

## CHAPTER NINE

# ON THE ALLEGED APOSTOLIC ORIGINS OF PRIESTLY CELIBACY\*

### *Introduction*

The Roman Catholic church requires celibacy of all its priests.<sup>1</sup> The term “celibacy” may be defined as a person’s voluntary pledge to refrain from marriage for religious reasons.<sup>2</sup> Although this obligation is currently the subject of vigorous discussion, I will not directly address this issue.<sup>3</sup> Nei-

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\*This essay is the English translation of “Review Article: The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy,” *European Journal of Theology* 1 (1992): 173–79 (with permission). The translation from the German is the present author’s.

<sup>1</sup>Bishops likewise have an obligation to celibacy, because they are selected from among priests. The most important Roman Catholic documents regarding celibacy are: *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965); *Optatam Totius* (October 28, 1965); *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (Paul VI, June 24, 1967); *Novo Incipiente Nostro* (John Paul II, April 6, 1979); and *Ultimis Temporibus* (November 30, 1967). I will not address the few exceptions of the universal celibacy requirement, such as those for certain deacons. My subject is a critique of the Roman Catholic rationale for its requirement of celibacy. The Vatican documents referred to in the present article are found in ET in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 2 vols. (Northport, NY: Costello, 1988 [2d ed.] and 1982).

<sup>2</sup>The Orthodox Church permits married priests, as long as they observe continence, i.e. refrain from sexual marital relations. However, only celibate priests are named bishops (cf. *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, in Flannery 2:296–97). The Eastern church recognized celibacy and continence at the Quinisext Council (Trullo) in the year 691 (Christian Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990], 429; Roman Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Fowler Wright, 1988)). However, the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement and the obligation to continence in the Orthodox Church are based on the same premises. For this reason I will limit myself to the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (June 24, 1967) and *Ultimis Temporibus* (November 30, 1967) in Flannery, 2:285–317 and 687–90. Concerning the contemporary debate, see also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Celibacy, Ministry, Church* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968); Thomas Bokenkotter, *Essential Catholicism—Dynamics of Faith and Belief* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 268–72; Georg Denzler, *Das Papsttum und der Amtszölibat. Päpste und das*

ther is the history of the celibacy debate the subject of investigation.<sup>4</sup> The Roman Catholic church maintains that the celibacy requirement is essentially of apostolic origin and that it was therefore binding on priests from early church history. If this claim of an apostolic origin for the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement can be refuted, celibacy is rendered without adequate foundation. The question of whether or not the Roman Catholic church will change the requirement of celibacy is secondary to the issue of whether or not there exists an adequate theological and historical basis for such a requirement.

### *The Alleged Apostolic Origins of Celibacy*

The *magnum opus* of the Italian Jesuit Christian Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* is considered by the eminent church historian Alfons Stickler to be “the best scholarly volume [about priestly celibacy] from a Roman Catholic perspective.” Cochini attempts to relate references to the celibacy requirement in conciliar documents of the 4th century CE with the person and ministry of Jesus Christ himself in order

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*Papsttum*, Vol. 5, I & II (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1973); Joseph Henry Fichter, *The Pastoral Provisions—Married Catholic Priests* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989); George H. Frein, *Celibacy: The Necessary Option* (New York: Crossroad, 1988); Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunüchen für das Himmelreich—Katholische Kirche und Sexualität* (Munich: Knaur, 1989); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Clerical Celibacy under Fire* (London/Sidney: Sheed & Ward, 1968); A. W. Richard Sipe, *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy* (New York: Brunner-Mazel, 1990); Leo Waltermann, ed., *Über den Zölibat der Priester* (Cologne: J. P. Bachern, 1970).

<sup>4</sup>For a survey of the history of the debate in the 19th and 20th centuries, cf. Cochini, *Apostolic Origins*, 18–46. As the title of his work indicates, the author concludes that priestly celibacy is actually of apostolic origin. Written from an entirely different perspective is Peter Brown, *The Body and Society—Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Brown, similar to Cochini, investigates the practice of permanent sexual continence from the apostolic period until Augustine. He concludes that clerical celibacy, though eventually finding some proponents, was practiced very differently from the way in which it is exercised today in the Roman Catholic church (xv). Brown has a different concept of church tradition than Cochini; he does not presuppose at the outset that tradition is invested with a certain degree of authority. Tradition can err. See also Joseph Coppens, *Sacerdoce et Célibat. Etudes Historiques et Théologiques* (Louvain: Editions Duculot, 1971) and Henry C. Lea, *The History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957).

to bridge the gap of three intervening centuries. Cochini is astutely aware that the main question is whether or not the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement is of apostolic origin and thus possesses a biblical foundation.<sup>5</sup>

The case, as it is presented by Roman Catholic theologians, is based on a hermeneutic that underscores the continuity between the Old and the New Testament. Moreover, Roman Catholic theology holds to the notion of a dual authority for Roman Catholic dogma, according to which ecclesiastical tradition (Tradition) as well as the Bible are drawn upon in the formation of church dogma.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the celibacy requirement, three aspects are closely interrelated: Roman Catholic teaching on the sacrament of "holy Communion"; the Roman Catholic conception of the nature of the priesthood; and Roman Catholic requirements for priests, particularly celibacy.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned, Roman Catholic hermeneutics stresses the continuity between the Old and the New Testament. Consequently, the nature of

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<sup>5</sup>In the Roman Catholic church's long history it was frequently political or pragmatic considerations that exercised great pressure on questions of dogma. If, however, the celibacy requirement cannot be shown to be derived from holy Scripture itself or is even found to be in contradiction with biblical theology, the celibacy requirement must be repudiated, regardless of political or pragmatic considerations. For this reason the Roman Catholic rationale for the celibacy requirement must be subjected to close scrutiny. The result of such an investigation can then be used to inform the contemporary debate.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Dei Verbum* (Vatican Council II; in Flannery, 1:750–65), where "Tradition" is regularly written with a capital "T" and is often called "sacred." The footnotes are half scriptural quotations and half references to the Fathers or papal and conciliar documents, a fact that further underscores the fact that the Roman Catholic church's teaching is based on tradition as well as the Bible. "Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture [note the order], then, are bound closely together . . . , flowing out from the same divine well-spring . . . Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (Flannery, 1:755). ". . . in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others" (p. 756). Cf. Cochini, *Apostolic Origins*, xiv, who likens the evolution of Catholic dogma to the growth of a seed into a tree, initially inconspicuous but eventually taking on clearer contours, so that the inconspicuous beginnings can be interpreted in light of later developments. He refers to Newman, who taught, "The whole question boils down to whether we can faithfully be guided by the strong light coming from the 4th and 5th centuries in order to explore the still pale, though sharp, outlines of the previous centuries" (*Apostolic Origins*, 17).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Cochini, *Apostolic Origins*, 429–39.

the sacrament of "holy Communion" is understood in continuity with the Old Testament sacrificial system. The "Communion" elements, particularly the "body" and the "blood" of Christ, are set in analogy to the sacrificial animals in the Levitical system.

The Roman Catholic emphasis on the continuity between the testaments also has implications for the manner in which the nature of priesthood is conceived. Essentially, Roman Catholic priests are viewed in correspondence to the Old Testament Levitical system. Their primary role is the mediation between God and believers. The priests' most important ministry is their service at the altar, particularly the observance of the sacraments, and here again particularly "holy Communion."

According to Roman Catholic teaching, the holders of such an office must be "ritually pure," so that they are able to represent Christ effectively to the believing community and in order to be able to render sacrifices to a holy God that are acceptable to him. For their prayers to be heard and their "sacramental sacrifices" to be effective, priests must therefore not "defile themselves" through sexual intercourse. For this reason celibacy is required of all priests in the Western church; the Eastern church requires celibacy or continence for its priests.<sup>8</sup>

Although ceremonial purity constitutes an important requirement for priests, Roman Catholic theologians emphasize that this requirement must not become an end in itself. Celibacy is rather seen as rooted directly in Christ's life and person. In the ultimate analysis, the celibacy requirement is substantiated and defended christologically. A celibate life is therefore understood as an integral part of the incarnation and sacrifice

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<sup>8</sup>Cochini claims that celibacy is the one requirement that remains valid of the Levitical code pertaining to sexual abstinence during priestly service at the altar (cf. e.g. Zachariah in Luke 1:8-25). While other Levitical requirements are no longer valid, sexual abstinence was not only kept, but even *extended*: from continence during the course of one's service at the altar (Levites) to permanent sexual abstinence in the case of Roman Catholic priests, since they perform their service at the altar and occupy their mediatorial role between God and the believing community continuously. The argument runs *a minori ad maius* ("from the lesser to the greater"): if Levites must refrain from sexual relations during the course of their ceremonial duties, how much more must Roman Catholic priests must refrain from sexual relations *all their lives*, since they were called by Christ to a greater, more lasting priesthood. Cf. D. Callam, "Clerical Continence in the Fourth Century: Three Papal Decretals," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 31, who conjectures that at a time where daily mass was customary, continence for the sake of "ceremonial purity" became an absolute necessity. He concludes that arguments for priestly continence were primarily substantiated by ceremonial requirements.

of Christ. As Christ's representative, the Roman Catholic priesthood must be *celibate* in order to participate effectively in Christ's mediatorial office.<sup>9</sup>

Cochini provides both patristic and biblical arguments for the apostolic origin of priestly celibacy.<sup>10</sup> He concedes that there were married priests in the first few centuries CE but claims that they were from the beginning required to remain continent (i.e. that married men must abstain from marital sexual relations subsequent to their ordination to the priesthood). A decree of the Council of Carthage (CE 390) stipulated that married individuals must observe continence in their marital relationships, because this is rooted *in apostolic tradition*.<sup>11</sup> The Roman

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Paul VI in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (June 24, 1967) on the christological significance of celibacy (Flannery, 2:290–92): “The Christian priesthood . . . can be understood only in the light of the newness of Christ, the Supreme Pontiff and eternal Priest, who instituted the priesthood of the ministry as a real participation in his own unique priesthood. The minister of Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God, therefore, look up to him directly as his model and supreme ideal. . . . Being entirely consecrated to the will of the Father, Jesus brought forth this new creation . . . Christ, the only Son of the Father, by the power of the Incarnation itself was made mediator between heaven and earth, between the Father and the human race. Wholly in accord with this mission, Christ remained throughout his whole life in the state of celibacy, which signified his total dedication to the service of God and men. This deep connection between celibacy and the priesthood of Christ is reflected in those whose fortune it is to share in the dignity and in the mission of the Mediator and eternal Priest; this sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bond of flesh and blood. . . . Thus, they [priests] intend not only to participate in Christ's priestly office, but also to share with him his very condition of living.” The argument can be summarized as follows: Christ himself is the ideal of every priest. He is the perfect mediator between God and people. Jesus' celibacy is necessary not only for him personally in order to fulfill his mission but is normative for all of those who follow him in his mediatorial office. The priestly calling thus entails not merely participation in Christ's priestly office but also identification with him in his manner of life (i.e. celibacy!).

<sup>10</sup>Cochini refers to pope Pius XI in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1936), 25 and to pope John Paul II in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), 406. Pius XI claims that the 4th century stipulations regarding celibacy presuppose an older and similar tradition. John Paul II relates priestly celibacy to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, the teaching of the apostles, and the entire tradition of the church.

<sup>11</sup>Cochini maintains that both the Council of Trent and Pius IV in his reply to the German princes cited the Council of Carthage (p. 4). The conciliar document indicates that “it is fitting that the holy bishops and priests of God as well as the Levites, i.e. those who are in the service of the divine sacraments, observe perfect continence, so that they may obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God; what the apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed, let us also endeavor to keep. The bishops declared unanimously: It pleases us all that bishop, priest, and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from [conjugal

Catholic concept of “sanctification” teaches that a man who is promoted to the order of a “holy person” must be elevated from the rank and file of “ordinary believers” in order to be able to exercise his “holy occupation.” This is how performance of the sacraments and sexual abstinence are related.

Cochini further refers to a decret of Siricius (*Directa*, CE 385), and *Cum in Unum* (CE 386), in which Siricius’ requirement of clerical continence is supported by Pauline teaching (1 Cor 7:5; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). Cochini maintains that the Pauline requirement of an *unius uxoris virum* (“husband of one wife”) ought to be interpreted in light of the continence requirement for married “priests.” Cochini contends that this is how monogamous marriage thus became an important requirement for the candidate for the priestly office. If he was faithful to his earthly wife, he would also remain faithful to his heavenly “wife” in Christ, the Church (cf. Eph 5:21–33, esp. 25–27).<sup>12</sup>

Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 7:5, Cochini explains as follows. Paul permits husband and wife temporary sexual abstinence for the purpose of prayer. This concession establishes the principle of temporary sexual abstinence for the purpose of spiritual activity. Again, Cochini argues *a minori ad maius*: if *the temporary* sexual abstinence of husband and wife for the purpose of *temporary* spiritual activity is taught by the apostles, should not *permanent* sexual abstinence of priests for the purpose of the discharge of a *permanent* spiritual vocation *all the more* be seen as part of apostolic teaching?<sup>13</sup>

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intercourse] with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep a perfect chastity” (p. 5).

<sup>12</sup>Cochini cites Ambrosius and Epiphanius, who derive the inadmissibility of remarried widowers to priestly ordination from 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:6 (p. 248). But see the Vatican II document *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Flannery, 1:892): “It is true that it is not demanded of the priesthood by its nature. This is clear from the practice of the primitive Church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:25; Tit. 1:6) and the tradition of the Eastern Churches where in addition to those—including all bishops—who chose from the gift of grace to preserve celibacy, there are also many excellent married priests.” It appears that Vatican Council II and Cochini represent different viewpoints here. Cf. also D. Callam, “Clerical Continence in the Fourth Century: Three Papal Decretals,” 28, who cites Siricius (4th cent. CE): “For this reason [the purity of Christ’s church] we priests are constrained to continence from the day of our ordination . . .” The purity of the “Bride of Christ” (i.e. the Church, cf. Eph 5:25–27) is here related to the continence (or celibacy) of her ministers.

<sup>13</sup>Cochini, *Apostolic Origins*, 10, with reference to Siricius’ *Directa* (CE 385).

Even the apostles, claims Cochini, observed continence subsequent to their being called by Christ. He refers to the passage where the apostles claim to have left “everything” for Christ (Matt 19:27). Jesus himself had spoken of “eunuchs for the kingdom” (Matt 19:12).

Finally, Mary’s “perpetual virginity” can be seen as logical necessity within the framework of Roman Catholic teaching. Mary herself served as mediatrix between God and people, when she gave birth to the Savior of the world. How, argues Roman Catholic dogma, could Mary have exercised this mediatorial office, apart from fulfilling the necessary requirements of perfect purity?

Roman Catholic theologians reject the charge that the celibacy requirement diminishes the significance and legitimacy of marriage. They point out that marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic church. Yet they also note Jesus’ own teaching that there will be no marriage in heaven (Mark 12:25). Marriage is therefore a temporary institution while the priest’s relationship with Christ’s church is eternal.<sup>14</sup>

The Roman Catholic celibacy requirement is viewed as being rooted in Christ’s celibate life itself, as well as in the apostolic practice of continence (refraining from sexual relations in marriage). Paul’s “husband of one wife” requirement and the Pauline principle of sexual abstinence for the purpose of exercising a spiritual ministry are noted as well. The Roman Catholic argumentation is based on a hermeneutic of continuity between Old and New Testament and on the assigning of joint authority to holy Scripture and church Tradition. The nature of the sacraments, particularly of “holy Communion,” the nature of the priesthood, and the celibacy requirement are integral and mutually interdependent parts of Roman Catholic dogma.

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<sup>14</sup>Siricius, who is enlisted by Cochini as an important witness, is cited by Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 358, as follows: “To Siricius, the issue seemed clear: service at the altar was only for those who were prepared henceforth to be perpetually free from at least one of the many strains of worldly life: the stain of intercourse. Those who stood before God to offer up the Eucharist must practice continence. Siricius cited Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans: ‘for those who are in the flesh cannot please God’ [Siricius, *Letter* 1.7.10: 1139A].” Brown aptly notes, “Siricius’ ruling was one of the first, but by no means the last, occasion in the history of the Latin Church when Paul’s mighty notion of the flesh, as all that was opposed to the Spirit of God, was whittled down to more manageable proportions, by being referred exclusively to sexual activity” (ibid.). This appears to support the impression that the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement was influenced at least in part by an unbiblical contrast between flesh and Spirit.

*Critique*

In the following discussion, the Roman Catholic systematic-theological interconnections and the implications regarding the celibacy requirement for priests will be subjected to a more detailed investigation.

We begin with the Roman Catholic hermeneutic that undscores the continuity between the testaments and the joint authority of holy Scripture and ecclesiastical Tradition. These foundational issues have important implications on the formation of Roman Catholic dogma and thus also for the formulation of the celibacy requirement for Roman Catholic priests.

While there are elements of continuity between the testaments, the discontinuity between Old and New Testament must in no way be diminished. Roman Catholic theologians cite Jesus' saying that he did not come to abolish the old covenant but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). However, the contrast here is not between "abolish" and "uphold," but between "abolish" and "fulfill and thus set aside."<sup>15</sup> Jesus did not abolish the old covenant; he fulfilled it. His mission, however, was thereby not yet accomplished. He rather instituted a new covenant in the place of the old that differs from the old covenant in important respects. As Roman Catholic theologians themselves acknowledge (cf. Mark 7:19), Jesus indeed set aside many aspects of the old covenant. What is of even greater significance, Jesus set aside the entire Old Testament sacrificial system through his once-for-all, permanently valid sacrifice at the cross (cf. Heb 7:27). For this reason one must be careful in drawing parallels between the testaments. As mentioned, however, it is precisely these kinds of parallels, such as between the Old and the New Testament priesthood, that constitute the basis for Roman Catholic teaching on celibacy.

The place and authority of ecclesiastical Tradition in the formation of dogma tends to interpret holy Scripture in such a way that a certain kind of interpretation is invested with infallible authority, even when the original passage allows a variety of interpretations. Thus the emphasis shifts from holy Scripture itself to "sacred Tradition." But human tradition must always be subjected to holy Scripture itself. When Cochini therefore draws upon historical documents in order to support the requirement of celibacy, he may be successful within the framework of the Catholic understanding of Tradition. But he will hardly persuade the

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in EBC 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 143-44.

theologian who deems it possible that misunderstandings and wrong turns in the formative stages of doctrinal development in church history have obscured or supplanted biblical teaching. Succinctly put, a theologian who subjects tradition to Scripture will in all likelihood arrive at conclusions that differ from the one who assigns to Tradition a “sacred” place within the framework of the Roman Catholic history of dogma. In this way Cochini’s argument takes on a certain circularity.

An example of this dynamic is Cochini’s interpretation of 1 Cor 7:5. Cochini gives virtually no consideration to the circumstances that occasioned Paul’s letter. He also appears to ignore certain qualifications Paul registers regarding his remarks. In fact, Paul replies to particular questions raised by the Corinthians. He intermingles binding teaching (7:11–12) with personal opinion (7:12, 25–26, 40). He notes that both marriage and singleness are a gift of God (7:7).<sup>16</sup> Paul assumes that marriage is the usual calling of a Christian (7:2).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Paul places his remarks into an eschatological framework (7:29–31). It is his concern that the Corinthians—and all Christians—live in light of eschatological realities. The external form of earthly things is perishable, so that we must focus on heavenly realities—including the spiritual significance of our marital relationships! The idea that singleness as such can lead a Christian to a higher form of spirituality is foreign to Paul. Medieval monastic asceticism or Eastern religions may view abstinence from earthly activities as virtues *per se*, but not Paul (see also 1 Tim 4:3–5). Roman Catholic theologians may interpret Paul’s remarks in 1 Cor 7:29–31 concerning chastity and poverty in a celibate sense. But does Paul also teach that priests in this life must never weep or laugh (1 Cor 7:30)? Consistent exegesis would require this interpretation.

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<sup>16</sup>For this reason it appears illegitimate to play off one calling (singleness) against another (marriage), and singleness ought not to be made an indispensable requirement for a certain class of believers (priests). Roman Catholic theologians contend that no one is compelled to celibacy. Rather, candidates for the priesthood are encouraged during the course of their preparation for priestly ordination to seek “the gift of celibacy” from God. Because he is gracious and good, God will certainly not deny their request. However, there is no biblical teaching indicating that all “priests” or full-time religious officers must live a celibate life (cf. 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:6 and the discussion above). Moreover, by requiring all of its priests to meet the celibacy requirement, the Roman Catholic church indeed requires singleness. To label priestly celibacy a free “choice,” as Paul IV in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (Flannery, 2:300) and John Paul II (Flannery, 2:356–57) do, thus does not do full justice to the Roman church’s actual practice.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (trans. Gordon Wenham; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 105–107.

Further arguments for celibacy may be answered as follows: Jesus' pronouncement regarding "eunuchs for the kingdom" (Matt 19:12) was made in the context of questions concerning the admissibility of divorce (cf. 19:3). When Jesus' disciples are shocked owing to his harsh-sounding limits on divorce, they gush out that it would be better in that case for people not to marry (19:10). In reply to his followers' statement, Jesus refers to certain individuals who may voluntarily forego marriage. But this renunciation is *voluntary*, as Jesus' final sentence, "He who can accept this, let him accept it" (19:12), makes clear. It is therefore illegitimate to apply this passage of Scripture to the Roman Catholic church's *requirement* of celibacy. Moreover, Jesus' statement does not pertain to *priestly* celibacy in a Roman Catholic sense.<sup>18</sup>

Another passage that is often adduced in the context of the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement is the apostolic claim to have left "everything" in order to follow Jesus (Matt 19:27–29; Mark 10:28–30; Luke 18:28–30). "Everything," according to Roman Catholic theologians, includes sexual relations with the apostles' wives or marriage itself. However, it is probable that the apostles resumed their familial obligations after three years of intensive following of Jesus. This seems to be indicated by Paul's statement in 1 Cor 9:5, "Do we not have the right to bring along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" There is no good reason to assume that the individuals mentioned by Paul observed continence.

Jesus' own celibate state can hardly be considered decisive for the celibacy requirement. After all, following Jesus does not entail identification with him in every conceivable aspect of his life. Should every one of Jesus' disciples who is serious about following him die on a cross? Should such a one not write any books, serve as itinerant preacher, and begin his public ministry at age thirty? Is it even possible for anyone but Jesus to die *for the sin of the world*? Or should every Christian be conceived by the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb apart from collaboration by his physical father? Jesus' "celibate" life-style could be explained in a number of ways. That the Lord sought to elevate "priestly" celibacy by his example to the normative life-style of his followers is by far not the only possible explanation, or even the best. If celibacy (or marital continence) was such a strong concern of Jesus, why do we not have a single, clear statement of Jesus on this topic? Rather, it appears that self-imposed celibacy is a kind of "poverty" that renders certain experiences in life impossible

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 89–90, 130.

that facilitate ministry to others in the case of married followers of Jesus. The continence legislation of the fourth century (and of following centuries), far from reflecting biblical teaching on God's own will, rather seems to represent a religious aberration and perversion that robbed existing marriages of their central core, complete union in a physical as *well as* spiritual sense.

Finally, as far as Mary's "perpetual virginity" is concerned that is often seen as related to celibacy, this teaching on Mary, as others, is not taught in holy Scripture. The doctrine rather seems to represent a logical consequence of other Roman Catholic dogmas. It can hardly be used to help answer the question regarding the nature of the priesthood in relation to its mediatorial role.

#### *Conclusion*

In the above discussion, we have attempted to demonstrate that the Roman Catholic interpretation of Scripture in cases such as 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Tim 3:2/Titus 1:6 is inadequate. Likewise, Roman Catholic views on the Lord's Supper and the nature of the priesthood reflect Roman Catholic hermeneutics and Tradition but are not actually based on biblical exegesis. The Lord's Supper is nowhere in the New Testament presented as "sacrifice." Christ's sacrifice is shown to be unique and unrepeatable (Heb). For this reason we do no longer need Levite-style priests today, who celebrate the "sacrifice of Mass" (in an Old Testament sense). Moreover, the regulations concerning ritual purity pertaining to the priesthood must be modified. A New Testament "Levitical priesthood" in place of the Old Testament priesthood is not taught anywhere in Scripture. The celibacy requirement is therefore theologically unnecessary in every respect. In whichever way this requirement originated historically in the Roman Catholic church, "priestly" celibacy is not in keeping with biblical teaching, nor is it of apostolic origin.