

SEXUALITY AND CELIBACY IN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

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Abstract

Roman Catholic priest and nun are made to take the oath of celibacy. Does this make them lose their sexuality? Is it only those who lack or are confused about sexuality that end up becoming Roman Catholic priests and nuns? Did Christ lack sexuality? This paper highlights the relationship between sexuality and celibacy so that those who feel called to celibate life will find fulfillment in it. Celibate life is the life of the “Kingdom” lived here on earth.

Introduction

Has celibacy made the catholic priests and nuns lose their sexuality or do we accept that only those who lack or are confused about their sexuality end up becoming Catholic priests and nuns. And now the big question, did Christ lack sexuality? (Lederer, 2002).

Sapir (2004) tried hard to portray celibacy as lack of sexuality. She picked two main issues – the church’s rituals and some rules which have been relaxed, yet according to her, “the hypocrisy grows worse”. She further questioned “Does the church really believe that red blooded American males are going to jump at the chance to become celibate in this day and age?” She continued, “Those who are particularly determined to serve the Catholic Church will in some

cases, marry, have children, become priests in the Anglican Church, and then ‘convert’ and become priests in the Catholic church. This happens, I have been told”.

Furthermore, Sipe (1994) caused a veritable flood of controversy in his work where he stated then that at least half the United States priests at any given time are involved in some pattern of sexual activity. According to Sipe (1994), “Many are called to be priests but few are called to celibacy”. He speaks of dual calling, one to the priest and one to marriage, but he does not say that what he perceived as a practical duality is really what the priesthood is all about. Sipe (1994) concludes his work by quoting Gandhi, who declared that “Only a love that can match or exceed what is possible with sexual love can sustain celibacy”.

Sipe (1990) went on to claim that the concept that the offerers of a sacrifice should remain untainted by sexual encounters goes back to ancient civilizations. Moreover, Schillebeeckx asserted that clerical celibacy originated in “a partly pagan notion of ritual purity”. Examples include the yellow capped Lamas of Tibet, the ascetic hermits of Egypt, the virgin priestesses of Thebes, the Astorte cult of Syria, the primitive worshippers of Dodona, the Vestal virgins of ancient Rome, and the Temple priests of the Aztecs. Even in my own town of Ukana in Enugu State today, the Odo priests abstain from sexual contacts two months with their wives to remain pure to usher in the Odo to the land of the living.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the relationship between sexuality and celibacy so that those who feel called to celibate life will find fulfillment in it. Celibate life is the life of the “kingdom” lived here on earth.

Sexuality

Sexuality is an offshoot of sex. The term, sex, (from Latin, *secare*, means *to divide*), refers to the two divisions male and female by which organisms are distinguished with reference to their reproductive functions. “Gender identity” refers to the person’s awareness and self

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definition as either male or female. Sex also refers to the culturally determined set of behaviour and attitudes considered appropriate for males and females. Summarily, sex refers either to the biological aspects of being male or female (i.e. synonym for one's gender), or to the expressions of sexuality which have physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions, particularly genital actions resulting in sexual intercourse and orgasm. In consumer and permissive societies, mass media tend all too often to portray sex as a commodity to be bought and sold as a biological means of procuring pleasure, and as a private concern of individuals concerned.

Moreover, the word, sex, may signify an impersonal designation of maleness or femaleness, as for example, on one's driver's license. It may mean an indefinable electric quality which attracts. It may mean a composite of qualities which ordinarily are a part of someone's personality, as when we say that a woman has "sexual appeal".

Then, sexuality is a "fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love". Sexuality prompts each of us from within, calling us to personal as well as to spiritual growth and drawing us out from self to interpersonal bonds and commitments with others, both men and women. It includes the qualities of sensitivity, understanding, intimacy, openness to others, compassion and mutual support.

Psychology of sexuality

Freud (1953) taught of the fundamental importance of sexuality in the life of a person. Sexuality is not but a fundamental dimension of personality. Sexuality must be understood within its total context of personality and not vice versa. Sexuality is a dimension of personality and personality is the more basic a concept. A sexual person is primarily asexual person. Being sexual, therefore, means many things. Among other things, it means sexual differentiation, being male or female. It also means being relational, structured for the other;

incomplete by self, inescapably social. Sexual existence is social existence. In social life, one encounters other beings of the same or the other sex. Being sexual also means, according to Georgen (1974), being bodily and physical. My body is a sexual reality and is involved in what I do and how I act.

Furthermore, human sexuality is distinct from other forms of sexuality. It cannot be reduced to animal sexuality. It is that and more. Sexuality in men and women is human and not an expression of a lower nature.

The Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, the first scientist to observe the masculine and feminine components of human nature, has helped most to unravel the nature of humans. According to him, man is not only a sexual being, he is also a bisexual being, combining within himself both the masculine and feminine principles. The feminine component of a man's personality is called the *anima* and the masculine component in the woman's personality is called the *animus*.

Beyond the obvious physical and sexual differences, there seems to be differences in psychological needs and drives. A classic analysis reflecting Jung's thought is as follows:

<i>Feminine traits</i>	<i>Masculine traits</i>
Humility	Self-possessiveness
Obedience	Responsibility
Openness	Closure
Receptivity	Assertiveness
Trust	Truth and Risk
Forgiveness	Confrontation
Patience	Decisiveness
Long suffering	Carry through
Tenderness	Tough love

Closely observing these (strengths or virtues), it becomes clear that those identified as feminine all support the deep need in women for belonging. On the other hand, the masculine traits all support the

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deep need in men for autonomy. All people have human emotional needs for love, belonging, self-worth and autonomy. The tender and compassionate person is one who has attained sexual maturity.

As a sexual person, one is both affectionate and genital. As a sexual person, one is both feminine and masculine. Maslow offers the following:

The man who thinks you can be either a man, all man, or a woman, and nothing but a woman is doomed to struggle with himself, and to eternal estrangement from women... If he can make peace with his female inside, he can make peace with the females outside, understand them better, be less ambivalent.

Furthermore, being man is not only something I discover, it is something I discover vis-a-vis the other sex, in relationship to woman. Thus, Jeanniere (1980: 24) wrote:

Woman becomes a woman under the gaze of a man, but one must assert with equal emphasis that man does not truly become man save under the gaze of a woman.

Theology and Sexuality

The Yahwist account records the origin of sexuality, maintaining that God said, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate." (Genesis chapter 2 verse 18). God was, in other words, saying that he created man incomplete. A man cannot live a full life by himself. He needs another to complement, even to complete, him as a human being. It is equally true to say that it is not good for the woman to be alone; she too is incomplete and turns to the man to complement, even complete, her as a human being.

It is not only the Biblical tradition that saw the original human being as both male and female. For instance, this notion appeared in both Persian Talmudic mythologies. Even Plato tells a fascinating Greek myth about how the original human beings were round spheres with four arms, four legs and two faces. They were so nearly perfect

that they rivaled the gods who, acting out of envy and fear, cut the spheres into two halves, one feminine and one masculine. Ever since then, as the myth continues, the two severed parts of the original human being have been striving to reunite. And when one meets his other half, he is lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy. Without the help of divine revelation, which we can claim for the author of Genesis, poets and philosophers seemed to come to the notion of this androgynous nature of human beings by intuition more than anything else.

This image of male-female dynamic struggle for unity becomes one paradigm for understanding God's struggle to gather a people to himself. At all events, the basic elements of the Yahwist theology of sexuality is good in that it enables man to be more complete, more as God wants him to be, not alone and isolated but in fellowship, which birds and wild creatures cannot provide. So sexuality, according to Yahwist theology, comes from God.

Recent Ecclesiastical Teaching on Sexuality

Pope John Paul II has used more than a hundred General Audiences to present a theology of the body. The Pope develops his theological anthropology in three stages. For him, human sexuality is set within the context of the person's search for identity (October 10, 1979). Sexuality, therefore, is not an attribute of the person but a constituent of subjectivity (Nov. 21, 1979). The second stage is the historical stage – where he delved into Matthew 5:27-28, “in the heart”. This word holds key to understanding the experience of sexuality. Objective acts are not as important as who the person is becoming. From April 16, 1980 till May 6, 1981, Matthew 5:27-28 is central to the development of phase two of his anthropology, the search for self-identity which necessarily includes the primordial experience of the body, as female and male must give priority to the process of interiority. When Christ qualified a lustful look as adultery “in the heart”, he appealed to the interior man (April 16, 1980).

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Historically, continues the Pontiff, man (as male and female) is alienated from self. This affects the *communio personarum*. The alienation of the body from personhood implies a reduction of the meaning of the body to the objective. Subjective meaning is reduced. The Pontiff attacked Reccour, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, as being masters of suspicion of the human heart. Their philosophical, psychological, and social theories all converged on the corruption of the human heart as the fundamental principle for interpreting man.

The third and final stage is the eschatological. John Paul II finds the final key to a holistic vision of man as female and masculine in Jesus' blunt reply to the Saducees about marriage after death: "You don't know the scriptures or the power of God; they will be like angels ...men and women will not marry" (Matthew 22:23-33). According to the Pope, the resurrection completes the revelation of the body. Life in the "other world" has an impact on the meaning of who I am and who we are as subjects. Since the resurrection affects the person who, whether celibate or married, consideration must be given to the redemption of the body.

The resurrection will consist in the perfect participation of all that is physical in man in what is spiritual in him... It will consist in the perfect realization of what is personal in man (December 9, 1981).

The resurrection constitutes the definitive accomplishment of the redemption of the body (January 27,1981).

Celibacy

For Sipe (1994: 58), celibacy:

is a freely chosen dynamic state usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for spiritual motive.

Sipe sees celibacy in the light of the law. His definition is very narrow even though he concludes his definition by quoting Gandhi, who declared that “only a love that can match or exceed what is possible with sexual love can sustain celibacy”.

According to Shorter (1996), consecrated celibacy is very far from being an emptying of love (Kenosis theology). Celibacy is not a loveless abstinence from sexual activity. Celibacy is a form of loving and of loving service. It is based on a distinction between “sexuality” and “sexual activity”, or between “diffused sexuality” and “conjugal sexuality”. Diffused sexuality consciously excludes sexual or genital activity, but it recognizes that we are sexual beings with occasional yearnings for sexual activity. Such yearnings and desires - if not indulged - are not necessarily opposed to the vocation and charism of celibacy. They should not be repressed, denied or negated, but they should be sublimated and – what is more to the point – integrated within a vocation that renounces willed sexual activity in order to be a sign and a channel of God’s universal love. Celibacy is for the kingdom.

The word celibacy is very broad in its usage. But, ordinarily it is used to designate the condition of being unmarried. Its Latin root – *caelebs*, and its Old English equivalent, *hal*, convey the richer meaning of being alone, whole, and healthy. To be whole and healthy carries the further meaning of being in good condition, undivided, complete. The whole or healthy describes a person who has a claim on some possession not shared with anyone else.

Deep within each human being, married or single, is a celibate core that makes it proper and even necessary, that we stand alone in seeking wholeness and completion from God. It is a space not shared with any other person.

The celibate core is a sacred centre, not a literal or physical space. As such, it is close to the biblical notion of heart - that is, the vital centre of life that is specifically human when a person is called on to the totally, freely, and authentically a unique and graced self before

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God. Within the sacred centre or space, the spirit of God dwells, prays unceasingly and conveys God's desires for each of us in a language beyond words. It is a "personal holy of holies", the inner sanctum of the temple of self, where only the self dares enter, a private enclosure into which none other dares trespass. Kelly (1950) describes the special-ness of this sacred centre:

Deep within us all there is an amazing sanctuary of the soul a holy place, a Divine center ... to which we may continuously return ... It is a dynamic center, ... It is the shekinah of the soul, the presence in the midst.

It is indeed in the proper use of celibate space that we learnt to improve the quality of our human relationships. Nor is retreat to one's celibate core to be confused with a solipsistic pre-occupation with oneself. It is, in truth, the loss of a false self in finding a true one. Nor does it imply an aloofness or indifference toward people and their needs. Rather, it kindles a warmer and wider compassion.

Claiming celibate space is not a matter of being either alone or together, but one of option for both solitary and solidary time in a healthy rhythm of alternation. As a matter of fact, the support of loved ones enables us to venture alone into that holy lonely, celibate space, awesome as it is attractive. In turn the aloneness of solitude appropriately spent disposes us to return better able to relate more deeply and more lovingly with others. We hope to bring back from celibate space more of self to give to love and service, or to put it in another way, the "we-ness" of community enables one to bear and to benefit from the "I-ness" of solitude, which in turn equips one to become more of a "we" with and for others.

Celibate space is where we learn to relate - to God, to self, to others. In celibate space we are less likely to need words, images, or actions and more likely to seek a language of silence. As we enter that space, we find that we can leave our egos behind, entrust our needs and fears to a provident God, and just "be there", quietly aware of and

immersed in the mystery of the Other, ourselves and others. Celibate space is the sacred geography of contemplation. It enables us to let God and others to be themselves.

Celibate integration

Integration of masculine and feminine traits in marital relationships can be easily understood, but it is not the only way for it. Single persons are not, by that fact, condemned to life of “incompleteness” as persons. The journey toward deeper masculine and feminine is available to them. But they cannot make the journey alone. Celibacy is a factor, an important one for that matter, in this integration process. It serves as a catalyst to a depth of relationship a religious needs with his/her people for it to happen. If she/he fails to make the journey, his masculinity or femininity will be neutralized, or to use a more sexual term, he or she may as well be neutered.

Acts against celibacy

Acts against celibacy are those acts that weaken or destroy the bonds of relationship among people. These are the very same acts that destroy friendships, families, marriages and parish communities. They are not unique to celibates at all. Furthermore, they may be committed by celibates or against celibates. Even the faithful of the church can act against celibacy.

Any act that breeds negative, anti-relationship atmosphere in the church can be against celibacy. There are many abiding anger, criticism, pride, apathy and irresponsibility, these are serious acts against celibacy because they weaken and/or destroy healthy relationship between a celibate and his/her people. When such things are going on there is no way a priest/religious will find the celibate way of life attractive. He/She might just as well live as a bachelor.

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Conclusion and recommendations

The following “commandments” in the celibate choice of life may be helpful. They are offered here as words of encouragement.

1. People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Love them any way.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good, anyway.
3. If you are successful, you will make false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway.
6. What you spent years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
7. People really need help but may attack you if you really help them. Help people anyway.
8. Give the world the best you have, and you will get kicked in the teeth. Give the world your best anyway.
9. If you choose to live the life of communion with your people, making them the first priority in your life, you will be judged old-fashioned. Live with your people anyway.
10. When you openly proclaim your love for your people, you will be dismissed as hopelessly idealistic. Proclaim your love anyway.

It is only in relationships that you will encounter most - not all - these problems, and celibacy is one of the weapons that can help you achieve all of these.

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