these widowers could not remarry. The verse also refers to

those bishops who were currently married. They also could not remarry (in the Catholic Church's Eastern rite, priests are allowed to marry; celibacy is only a disciplinary rule for the clergy of the Roman rite). Therefore, this text has nothing to do with imposing a marriage requirement on becoming a bishop.

1 Tim. 4:3 – in this verse, Paul refers to deceitful doctrines that forbid marriage. Many non-Catholics also use this verse to impugn the Church's practice of celibacy. This is entirely misguided because the Catholic Church (unlike many Protestant churches) exalts marriage to a sacrament. In fact, marriage is elevated to a sacrament, but consecrated virginity is not. The Church declares marriage sacred, covenantal and life-giving. Paul is referring to doctrines that forbid marriage and other goods when done outside the teaching of Christ and for a lesser good. Celibacy is an act of giving up one good (marriage and children) for a greater good (complete spiritual union with God).

1 Tim. 5:9-12 – Paul recommends that older widows take a pledge of celibacy. This was the beginning of women religious orders. 2 Tim. 2:3-4 – Paul instructs his bishop Timothy that no soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the One who enlisted him. Paul is using an analogy to describe the role of the celibate priesthood in the Church. Rev. 14:4 – unlike our sinful world of the flesh, in heaven, those consecrated to virginity are honored. Isaiah 56:3-7 – the eunuchs who keep God's covenant will have a special place in the kingdom of heaven. Jer. 16:1-4 – Jeremiah is told by God not to take a wife or have children.

Women in the Priesthood

Gen. 3:15; Luke 1:26-55; John 19:26; Rev. 12:1 – Mary is God's greatest creation, was the closest person to Jesus, and yet Jesus did not choose her to become a priest. God chose only men to be priests to reflect the complementarity of the sexes. Just as the man (the royal priest) gives natural life to the woman in the marital covenant, the ministerial priest gives supernatural life in the New Covenant sacraments.

Judges 17:10; 18:19 – fatherhood and priesthood are synonymous terms. Micah says, "Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest." Fathers/priests give life, and mothers receive and nurture life. This reflects God our Father who gives the life of grace through the Priesthood of His Divine Son, and Mother Church who receives the life of grace and nourishes her children. In summary, women cannot be priests because women cannot be fathers. Mark 16:9; Luke 7: 37-50; John 8:3-11 – Jesus allowed women to uniquely join in His mission, exalting them above cultural norms. His decision not to ordain

women had nothing to do with culture. The Gospel writers are also clear that women participated in Jesus' ministry and, unlike men, never betrayed Jesus. Women have always been held with the highest regard in the Church (e.g., the Church's greatest saint and model of faith is a woman; the Church's constant teaching on the dignity of motherhood; the Church's understanding of humanity as being the Bride united to Christ, etc.).

Mark 14:17,20; Luke 22:14 – the language “the twelve” and “apostles” shows Jesus commissioned the Eucharistic priesthood by giving holy orders only to men. Gen. 14:10; Heb. 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:15,17 – Jesus, the Son of God, is both priest and King after the priest-king Melchizedek. Jesus' priesthood embodies both Kingship and Sonship. Gen. 22:9-13 – as foreshadowed, God chose our redemption to be secured by the sacrificial love that the Son gives to the Father. Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19 – because the priest acts in persona Christi in the offering to the Father, the priest cannot be a woman.

Mark 3:13 – Jesus selected the apostles “as He desired,” according to His will, and not according to the demands of His culture. Because Jesus acted according to His will which was perfectly united to that of the Father, one cannot criticize Jesus' selection of men to be His priests without criticizing God. John 20:22 – Jesus only breathed on the male apostles, the first bishops, giving them the authority to forgive and retain sins. In fact, the male priesthood of Christianity was a distinction from the priestesses of paganism that existed during these times. A female priesthood would be a reversion to non-Christian practices. The sacred tradition of a male priesthood has existed uncompromised in the Church for 2,000 years.

1 Cor. 14:34-35 – Paul says a woman is not permitted to preach the word of God in the Church. It has always been the tradition of the Church for the priest or deacon alone (an ordained male) to read and preach the Gospel. 1 Tim. 2:12 – Paul also says that a woman is not permitted to hold teaching authority in the Church. Can you imagine how much Mary, the Mother of God, would have been able to teach Christians about Jesus her Son in the Church? Yet, she was not permitted to hold such teaching authority in the Church.

Rom. 16:1-2 – while many Protestants point to this verse denounce the Church's tradition of a male priesthood, deaconesses, like Phoebe, were helpers to the priests (for example, preparing women for naked baptism so as to prevent scandal). But these helpers

were never ordained. Luke 2:36-37 – prophetesses, like Anna, were women who consecrated themselves to religious life, but were not ordained. Isaiah 3:12 – Isaiah complains that the priests of ancient Israel were having their authority usurped by women, and this was at the height of Israel's covenant apostasy.

6. Conclusion

Until about the year 400, a bishop was called "father" ("papa"); this title was then restricted solely to addressing the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St. Peter, and in English was rendered "pope." In an early form of his rule, St. Benedict (d. c. 547) designated the title to spiritual confessors, since they were the guardians of souls. Moreover, the word "abbot," denoting the leader in faith of the monastic community, is derived from the word abba, the Aramaic Hebrew word father, but in the very familiar sense of "daddy." Later, in the middle Ages, the term "father" was used to address the mendicant friars - like the Franciscans and Dominicans - since by their preaching, teaching and charitable works they cared for the spiritual and physical needs of all of God's children. In more modern times, the heads of male religious communities or even those who participate in ecumenical councils, such as Vatican II, are given the title "father." In the English-speaking world, addressing all priests as "Father" has become customary.

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